Performativity as Critical Praxis:
J.L Austin, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, Catherine Malabou, c. 1955-2014

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Abstract

In the second half of the twentieth century, the concept of "performativity" came to play a leading role in academic discourse in the philosophy of language, deconstruction, queer and gender studies, art theory, and performance studies. Most recently, it has taken centre stage in the emerging interdisciplinary field of performance philosophy. Despite its ubiquity, however, performativity remains enigmatic. Accounting for the capacity of speech to bring about the action that it designates, and the processes through which identities are enacted, and meaning is produced, the concept lies somewhere in the tensions among language, embodiment, and action. As such, it is a singularly important term in understanding the meaning and significance of contemporary art and performance in relation to modernist norms and values. My dissertation provides a rigorous historicization and theorization of performativity by means of an analysis of the key texts by its major theorists. It argues that J.L Austin, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, and Catherine Malabou envision modes of performative writing that enact the ideas that their texts describe. In other words, I propose that they resist traditional modes of logical argumentation and disseminate their theories of performativity in a performative manner. An intellectual history written in the first person, each chapter narrates my phenomenological reception of a rhetorical performance by one of the above philosophers. Through it, performativity emerges as a mode of critical praxis characterized by both discursive resistance and embodied transgression—one that makes the ontological borders between philosophy and art more porous.

Résumé

Depuis la seconde moitié du 20e siècle, le concept de « performativité » occupe une place importante dans le discours universitaire dans les domaines de la philosophie du langage, la déconstruction, les études queer et de genres, le discours artistique, et les études sur la performance. Plus récemment, le concept s'est retrouvé au cœur du champ d'étude interdisciplinaire émergent qu'est la philo-performance. Malgré l'omniprésence du terme, la performativité reste encore énigmatique. Illustrant la capacité du langage de susciter l'action qu'il désigne, ainsi que les processus de production de sens et de construction identitaire, le concept s'inscrit dans les tensions entre le langage, l'incarnation et l'action. Ce terme revêt donc une importance toute particulière pour la compréhension des processus de signification de l'art contemporain et de la performance, et de leur questionnement des normes et valeurs modernistes. Par une analyse de textes fondamentaux de théoriciens majeurs, ma thèse présente une analyse théorique et un survol historique rigoureux de la performativité, soutenant ainsi que l'écriture performative de J.L Austin, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler et Catherine Malabou met en scène les notions que leurs textes décrivent. En d'autres termes, cette écriture résiste aux modes traditionnels d'argumentation logique et diffuse la théorie inhérente de la performativité de manière performative. Dans cette histoire intellectuelle écrite à la première personne, j'expose dans chacun des chapitres ma réception phénoménologique de la performance rhétorique mise de l'avant par les philosophes susmentionnés. La performativité y émerge comme un mode de pratique critique caractérisé à la fois par une résistance discursive et une transgression incarnée, où les frontières ontologiques entre la philosophie et l'art deviennent plus poreuses.

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Introduction: Performativity as Critical Praxis

Cold Open

In one scene of French television network ARTE's documentary about renowned philosopher and queer and gender theorist Judith Butler, Butler is shown walking through an art gallery perusing a series of photographs.[1] As she converses with her interviewer, the camera slowly pans the images. We see: a woman lying on the floor holding an orange blanket (Figure 1); a teary-eyed woman in a blonde wig and a nightdress lying in bed clutching a sheet (Figure 2); a woman lying on a brown leather sofa staring at a telephone (Figure 3); a woman in a kilt on her hands and knees on a hardwood floor (Figure 4); a woman lying on her side with beads of sweat across her body (Figure 5); a woman sitting on the floor with her arms wrapped around her knees and her chin in her hand (Figure 6).

These photographs are, of course, part of acclaimed American photographer Cindy Sherman's emotionally charged 1981 *Centerfolds* series. The context is Sherman's 2006 Retrospective at the Musée Jeu de Paume in Paris. In this cycle of Sherman's self-imaging practice, the subject is framed cinematically in intimate, domestic settings, while her distant gaze is directed into the hors-champs, creating a feeling of "unheimlichkeit". Butler and her German interlocutor naturally react to the images' solicitation with interpretive responses. Situating Sherman's images dialectically in terms of victimization and agency, submission and defiance, words such as "fear", "sensuality", "vulnerability", "hope", "pleasure", "fragility", and "desire" echo in the

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[1] Paul Zajdermann, *Judith Butler, philosophe en tout genre*, documentary film, directed by Paul Zajdermann (2006; Paris: ARTE, 2006).

space. The temporal space of translation that thereby opens—one between the natural languages of German and English, but also between language and images, words and bodies—is, as phenomenology has taught us, a space of intersubjective exchange. It is also, as psychoanalytically-informed film theory has demonstrated, a space of projection and identification.

Interestingly, then, in the documentary's preceding scene, Butler explains that while growing up as a young, Jewish girl in Cleveland, Ohio, her mother's family owned movie theatres. Having integrated the idea that assimilation required conforming to certain gender norms, her family members began to embody exaggerated imitations of Hollywood stars. Jokingly, Butler speculates that her grandmother played Helen Hayes, her mother Joan Crawford, and her grandfather Clark Gable or Omar Sharif. In one way, she believes that her canonical 1990 book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, may have germinated out of her need to understand how her relatives negotiated these Hollywood norms—how they successfully performed the above roles, but also how they failed to fully enact them.

It is this impossibility of fully embodying clichéd gender stereotypes that is at the heart of Sherman's by now iconic *Centerfolds* series. As its title suggests, the work plays on the tradition in men's magazines of featuring an objectifying centerfold image of an idealized, female body made available for consumption by the (male) viewer's gaze. The critical power of Sherman's work lies in its subversion of this tradition, but also in the images' seriality; by transforming herself in each image, the artist replaces the idea of an authentic, original, or true self with multitudinous selves. This citational strategy exposes the imperfections of mimicry; if all

representations constitute copies, then the very idea of an "original" image or self is debunked. Anticipating Butler's theorization of gender as a form of cultural fiction, Sherman's work portends a conception of identity that we would now label "performative".[2]

Tracing Performativity's Interdisciplinary Genealogy

In the documentary scene discussed above, spectators witness the philosopher who is credited with popularizing the concept of performativity within third-wave academic feminist discourse discussing the work of an artist who has produced one of the most well-known, literal instantiations of performativity in contemporary art. That two such public figures should "meet" in the context of a discussion of performativity should come as no surprise. Performativity is so prevalent that certain scholars have referred to it as a contemporary "trope", while others have identified a "performative turn" in the paradigmatic and epistemological shift of the last half of the twentieth century that foregrounds the social construction of human experience.[3] During this time, the concept came to play a leading role in academic discourse in a variety of disciplines, including the philosophy of language, deconstruction, queer and gender studies, art history, and performance studies. Most recently, it has taken centre stage in the emerging, interdisciplinary field of performance philosophy.

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[2] While Sherman is one of the most well-known artists working with serial self-imaging, she was certainly not the first to do so. Important predecessors include French artist Claude Cahun, who produced a stunning body of photographic self-portraits throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and, in the feminist vein, American artists Lynne Hershman and Martha Wilson, who have been engaged in such practices since the 1970s.

[3] It is Rebecca Schneider who refers to performativity as a "trope", and Richard Schechner who speaks of the "performative turn". See: Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London: Routledge, 1997), 22. And: Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 38.

The popular narrative of the intellectual history of performativity locates its genesis with J.L. Austin, the British philosopher of language who first introduced the term "the performative utterance" in his 1955 lecture series *How to Do Things with Words*. Here, Austin used it to characterize a mode of locution that does what it says—one that does not merely describe, but in fact produces, the event that it designates. It was Austin's former student, the American analytic philosopher of language John Searle, who went on to develop the most comprehensive, subsequent theory of speech acts. Based on the premise that language is a rule-governed behavior, Searle's 1969 book, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, emphasizes the intentionality of the speaker and, following Austin, posits fictional discourse as logically dependent on non-fictional discourse.

The analytic emphasis in studies of performativity was challenged in a series of polemical debates between Searle and French philosopher Jacques Derrida in the early 1970s. The dispute was sparked by the publication of Derrida's 1971 "Signature Event Context", which introduced the concept of "iterability" to demonstrate that all signs can extend beyond the intentional reach of their authors.[4] Because signs can be disengaged from their original context of utterance, Derrida argued that they are iterated or *cited* again and again, and that it is through this process that meaning emerges. With this argument, Derrida had effectively deconstructed the ontological barrier between non-fictional and fictional discourse.

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[4] Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context", *Limited Inc.*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 1-24.

Following Derrida, it was Butler who produced the next major theorization of performativity.[5] Her theory of gender performativity, which contests essentialist accounts of gender difference, took the concept from the level of discursivity to the level of corporeality. With her 1988 article "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", Butler mobilized phenomenological and theatrical conceptions of the act to provide a critical, feminist, and queer genealogy of subject formation. In her canonical 1990 *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (which includes a chapter based on a revised version of "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution") and its 1993 sequel *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, she drew upon Derrida's theory of the iterability of the semiotic signifier to propound a theory of the iterability of the embodied gesture. The resulting theory of gender performativity served to dispel the idea of a mimetic or causal relationship between the layers or structures of identity known as sex, gender, and sexuality.

Next, performativity took on a central role in the field of performance studies, which emerged in the 1980s out of the research collaborations between Scottish anthropologist Victor Turner and New York theatre scholar and director Richard Schechner, who were both interested in exploring the relationship between social and aesthetic drama. While within art history performativity is

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[5] Following on the heels of Butler, queer and gender theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also produced groundbreaking work on performativity. While her theories of performativity were less influential than Butlers', her work is arguably more performative than Butlers' in that it enacts what is describes. For two of Sedgwick's key texts on performativity see: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Andrew Parker, "Introduction," to Parker and Sedgwick, ed., *Performativity and Performance* (New York & London: Routledge, 1995), 1-18, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity: Henry James' *The Art of the Novel,*" *GLQ* 1 (1993) 1-16. I am grateful to Amelia Jones for sharing the ideas she is developing about Sedgwick's work in her upcoming book, tentatively entitled *Intimate Relations: A Genealogy of Queer / Performativity*. I was first exposed to Jones' project in the following lecture: "Intimate Relations: Queer Performativity and the Theatricalization of Filiation," keynote for *Resonances in the Work of Judith Butler* conference, Free University of Amsterdam, April 5, 2017.

used to theorize visual and performance art, in performance studies it is also employed in the discussion of the broader-spectrum idea of the social actor's performance of everyday life.[6]

Most recently, performativity has become a byword within the burgeoning field of performance philosophy, where it is mobilized to describe academia's move away from traditional modes of argumentation toward more experimental forms of discourse. With the birth of this scholarly discipline, we are invited to turn performativity back on itself, and to chart a reciprocity of influence between philosophy and art discourse. As such, today we can ask not only what philosophical theorizations of performativity lend to an understanding of how meaning emerges in artistic practice, but also what, for example, Sherman's embodied, self-imaging practice might tell us about the ways in which Butler, as intellectual actor, takes the academic stage. How is the event of her thinking performatively enacted, and what role do we, as her spectators, play in the theatre of ideas?

<u>Performance Art and Philosophy: Deconstructing the Binary</u>

Despite its ubiquity, however, performativity remains enigmatic. Accounting for both the capacity of speech to bring about the action that it designates, and the processes through which identities are enacted and meaning is produced, performativity lies in the tensions among language, embodiment, and action. Over the course of its heterogeneous genealogy, the notion

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[6] It is of course the Canadian anthropologist Erving Goffman who is credited with the idea of aligning our quotidian performances with theatrical acts. For Goffman's most famous use of theatrical metaphor to analyze human interaction, see: Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959).

has undergone numerous semantic shifts. Today, its precise meaning is difficult to pin down. For this reason, literary critic J. Hillis Miller has labeled the performative a "shape-changer", while scholars Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick speak not of performativity, but of "performativit*ies.*"[7] In his eponymously titled book, which traces the intellectual history of the concept, literary and theatre scholar James Loxley concludes that because "the theoretical work on performativity has not added up to a single, easily assimilable idea…..invoking it brings us not the safety of an answer, but the ongoing pressure of a question."[8]

Over the past five years, I have submitted myself to the pressure of performativity's question. The result of this labour lies in the pages of this dissertation. However, because (as my chapters will demonstrate) performativity is inherently anti-essentialist, I do not attempt to define it in ontological terms. In addition, because it is polysemic and its multiple meanings seem to push across and beyond—indeed to exceed—the limits or boundaries of its signifier, I also do not endeavor to entomb it in an apodictic response.

Instead, my dissertation conducts a rigorous historicization and theorization of the concept of performativity by means of an analysis of the germinal texts of its major theorists. Framing these works as performative rhetorical performances (i.e., as modes of either oral or written discourse that enact the ideas that they put forth), I situate performativity in the tensions between discursivity and materiality. In so doing, I demonstrate that, just as performance art has a discursive function, philosophy has the potential to perform. By highlighting the embodied

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[7] J. Hillis Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 183. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, eds., *Performativity and Performance* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 1.
[8] James Loxley, *Performativity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 166.

nature of these performative disseminations about performativity, I touch upon the generally

untouchable subject of the philosopher's body. While my first two chapters mine the historical

texts on performativity from the philosophy of language for places where the body may be

hidden, my later chapters question how an author's body (*corps*) may be said to be inscribed in

the body of her text (*corpus*), and how her *gender* relates to her use of the performative *genre*.

Through my dissertation, performativity emerges as a form of critical *praxis*—one that serves to

make the ontological borders between theatre and theory, or performance art and philosophy,

more porous.[9]

Philosophy and art have, of course, traditionally been constructed as two very distinct and

separate realms of human activity, with the former regularly being called upon to illuminate or

explain the latter. The influence has generally been one directional, with little thought given to

what artistic practice might contribute to philosophy's understanding of itself. This tendency is

exemplified in the following passage from French philosopher Alain Badiou's 2004 book

Handbook of Inaesthetics, in which Badiou configures the relationship between the two practices

in Hegelian/Lacanian terms using the metaphor of the master and the hysteric:

> We know that the hysteric comes to the master and says: "Truth speaks through
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> my mouth, I am *here*. You have knowledge, tell me who I am." Whatever the
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> knowing subtlety of the master's reply, we can also anticipate that the hysteric

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[9] The etymology of the word "praxis" comes from the Greek root words "prassein" or "prattein", meaning "to do, to act" but also "to affect". For Aristotle, the term was part of a tripartite that served to distinguish between the three activities of human life– *theoria*, *poiesis*, and *praxis* – which corresponded to the three ultimate goals of truth, production, and action, respectively. Although traditionally understood in opposition to theory, praxis implies the exercise, realization, or embodiment of an art, science, or theory over a temporal process. Because performativity places discourse into the realm of action, I believe that it breaks down the above tripartite division.

will let him know that it's not yet *it*, that her *here* escapes the master's grasp,

that it must all be taken up again and worked through at length in order to please

her. In so doing, the hysteric takes charge of the master, "barring" him from

mastery and becoming his mistress. Likewise, art is always already there,

addressing the thinker with the mute and scintillating question of its own identity

while through constant invention and metamorphosis it declares its

disappointment about everything that the philosopher may have to say about it.[10]

For Badiou, art-the-hysteric constantly escapes the containment of philosophy-the-master. This

formula follows the Hegelian theory that the master is in fact dependent on the slave for the

recognition necessary for self-consciousness, and is, in a certain sense, enslaved by the slave's

labour.[11] Translated into psychoanalytic terms, the assumption is that the master needs the

hysteric to confirm his authority. In Badiou's anecdote, however, art—dissatisfied with

philosophy's responses—undermines said authority.

While Badiou implies that philosophy is unable to fully capture the meaning or identity of art,

his analogy remains problematic for several reasons. First, it genders the two terms of the dyad in

a predictable manner, with philosophy cast in the role of the master/analyst, and art taking on the

role of the hysteric/slave/analysand. (As its very name reveals, hysteria has historically been

used to pathologize and stigmatize *women's* bodies.) Second, Badiou's sexism is intimately

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[10] Alain Badiou, "Art and Philosophy", *Handbook of Inasethetics,* trans. Alberto Toscana (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 1-2.

[11] For Hegel's account of how self-consciousness is achieved through conflict with alterity, see the section of *Phenomenology of Spirit* on desire, including "The Truth of Self-Certainty" and "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage": G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 104-119.

linked to the romanticization of art so common to French philosophy. Art-as-mistress is portrayed as evasive, mysterious, and difficult to please; through seductive play, she escapes her master's stronghold. Lastly, Badiou's formula is premised on a clear, ontological distinction between art and philosophy which, like all metaphysical binaries, contains an inherent value judgement. Philosophy is traditionally associated with the mind, reason, form, and masculine authority, while in the context of their comparison, art (and this would be especially true of performance art) is equated with the body, passion, matter, and feminine disobedience. This hierarchy is echoed within academia itself, with philosophy positioned as the master discourse within the humanities, and art history—and, again, more recently the interdisciplinary (and thus "impure") field of performance studies—viewed as subordinate fields.

With this dissertation, I propose that framing philosophy texts about performativity as forms of rhetorical performance may serve to challenge the clear ontological separation between philosophy and performance, thereby exposing and disproving the inherent value judgements contained in their metaphysical separation. Without conflating the two realms of activity (they are of course separate disciplines), I demonstrate how performativity highlights their commonalities. Bringing clarity to the much-deployed, yet little-understood, concept of performativity has benefits for both philosophy and performance studies/art history. First, it allows for a queering of philosophy that frees the discipline from the limitations of binary thought, and makes it conscious of its own (embodied) performativity.[12] Second, it offers art

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[12] With the idea of "queering" philosophy, I aim to suggest that performativity has the potential to disrupt the traditional structures with which we think and "do" philosophy. Such a queering would bring the "margins" to the centre of philosophical discourse. It would exorcize the last vestiges of the Cartesian subject, and become self-conscious of the relational nature of its own identity by increasing and acknowledging its debts to its "others".

history and performance studies a conceptual tool with which to articulate the intersubjective and embodied processes through which art comes to mean or signify.

Performativity and Performance Art

The disparities among definitions of performativity have lead James Loxley to conclude that "it is the term rather than the concept that has been transplanted" from performativity's origins in the philosophy of language to its use in performance studies discourse. Loxley understands the relationship among these differing interpretations of the term as "asymptotic", meaning that they display "an ever-closer proximity without a final, resolving convergence."[13] German art historian Dorothea von Hantelman is even more extreme in her conclusions. She maintains that performativity and performance art are "based on completely antagonistic worldviews." Because performance art traditionally relies upon the singularity of the individual performer and in Butler's poststructuralist philosophy agency is understood as performative and therefore non-subjectivist, von Hantelman judges that "performativity has nothing to do with the art form of performance."[14]

I beg to differ. While a poststructuralist conception of performativity clearly represents a distinctive shift away from the theories of agency and subjectivity implied by Austin's and Searle's accounts of the performative enunciation (which, as J. Hillis Miller argues, and as my dissertation corroborates, were founded upon a Cartesian concept of the ego), I disagree with the

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[13] Loxley, 140.
[14] Dorothea Von Hantelman, *How to Do Things with Art* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2007), 18, 19.

claim that the mere fact of a performer engaging in the production of a speech act (be it linguistic or embodied), negates, de facto, the operation of such a poststructuralist performativity.[15] In fact, I believe that it is patently false to say that performance art is generally performed by a fully present, self-contained subject. To the contrary, most performance art is processual and stages a relational subject-in-process—i.e., one that is performative.

I am by no means alone in believing that performativity and performance art are intimately linked. Nor, for that matter, is Miller alone in associating postmodernism with the dissolution of the Cartesian subject; this was, of course, a key argument of theories of postmodernism across philosophy in the 1970s and 1980s. Within the fields of art history and performance studies, many prominent scholars have produced nuanced analyses of the performativity at play within performance practices from what is commonly referred to as the postmodern era. As early as the mid 1990s, they began to illuminate the ways in which queer and feminist performance artists working in the second half of the twentieth century employed performative strategies to interrogate notions of identity and subjectivity, thereby conceptualizing the subject not as coherent, unified, and self-contained, but rather as relational, contingent, and posterior to its performances.

The American art historian Amelia Jones, for one, has drawn upon phenomenology and poststructuralist thought in her theorizations of body art practices from the 1960s to the present day. Through her work, performativity has emerged as a fundamentally processual, embodied,

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[15] Miller, 29.

relational practice. On the very first page of her major 1998 work *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, Jones defines her topic in the following terms:

> Body art is viewed here as a set of performative practices that, through […] intersubjective engagement, instantiate the dislocation or decentering of the Cartesian subject of modernism. This dislocation is, I believe, the most profound transformation constitutive of what we have come to call postmodernism.[16]

American theatre and performance studies scholar Rebecca Schneider has also stressed the political potential of performative art practices to destabilize fixed identity categories. In her 1997 work, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, Schneider demonstrated how a group of feminist performance artists who engage in "explicit" body art practices use their bodies as stages to collapse "the distance between sign and signified", thereby emphasizing the relationality of signification.[17] And, with his 1997 work, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, performance studies scholar José Muñoz foregrounded the ways in which a group of queer artists of color harnessed the transformational, world-creating potential of performativity. For these minority artists working in a patriarchal and heteronormative world, performativity became a strategy of resistance.[18]

Published in 2001 (just a few years after the above texts that address the performativity of body art), performance theorist Jon McKenzie's *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*,

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[16] Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 1.

[17] Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London: Routledge, 1997), 23.

[18] José Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

argued that performance studies scholarship at the millennium was marked by a shift of focus "from theater to theory". In it, McKenzie advanced the thesis that "because practitioners and researchers alike had originally located the efficacy of performance in the presence of performing bodies, the poststructuralist critique of presence contributed to a whole new series of conceptual shifts within the study of cultural performance." For McKenzie, deconstructive readings of Austin constitute one of the most significant causes of this shift: "Displaced but not replaced, the efficacy of embodied transgression has been reworked as the efficacy of discursive resistance, and, in passing, performance presence gives way to performance iterability."[19]

A decade and a half later, I would venture to ask the following question: how might we today, in the advent of the birth of performance philosophy, reconsider the interplay between embodied transgression and discursive resistance by examining the linguistic and embodied performativity not of performance art, but of philosophy texts *about* performativity? Such a project would, I surmise, oblige us to admit that embodied transgression and discursive resistance are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In addition, I would suggest that challenging this distinction in the aftermath of the move "from theatre to theory" by framing theorizations of performativity as textual performances will also serve to complicate the clear, (onto)logical distinction between theatre and theory, or—more broadly—art and philosophy. Indeed, one of the many merits of performance philosophy is that it allows us to move beyond the application model when configuring the relationship between philosophy and art. This strikes me as wonderfully productive, since the "application" of the former to the latter often results in both the vulgarization of theory and the reification of art. Based on the belief that art and philosophy are

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[19] Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 41, 44.

but different languages with which we perceive and produce worlds, I believe that, much as art

has discursive functions, discourse also acts. In other words: it *performs*.

Performative Writing

In the introduction to her 1997 book *Mourning Sex*, aptly entitled "this book's body",

performance studies scholar Peggy Phelan recalls French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-

Ponty's "spiraling" question about what mode of language philosophy should "speak". In *The*

Visible and the Invisible, published posthumously in 1964, Merleau-Ponty reflected:

> Hence it is a question whether philosophy as reconquest of brute or wild being
>
> can be accompanied by the resources of an eloquent language, or whether or not
>
> it would be necessary for philosophy to use language in a way that takes from it
>
> its power or immediacy or direct signification in order to make it equal to what
>
> philosophy wishes all the time to say.[20]

According to Phelan, the language of philosophy must "risk 'poetry'."[21] Such language she

names "performative". In her words:

> Performative writing is different from personal criticism or autobiographical
>
> essay, although it owes a lot to both genres. Performative writing is an attempt to
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> find a form for "what philosophy wishes all the same to say." Rather than

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[20] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 102-3.
[21] Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 11.

describing the performance event in "direction signification," a task I believe to

be impossible and not terrifically interesting, I want this writing to enact the

affective force of the performative event again, as it plays itself out in an

ongoing temporality made vivid by the psychic process of distortion (repression,

fantasy, and the general hubbub of the individual and collective unconscious),

and made narrow by the muscular force of political repression in all its mutative

violence. The events I discuss here sound differently in the writing of them than

in the 'experiencing' of them, and it is the urgent call of that difference that I am

hoping to amplify here. Performance writing is solicitous of affect even while it

is nervous and tentative about the consequences of that solicitation. Alternately

bold and coy, manipulative and unconscious, the writing points both to itself and

to the "scenes" that motivate it. These scenes are fashioned and distorted in an

attempt to say "what philosophy wishes all the same to say".[22]

While, for Phelan, performative writing is concerned with the recollection, retelling, or

reenactment of a previous (performance) event, the type of performative writing that I am

interested in is non-referential. That is, with this dissertation, I propose that the historical

theorizations of performativity themselves constitute performative events. Like Phelan, however,

I understand performative writing as a mode that enacts what it describes. Also like her, I believe

that because its style reflects its content, it often precludes direct signification.

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[22] Ibid., 11-12.

In her article, "Performing Writing", that was published in the 1998 book, *The Ends of Performance*, edited by Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane, Della Pollock refutes the idea that the term "performative writing" refers to "a genre or a fixed form", and suggests instead that it is "a way of describing what some good writing *does*." Here, Pollock clearly reinforces Austin's defining idea of the performative as a mode of action—a way of *doing things with words*. For Pollock, this key feature of the performative is intrinsically linked with how meaning is produced. In her succinct words, "writing as doing displaces writing as meaning; meaning becomes in the material, dis/continuous act of writing."[23] Importantly, then, Pollock emphasizes the production of meaning as a *temporal* process (meaning *becomes*). Equally importantly, she links the discursive to the material—an issue that my later chapters explore in relation to debates about the materiality of the body in feminist theory.

While Pollock avoids defining performative writing ontologically, she does offer us six defining features of (or in her words, "excursions into") the practice. They are the following: 1) performative writing is "evocative" (i.e., it "uses language like paint" and "confounds normative distinctions between critical and creative"; 2) performative writing is "metonymic" (i.e., it displaces meaning by highlighting the differences between the signifier and the signified, as exemplified by Derrida's practice of putting words under erasure); 3) performative writing is "subjective" (it "defines itself in/as the effect of a contingent, corporeal, shifting, situated relation—and so itself as shifting, contingent, contextual"); 4) performative writing is "nervous" (because of its intertextuality, its nonlinearity, its use of pastiche); 5) performative writing is

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[23] Della Pollock, "Performative Writing", in *The Ends of Performance*, eds. Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 75.

"citational" ("it figures writing as rewriting" and "it quotes a world that is always already performative"); 6) performative writing is "consequential" (it posits language as an action that has effects).[24]

The notion of performative writing was first fleshed out by Phelan and Pollock in these key performance theory texts from the late 1990s. In the advent of the birth of performance philosophy, how might we draw upon them to revisit the historical texts about performativity?

<div align="center">

Derrida's Daughters:
French Theory, Feminism, and the Birth of Performance Philosophy

</div>

Given her belief that performative writing must "risk poetry", it is fitting that Phelan introduces the practice with a description of her experience of hearing Derrida lecture on Paul Celan's famous poem, "Ashglory", at the University of Irvine, California in 1993. Her description enacts her own definition of performative writing in that it captures the affective force and idiosyncratic style of Derrida's lecture—itself a revisiting of Celan's textual performance.[25]

Derrida's writing is at once literary and theatrical, replete with playful neologisms and direct addresses to his readers, and marked by the practice of putting words "under erasure" ("sous rature"). It corresponds to Phelan's definition of performative writing in that it often foregoes direct signification in favour of a more poetic mode of locution. It also exemplifies virtually all of Pollock's defining features of performative writing—most notably the breakdown between the

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[24] Pollock, 80-85.
[25] Phelan, 9-11.

critical and the creative, and the use of metonymy to displace meaning. In addition, Derrida's performativity facilitates his subversive and political intervention into the traditional language of metaphysics. In this way, it allows him to intervene in what Phelan refers to as "the deadly asperities of contemporary thinking."[26]

Today, the proliferation of performative praxes among contemporary philosophers has led to the founding of an interdisciplinary field of scholarship within the humanities. Known as "performance philosophy" in English-speaking, academic circles and "philo-performance" in their French counterparts, this rapidly growing field is situated at the intersection of continental philosophy and performance studies. Scholars working in the field address the following kinds of questions: How has the relationship between performance and philosophy been understood historically and how might it be reimagined today? How are philosophy texts staged in performance and how do images of performance figure in philosophy? How are ideas embodied dramatically? How might thinking be framed as an event? How might performance be considered a form of philosophy and philosophy a form of performance?

The claim that performance philosophy is a new discipline should not, however, go uncontested. In Western history, the intersection of theatre and philosophy may be traced back over two millennia to their shared "origins" in Ancient Greece. As such, despite the "anti-theatrical" prejudice that has marked parts of the history of philosophy, and the "anti-intellectualism" that

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[26] Ibid., 16.

has characterized certain theatre practices, the two disciplines are, in the words of theatre scholar Martin Puchner, "entangled…enterprises."[27]

In the current era, the impetus to formalize the encounter between philosophy and the broader notion of "performance" in a new field of scholarship was motivated by the proliferation of research into the overlap of these two disciplines among both artists and scholars over the past decade. According to Dr. Laura Cull, Head of the Department of Theater and Dance and Senior Lecturer in Theatre Studies at the University of Surrey, we have witnessed a simultaneous philosophical turn within performance studies and a growing interest in theatre and performance on the part of contemporary philosophers in recent years.[28] In addition, Cull notes, as philosophy begins to acknowledge and reflect upon its own performativity, it is (finally) looking outside of its traditional modes of expression and opening itself to influence from the arts.[29]

In order to stimulate research by, and promote exchange among, those working in the field, the Performance Philosophy research network was founded in 2012.[30] In the words of Dr. Cull, who is one of Performance Philosophy's eleven core conveners, the network came into being through

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[27] Martin Puchner, "The Problem of the Ground," in *Encounters in Performance Philosophy*, ed. Laura Cull and Alice Lagaay (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 72.

[28] Cull cites Samuel Weber's *Theatricality as Medium* (2004), Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator* (2011), and Alain Badiou's multiple publications on theatre as examples of this growing trend within contemporary continental philosophy. Within contemporary Anglophone philosophy, she cites: Noël Carroll, Tom Stern, David Davies, James Hamilton, and Paul Woodruff. See: Laura Cull, "Performance Philosophy: Staging A New Field," in *Encounters in Performance Philosophy*, eds. Laura Cull and Alice Lagaay (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 17-18.

[29] Laura Cull, "Performance Philosophy: Staging A New Field," in *Encounters in Performance Philosophy*, eds. Laura Cull and Alice Lagaay (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), ix.

[30] The inaugural core conveners of the Performance Philosophy network were: Dr. Laura Cull (University of Surrey), Dr. Will Daddario (Illionios State University), Dr. Kélina Gotman (King's College London), Dr. Karoline Gritzner (Aberystwythe University), Dr. Eve Katsouraki (University of East London), Dr. Esa Kirkkopelto (Theatre Academy Helsinki), Dr. Alice Legaay (Bremen Univeristy), Prof. John Mullarkey (Kingston University), Prof. Freddie Rokem (Tel Aviv University), Dr. Theron Schmidt (UNSW Australia), Dr. Dan Watt (Loughborough University).

a "performative deixis" in that it both "gestured to the existence of a new emergent field" and "summoned such a field into existence."[31] Since its inception, the network has promoted multiple projects to stimulate the production and exchange of knowledge. These include: the launch of a book series and a peer-reviewed journal in collaboration with Palgrave MacMillan, and the organization of a series of symposia, conferences, and seminars. As of this point in time, nine books (including both monographs and edited collections), and two journal volumes have been published. An inaugural conference, "What is Performance Philosophy? Staging a New Field," was held at the University of Surrey in 2013. A second, biennial conference, "What Can Performance Philosophy Do?", took place between The University of Chicago and the Chicago Cultural Centre in 2015. A third, biennial conference, "How does Performance Philosophy Act? Ethos, Ethics, Ethnography" is scheduled to take place at the Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague in June, 2017.

In between these biennial conferences, the network has sponsored a variety of interim events. Of those that have transpired thus far, the most significant—in terms of both scale and impact—was the 2014 symposium, "Theater, Performance Philosophy: Crossings and Transfers in Contemporary Anglo-American Thought". Held at the Sorbonne University, this event welcomed papers from over one hundred scholars, and hosted six internationally acclaimed keynote speakers**:** Judith Butler, Alphonso Lingis, Catherine Malabou, Jon McKenzie, Martin

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[31] "Performance Philosophy". *www. Surrey.ac.uk.*
(http://www.surrey.ac.uk/schoolofarts/research/theatre/performance_philosophy/). Web. Accessed Aug. 31, 2014.
Embedded in Cull's statement is a reference to what Jacques Derrida's perceptive textual analysis of the American Declaration of Independence had unveiled as the unique *temporality* of performativity – its simultaneous ability to describe and produce a given state of affairs. See: Jacques Derrida, "Declarations of Independence," *New Political Science*, Vol. 7, Issue 1 (1986): 7-15.

Puchner, and Avital Ronell**.** In their call for papers, the conference organizers introduced their event with the following words:

> The enquiry into performance structures the thinking of a growing number of
> renowned thinkers, such as Judith Butler, Avital Ronell, Alphonso Lingis,
> Stanley Cavell, Martha Nussbaum, Samuel Weber, Iris Murdoch and Simon
> Critchley, be it on ethical, political or aesthetical grounds. For some, theater and
> performance become the matrix of their philosophical reflection. For others,
> concepts derived from theatrical terminology are used as keys to interpreting
> today's world. For still others, theater and performance penetrate and percolate
> throughout their writing style, enabling new forms of philosophical dialog. In
> these different ways, the event of thinking comes to be inscribed in flesh and
> voice. These experiments disrupt traditional forms of philosophical discourse
> and suggest that academia is leaning towards innovative forms of "performance
> philosophy".[32]

It was my interest in contemporary iterations of performative philosophy that inspired me to make the trip to Paris to attend this symposium. I was curious to examine how the poststructuralist lineage of performativity had influenced a new generation of theorists, and to question how and why these influential thinkers were forgoing traditional modes of academic discourse in place of models borrowed from the arts, and specifically from performance. I was particularly interested in how the women philosophers invited to the symposium exploited

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[32] *www.tpp2014.com.* (http://tpp2014.com/en-us/call-papers/.) Web. Accessed Aug.31, 2014.

performativity's dual status as linguistic and embodied object in their feminist writing praxes. What affordances did this grant them? If Austin taught us that language is a form of action, and Derrida demonstrated that it is also a form of fiction, and Butler teased out the way in which language acts on the body's gender and sex, how might enacting modes of performative writing allow feminist philosophers to engage in forms of both discursive resistance and embodied transgression?

In their call for papers, the organizers of the "Theater, Performance, Philosophy: Crossings and Transfers in Contemporary Anglo-American Thought" symposium recalled that, in the 1970s, "American universities seized upon the works of French philosophers in order to derive from them new ideas, creating the *French Theory* corpus." They then stipulated that with their conference, they aspired to "instigate a return-effect of contemporary Anglo-American thought, enriched by *French Theory*, into French universities."[33] Indeed, while the corpus of the poststructuralist theorists was "imported" to the USA in the 1960s and 1970s, and integrated into humanities curricula in the 1980s, where it radically transformed the American academy, we are currently witnessing a reverse movement in which this work is being re-exported to France under a new guise by American critical, gender, and performance theorists.

Due to its heterogeneous genealogy and its trans-Atlantic travels, I believe that performativity may be instrumental in charting the cross-pollinations between European and North American theory over the past few decades. Born in England to a father from Oxford University delivering a series of lectures in North America, performativity came of age in France as one of the

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[33] *www.tpp2014.com.* (http://tpp2014.com/en-us/call-papers/.) Web. Accessed Aug.31, 2014.

conceptual tools of Derrida, the *enfant terrible* of deconstruction. Postmarked, translated, and sent again across the Atlantic Ocean, it developed in the more politicized environment of American, third-wave academic feminism, where it was popularized by the mothers of queer and gender theory (Butler, Sedgwick, et al.). It then matured within the field of performance studies, before it was recently adopted by performance philosophy.

Like performativity, Butler, Ronell, and Malabou—the three plenary speakers from the "Theatre, Performance, Philosophy" conference—were also all born in the 1950s. As such, they belong to what Malabou has baptized "la generation d'après" (by which she means the generation following structuralism).[34] While they work in different streams of continental philosophy, all three engage directly with Derrida's theorizations of performativity and writing—either by building on his concept of performativity (Butler), by enacting a mode of performative writing (Ronell), or by contending that we are now post-writing and post-performativity (Malabou). In her obituary of Derrida, which was published in *The New York Times* in 2004, and later in *The London Review of Books*, Judith Butler refers to Derrida as the thinker who "not only taught us how to read, but gave the act of reading a new significance and a new promise."[35] Butler concludes her article by stating that following his death, "Jacques Derrida" has become "the name of our loss….the one we continue to address in what we write", expressing that for her, like for many, it is virtually "impossible to write without relying on him."[36]

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[34] Catherine Malabou, "The Following Generation," trans. Simon Porzak, *Qui Parle: Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2012): 19.
[35] Judith Butler, "Jacques Derrida," *The London Review of Books*, vol. 26, no. 21 (2004): 32.
[36] Ibid., 32.

According to Catherine Malabou, it was only by working with Derrida that she truly "became a philosopher."[37] Derrida was, however, the first to alert her to the challenges she would face as a woman in the patriarchal world of (French) philosophy.[38] And challenges she did face. As a young student preparing to take the entrance exams for the prestigious École Normale Supérieure, she was told by a teacher that that she "would never succeed" since "philosophy was a masculine domain or field."[39] Today, she claims that because she works on canonical philosophers and situates her work within metaphysics, she is never considered an independent thinker: "People associate my name to a man's name all the time, I am thought of as a specialist of Hegel or as a specialist of Derrida; I'm never myself." Malabou laments the fact that she is often "introduced in reference to deconstruction," despite the fact that her engagement with Derrida's work is often critical.[40] Because of this, it became necessary for her to distance herself from Derridean thought "in order to remain both 'woman' and 'philosopher'"—a decision that she claims was "my own and which was the pure, radical, and unconditional affirmation of my own freedom."[41]

Ronell also speaks of the "bruises of misogyny" that she endured throughout her academic career, beginning at Princeton where she was one of the only women in her graduating class. She states that she found refuge from the "misogynist, racist, and conservative apparatus of the American academy" in the "parasites, patricides, and Parisianisms" of French theory, and in particular in the work of Derrida. For her, "Derrida's language usage, exquisite and

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[37] Noelle Vahanian, "A Conversation with Catherine Malabou," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, vol.9, no.1 (2008): 2.
[38] Catherine Malabou, *Changing Difference: The Feminine and the Question of Philosophy*, trans. Carolyn Shread (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 3.
[39] Vahanian, 5, 6.
[40] Ibid., 6, 5.
[41] Malabou, *Changing Difference: The Feminine and The Question of Philosophy*, 3.

replenishing…became an offense to the more strictly controlled behaviors and grammars of academic language."[42] She writes that:

> His political views, refined and, by our measure, distinctly leftist, knew few borders and bled into the most pastoral sites and hallowed grounds of higher learning. Suddenly color was added to the university – color and sassy women, something that could not easily be forgiven. In him, Kant reemerged as a morphed and updated historicity, a cosmopolitan force that placed bets on and opened discursive formations to women. Derrida blew into our town-and-gown groves with protofeminist energy, often, and at great cost to the protocols of philosophical gravity, passing as a woman.[43]

Just as there are plural performativities, there are of course multifarious feminisms. When labelling Derrida's energy "protofeminist", it would be important to add the nuance that a Derridean conception of genealogy would deconstruct the logic of the origin and problematize bonds of filiation. Similarly, a deconstructive, feminist genealogy would challenge the priority of patrilineage. I would thus propose to employ a dialogic temporality to chart the reciprocity of intellectual influence between Derrida and his "daughters". As such, when I suggest that they "follow" in the path of Derrida, I wish to imply that Butler, Ronell, and Malabou do so not through acts of mimesis but, instead, through acts of invention.

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[42] Avital Ronell, *Fighting Theory* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), ix, 123, 162.
[43] Ibid., 123.

Thesis Overview

With this dissertation, I seek to provide a rigorous historicization and theorization of performativity by means of an analysis of a selection of texts by its major theorists. This project enables me to develop a nuanced understanding of how performativity operates in the visual and performing arts, while also illuminating the term for performance philosophy scholars. An intellectual history written in the first-person, each chapter narrates my phenomenological reception of a rhetorical performance by one of the key theorists of performativity. Each highlights the particularities of the ways in which J.L Austin, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, and Catherine Malabou enact modes of performative writing that resist the formalizing, reifying tendencies of much philosophical language. In so doing, I consider how their thinking may be said (as per the TPP organizers) to be "inscribed in flesh and voice." Performatively exercised, realized, and embodied, their writings *do things with words*, in Austin's original sense of the phrase. As such, they make philosophy into an action, an art form, an embodied and critical praxis that performatively employs language as a conceptual and political tool.

In the first half of my dissertation, I revisit performativity's genesis in the philosophy of language, and situate the concept in the "bifurcated history" between orality and technologies of writing.[44] These chapters emphasize the relationship among the conceptual content of the texts in question, the media through which they were disseminated, and their rhetorical style. I propose that it is the interplay among these three factors that produces meaning. With this argument that emphasizes the spectator's role in the intersubjective exchange, I refute the idea that meaning is self-contained in a text or work of art.

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[44] Martin Puchner, "The Drama of Ideas", (lecture presented at the symposium *Theater, Performance, Philosophy*: *Crossings and Transfers in Contemporary Anglo-American Thought*, La Sorbonne, June 26, 2014).

In my first chapter, "Any Search for an Origin is Hysterical: Summoning the Ghost of J.L. Austin", I narrate my acousmatic experience of listening to a recording of Austin's lecture "Performatives", given at The University of Gothenburg in 1959. Through extensive research into the modes of production of Austin's work, I demonstrate that the philosopher produced and disseminated his research orally, dialogically, and pedagogically through contexts that privileged the inter-subjective exchange. I frame Austin's self-described practice of "linguistic phenomenology" as a pragmatic one in which philosophy *is* context and collective labour. Further, I suggest that Austin's mode of "doing" or "performing" philosophy is also at play within the dramaturgy of his texts, which restage his thought processes and invite his readers to become spectators to the dramatization of his ideas. As such, I argue that Austin developed and delivered his theory of performativity in a performative manner; in other words, in describing his ideas, he was simultaneously enacting them. My study of the scene of performativity's "genesis" allows me to argue that from its inception, the concept has challenged notions of authorship and the origin.

My second chapter, "Archive in Absentia: Orality and Writing in Derrida's 'Signature Event Context'", proposes that it is by virtue of the interdependence of the oral and written disseminations of his 1971 "Signature Event Context" that Jacques Derrida was able to performatively enact his deconstructive intervention into Austinian speech act theory. In it, I chronicle my search for an audio-visual archive of Derrida's live reading of this famous text, which deconstructs the binary oppositions between orality and writing and non-fictional and fictional discourse. However, when I emerge from this search empty-handed, I come to conclude

that the absence of this archival document serves to support Derrida's theses about the indeterminacy of context and the iterability of the semiotic signifier. Entering the text, I foreground the ways in which its performativity is expressed through its materiality. Here, I focus on the mise en page of the concluding paragraph, and argue that, as a material trace of a live event—yet a trace that, in a sense, preceded its own origin—"Signature Event Context" self-consciously and performatively incorporates the absence of its Other (it's oral counterpart) into its own, embodied form.

In the second half of my dissertation, I examine how two contemporary philosophers—one American and one French, one whose name is known for popularizing performativity over the last few decades, and one who contests the notion—enact two very different permutations of critical, feminist, performative praxis. Here, I hone in on the subject of how performativity is expressed through the medium of the body, and question what it means to be performative or to act peformatively. I situate the concept within debates in feminist theory about form, essence, and materiality, and assess its continued relevance in our current post-poststructuralist philosophical landscape. This allows me to highlight performativity's role in the cross-pollinations between French and North American feminist theory, and to demonstrate the difficulty of moving beyond a performative account of gender constitution.

My third chapter, *A Choreography of Gestures: Judith Butler and the Philosopher's Body*, stages Judith Butler as a transitional figure—one central to the historical theorization of performativity and one who continues to engage in new modes of performative philosophy today. To this end, I focus on two rhetorical performances that span Butler's career: her 1988 article "Performative

Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" and her 2014 lecture "When Gesture Becomes Event", delivered as a keynote address at the "Theatre, Performance, Philosophy: Crossings and Transfers in Anglo-American Thought" symposium. I recall how, in the latter, Butler highlighted the somatic dimensions of the speech act by framing gesture—understood as both citation and event—as a potentially critical practice. How, I ask, might Butler's reflections on gesture be applied to a reading of the somatic dimensions of her own rhetorical performance? In addressing these questions, I touch upon the generally untouchable subject of the philosopher's body. Applying Butler's theory of the event as an embodied encounter with the other to the analysis of a philosophy lecture, I consider the spectator's role in the relationship between a philosopher and her audience. In so doing, I question how theatricality and performativity interact. Drawing on phenomenological accounts of temporality and performance studies scholarship on the difference in the perceptual experience of live versus mediatized communication, I take up the epistemological problem of how a spectator can know or access a performer-philosopher's embodied subjectivity, while also questioning the roots of his or her desire to do so.

In my fourth and last chapter, I consider the implications of French philosopher Catherine Malabou's hallmark concept of "plasticity"—which designates the subject's capacity to give, receive, and annihilate form—on theories of both the performativity of language and gender. I open my chapter with an exposition of Malabou's 2010 article, "The End of Writing? Grammatology and Plasticity", in which she argues that plasticity has come to supplant Derridean writing as a contemporary motor schema. From here, I develop a close reading of Malabou's 2004 book, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*,

and suggest that, despite her contestation of performativity, Malabou ushers in plasticity in a performative manner. Lastly, I consider Malabou's reflections on gender in her 2014 article, "Sujet: Femme", in which she links the anti-essentialism of Derrida and Nietzsche's accounts of sexual difference to Butler's theory of gender performativity. Identifying the above philosophers' conflations of Heideggerian notions of Being and essence as a form of ontological violence, Malabou calls for an anti-essentialist, plastic theory of the essence of woman. In response, I highlight the parallels between performativity and plasticity—namely that both configure identity and form as mutable and transformable—and argue that because of this, the two concepts do not stand in as stark an opposition as Malabou maintains. From here, I conclude that we are not (yet) post-performative. Performativity, I argue, is not a thing of the past; the trope is not obsolete, nor is has it been replaced or superseded. Rather—due perhaps to its plasticity—it is constantly being formed, reformed, and transformed.

Chapter One
"Any Search for an Origin is Hysterical": Summoning the Ghost of J.L. Austin

Prologue: Waiting for an Apparition

As in Hamlet, the Prince of a rotten State, everything begins by the apparition of a specter. More precisely, by the waiting for this apparition. The anticipation is at once impatient, anxious, and fascinated…

-Derrida 1994, 4.

It is with much anticipation that I finally sit down to listen to the recording of British philosopher of language J.L Austin's lecture "Performatives", given at the University of Gothenburg in 1959. Seeking to highlight the performativity of a selection of contemporary philosophy texts, I naturally turned to Austin's work as a historical precedent. After all, it was Austin who first coined the term "performative" to designate a form of language in which one does what it says— a form that does not merely describe, but produces, a given state of affairs. It was Austin who, in so doing, contested the dominant logical positivist belief that all linguistic statements must be evaluated according to their truth or falsity.

As White's Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford during that university's "golden years" of the 1950s, Austin held one of the most prestigious chairs of philosophy in the world.[45] He is remembered equally for his patient, fastidious, and methodological analysis of ordinary language use and for his black humor, "Oxbridge irony" and "wild, comic imagination of disaster,

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[45] John Searle in: Gunther Grewendorf and Georg Meggle, eds., "Speech Acts, Mind and Social Reality: Discussions with John Searle," in *Studies in Linguistics and Philosophy*, vol.79. (2002): 17.

transgression and grotesque mishap."[46] By proposing the then novel idea that saying could also be a form of doing, Austin placed language into the realm of action. Among philosophers of language, he is credited with inaugurating the field of speech act theory. Among performance studies scholars, he is cast as the point of origin in a genealogy tracing the influence of linguistic theory on performance theory.

However, while Austin's legacy was manifold and his influence widespread, he was by no means a prolific writer. Austin only published seven papers in his lifetime. His book publications, too, are scant, numbering a mere three. Aside from his translation of German logician Gottlob Frege's *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik* (*The Foundations of Arithmetic*), his own books appeared posthumously.

First published in 1961 by editors J.O. Urmson and G.J. Warnock, *Philosophical Papers* compiles all of Austin's articles—both the seven that were published in his lifetime, and an additional six that appeared after his premature death.[47] In them, Austin applies the methods of ordinary language philosophy to the analysis of performative utterances, speech act theory, and correspondence theory, broaching topics such as excuses, accusations, pretending, and freedom, as well as Aristotelian and Platonic theories of language.

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[46] These characterizations of Austin are from, respectively, Judith Butler as cited in Shoshana Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 115, and J.Hillis Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 44.

[47] The one exception is "Performative-Constative", which was originally published in *Cahiers de Royaumont, Philosophie, La Philosophie Analytique,* no. 4 (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1962) and translated into English by G.J Warnock under the title "Performative-Constative", where it appeared in: Charles E. Caton, ed., *Philosophy and Ordinary Language* (Champain: University of Illinois Press, 1963).

Sense and Sensibilia (1962) is a work on sense data theories of perception that revolves

principally around a critique of the ideas put forth in British philosopher A.J. Ayer's 1940

publication, *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*. In the forward to *Sense and Sensibilia*,

editor G.J. Warnock explains that due to the "unreadable" and "scarcely unintelligible" quality of

many of Austin's manuscript notes (themselves modeled on Austin's lecture series, "Problems

on Philosophy", given at Oxford in 1947), Warnock was obliged to essentially rewrite them.[48] In

order to remain as faithful as possible to Austin's ideas, he consulted Austin's notes from several

other lecture series given between 1947 and 1958. It thus follows that the published text is not a

reproduction, but rather a reconstruction, of Austin's writing.

The much-celebrated *How to Do Things with Words*, which represents Austin's greatest

contribution to speech act theory, and in which his notion of the linguistic performative was first

introduced in print, has a similar history, albeit one that played out on both sides of the Atlantic.

In 1955, Austin had made a trip to the United States where he visited both Harvard and Berkley.

At Harvard, he delivered a series of twelve lectures under the aegis of the prestigious William

James Lectures, which were endowed in 1929 (and continue today) in honor of the American

pragmatist philosopher. In his 1929 bequest, Harvard Alumnus Edgar Pierce stipulated the

conditions of the lectures: 1) that they be open to the public, and 2) that they subsequently be

published by the Harvard University Press.

Respecting Pierce's wishes, in 1962, Austin's lectures were released under the playful title *How

to Do Things with Words* that Austin, himself, had chosen in 1955. In their preface to the first

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[48] G.J. Warnock, preface to J.L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), vii.

edition of the book, editors J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà explain that the book's central ideas were first formulated in 1939. They were further expanded during a series of lectures given at Oxford between the years of 1952 and 1954 under the title "Words and Deeds", before they were refined in the William James Lectures. As with the Austin of *Sense and Sensibilia*, then, the Austin of *How to Do Things with Words* was engaged in an iterative writing process in which his set of notes was rewritten and revised for each series of lectures. Like Warnock, Urmson and Sbisà admit that the published text is far from a replica of Austin's written notes. They explain that in the beginnings of the lectures these notes were very complete and were fleshed out in full sentences; however, as Austin proceeded, they became more fragmentary and abbreviated. In order to cross-reference the text, the editors thus turned to Austin's notes from the "Words and Deeds" lectures, the notes taken by those who attended his lectures in both the USA and in England, a talk Austin gave on BBC radio in 1956 entitled "Performative Utterances", and the 1959 Gothenburg lecture, "Performatives".

It was with the hope of understanding the complicated status of the authorship of the inaugural text on the performative utterance, the relationship between the concept of performativity, the modes of its production, and the media through which it was disseminated, that I turned to these archives. My preliminary research quickly revealed that a recording of "Performative Utterances", which aired on the 24th of August, 1956, did not survive in the BBC Sound Archives. As with many of the programs from that time, Austin's talk went out live and was not recorded. The BBC did, however, produce a transcript (which is housed in their Written Archive)—a document that I procured and that, as a written record of an oral communication, represents a particular species of writing. Due to some fortuitous timing, my research in

Gothenburg was more successful. The proprietors of "Performatives" at The Department of Philosophy, Linguistics and Theory of Science at Gothenburg University had succeeded in digitizing the lecture one week prior to my inquiry, and they generously agreed to share it with me.[49]

As I prepare to encounter Austin's ghost through the medium of his voice, I am surprised by the veil of essentialism that taints my expectation. Like any student of the intellectual history of performativity, I have closely dissected the deconstructionist readings of Austin by Jacques Derrida, Shoshana Felman, Judith Butler, and their followers. Like any theorist working after Derrida on the relationship between orality and writing, I am wary of the valorization of the voice due to its proximity to a transcendental source. I know better than to bestow upon this recording any sort of epistemological superiority over the written word. Yet as I sit down to listen to the voice of the "Father" of a concept that would go on to effectuate nothing short of a paradigmatic shift within the humanities and social sciences in the second half of the twentieth century, it seems that my poststructuralism is suddenly clouded by a rather sentimental wish to access something like Austin's interior "essence". "The voice is like a fingerprint, instantly recognizable and identifiable", the Slovenian philosopher Mladen Dolar writes in his beautiful book on the subject.[50] But what is it that I could possibly access through the medium of Austin's voice that remains inaccessible in his writing, reconstructed as it is?

[50] Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 22.

My commitment to performing the role of a fully "present" interlocutor is reinforced by my awareness that this recording, made on the 2nd of October 1959, just three months before Austin's death from lung cancer at the age of forty-eight, holds the last known public trace of his voice. I thus vow to myself to fulfill my side of the intersubjective exchange to the best of my ability and to participate as conscientiously as possible in the production of meaning. But here, too, I am skeptical. Does my seemingly sincere intention to be ethical not—in fact—cloak some sort of yearning for communion? I realize that I am divided. While my *intention* is to be analytical, my *desire* is to be seduced.[51] Conscious of this consciousness—and taking solace in the fact that if nothing else, I am *at least* self-conscious—I press play, and the recording begins.

Austin's Theory of the Performative Utterance

The book *How to Do Things with Words*, the BBC "Performative Utterances" transcript, and the Gothenburg "Performatives" recording represent three iterations of the same thesis: that of the performative utterance. Of these three documents, *How to Do Things with Words* is by far the most detailed and extensive elaboration. In it, Austin begins by introducing his concept of the performative utterance by way of contrast with the constative utterance, or statement. While the latter is said to describe a pre-existing state of affairs, the former designates a form of language that performs an act, or brings such a state of affairs into being. Said in another way, performatives make a saying a doing. In order to illustrate his proposal, Austin provides the following examples:

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[51] In her book *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J.L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*, Shoshana Felman confesses that she is "seduced" by Austin's writing.

(E.a) "I do (sc.Take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife)"—as uttered in

the course of the marriage ceremony.

 (E.*b*) "I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth"—as uttered when smashing the

bottle against the stem.

(E.*c*) "I give and bequeath my watch to my brother"—as occurring in a will.

(E.*d*) "I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow."[52]

By considering the performative utterance as the performance of an act, Austin had contested the

generally accepted tenet that all linguistic enunciations must be evaluated according to their truth

conditions, or their correspondence to certain facts. Instead, he proposed to evaluate them

according to their success or failure. In his second lecture, he proposes six conditions that must

be met so that a performative utterance can be deemed "felicitous". They are the following:

(A.1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain

conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by

certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,

(A. 2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be

appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.

(B.1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and

(B.2) completely.

(T.1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having

certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential

conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so

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[52] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 5.

invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the

participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further

(T.2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently.[53]

From here on in, Austin embarks on the project of determining a set of grammatical or lexical

criteria that define the performative utterance. This search, however, ends in an impasse, with

Austin concluding that the constative utterance is also prone to infelicity, while the performative

also relies upon certain conventions. Forced to accept the collapse of his initial

performative/constative dichotomy, Austin concludes that it is tautological to speak of

performative language: "Once we realize that what we have to study is not the sentence but the

issuing of an utterance in a speech situation, there can hardly be any longer a possibility of not

seeing that stating is performing an act."[54]

From this point on, Austin decides to look beyond the propositional content of the sentence and

to "consider the *total situation* in which the utterance is used."[55] This leads to another system of

classification: the tripartite division of "locution", "illocution" and "perlocution", which

articulates the three axes of language that coalesce in communication. "Locution" refers to the

semantic and referential meaning of a given utterance, "illocution" to the act performed *in* saying

something (in other words to what the utterance does) and "perlocution" to the effects or

consequences produced *by* the utterance.

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[53] Ibid., 15.
[54] Ibid., 139.
[55] Ibid., 52.

Concluding that the "total speech act in the total speech situation" is the only object worthy of study, Austin advances a last taxonomy, this time to elucidate families of speech acts. Admitting that his neologisms are "more-or-less rebarbative", he distinguishes between "verditives" which pronounce judgment, "exercitives" which assert power, "commissives" which communicate obligation or intention, "behabatives" which adopt an attitude, and "expositives" which elucidate arguments.[56]

<div align="center">

Thursday Evenings and Saturday Mornings:
Austin's Performative Praxis of Linguistic Phenomenology

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How to Do Things with Words concludes with a typical Austinian gesture. Admitting that the thesis expounded in the book is "bound to be a little boring and dry to listen to and digest", Austin offers his readers "the real fun of applying it in philosophy."[57] As an Oxford philosopher, or "ordinary language philosopher", Austin was concerned first and foremost with everyday language use—with "what we say when, and so why and what we should mean by doing it."[58] However, well aware that many philosophers outside his circle were skeptical of the idea that it is possible to make ontological claims about the world through an analysis of mere words, Austin came up with the term "linguistic phenomenology" to describe his methodology:

> When we examine what we should say when, what words we should use in what
> situations, we are looking again not *merely* at words (or 'meanings' whatever
> they may be) but also at the realities we use the words to talk about: we are
> using a sharpened awareness of words to sharpen our perception of, though not

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[56] Ibid., 148, 151.
[57] Ibid., 164.
[58] J.L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 129.

as the final arbiter of, the phenomena. For this reason I think it might be better

to use, for this way of doing philosophy, some less misleading name….for

instance "linguistic phenomenology".[59]

Thus, although he was working within the tradition of Analytic philosophy, Austin borrowed a

term from the Continental tradition to name his practice. Here, it is of interest to mention that in

1958, Austin participated in the first meeting on French soil between the major proponents of the

Anglo-American and the Continental factions of philosophy. Hosted by the Royaumont Abbey in

Northern France, the event brought together such thinkers as J.O. Urmson, Bernard Williams,

Gilbert Ryle, Peter Strawson, Willard Quine, Evert Beth, Richard Hare, and Austin, on the one

hand, and Jean Wahl, Ferdinard Alquié, Herman Van Breda, Lucien Goldmann and, most

relevantly, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, on the other. It is known that Austin was familiar with the

work of Merleau-Ponty, the leading force in phenomenology at that time. Reports reveal that

Austin had studied his 1945 opus *Phenomenology of Perception*, a key text in twentieth century

phenomenology that foregrounds the embodied nature of perception and the intersubjective

quality of our lived experience. I would thus argue, then, that Austin's choice of the term

"linguistic phenomenology" communicates his sensitivity to the intersubjective nature of the

linguistic exchange, which his theory of performativity would bring to the fore. One might also

venture to suggest that it foreshadows the fact that performativity would attract the attention of

Analytic and Continental philosophers alike for decades to come.

In this chapter, I will argue that in addition to his explicit theorization of the concept of

performativity, Austin produced and disseminated his philosophy in a performative manner,

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[59] Ibid., 130.

favoring contexts that privileged the intersubjective. In addition to his university lectures and the BBC talk, Austin also organized more intimate, weekly gatherings to discuss various problems in philosophy. The first such meetings took place before the war in the second half of the 1930s, and the second, after the war throughout the 1950s. Both are described in the three prosopographical papers by Sir Isaiah Berlin, George Pitcher, and G.J. Warnock that are included in the volume *Essays on J.L. Austin*, published by the Oxford University Press in 1973.

Beginning in 1936 and continuing until 1939, a group of no more than seven young Oxford philosophers would gather on Thursday evenings at All Souls College, where Austin had been a fellow since 1933. Austin wished for these meetings to remain informal, and for there to be no obligation to produce or publish any results. Topics broached included perception, *a priori* truths, counter-factual statements, and the question of personal identity. For Sir Isaiah Berlin, who participated in the gatherings, these meetings represented "the most fruitful discussions of philosophy" of his life. In Berlin's account, the meetings marked the beginning of what would become known as the school of Oxford Philosophy.[60]

When Austin returned to Oxford after the war, he organized another series of informal, weekly philosophical discussions that ran throughout the 1950s.[61] These gatherings, which took place on Saturday mornings at various colleges around Oxford, were aptly called "Austin's Saturday mornings". In G.J. Warnock's personal account of these sessions, he explains that those invited

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[60] Ibid., 9, 1. Isaiah Berlin, "Austin and the early beginnings of Oxford philosophy," in *Essays on J.L. Austin*, ed. Isaiah Berlin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 1,9.
[61] As with the lives of many academics of that era, Austin's career was interrupted by the war. Austin served as a decoder in the British Intelligence Corps for a period of six years, contributing enormously to the D-Day intelligence project. He left the army as a highly decorated lieutenant.

received a card from Austin at the beginning of the term with the schedule of the "Sat. mng. mtgs."[62] What united the invitees was that they were all full-time, tutorial Fellows at Oxford. According to Austin, this made them vulnerable to becoming so consumed with bureaucratic and teaching obligations that they would end up neglecting their intellectual pursuits. Thus, on Saturday mornings a group would gather with the goal of stimulating discussion and probing current philosophical problems. There, Austin lead sessions on such works as Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, Frege's *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik*, Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* and Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures*. Again, these titles reflect Austin's fluency in, and openness to engage with, different philosophical traditions.

Echoing Berlin, Warnock reports that during the Saturday morning sessions "practically no philosophical conclusions were ever explicitly drawn", adding that he did not have "any impression that Austin had, even at the back of his mind, any particular philosophical lessons that he hoped we should learn". When speculating about Austin's goal in organizing the sessions, Warnock offers the following speculation: "I think he wanted to convince us of the possibility of collaboration, and perhaps above all to get us to believe seriously in the possibility of *agreement*."[63] He suggests that Austin saw philosophy as a "*co-operative* pursuit."[64] Like Berlin, Warnock remembers these sessions as "the best of philosophical occasions."[65] In his words, Austin:

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[62] G.J. Warnock, "Saturday Mornings," in *Essays on J.L. Austin*, ed. Isaiah Berlin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 31.
[63] Ibid. 40, 43.
[64] G.J. Warnock, *J.L Austin* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 9.
[65] G.J. Warnock, in Berlin, ed., *Essays on J.L. Austin*, 44.

[…] was not a purveyor or explainer, however competent or critical or learned,

of philosophy; he was a maker of it, an actual origin. One had the feeling – not

always, but often – that those meetings, which were so unmistakably his own,

were not occasions on which philosophy was talked about, or taught, or learned

– they were occasions on which it was *done*, at which that actually *happened*,

there and then, in which the life of the subject consists.[66]

I would suggest that today we could use the term "performative" to describe Austin's method of

philosophizing—for it appears that in *doing* the philosophy he was describing, Austin was

enacting his own, original sense of the term performative. In Berlin and Warnock's narrations of

the Thursday evening and Saturday morning sessions, we are given a glimpse of Austin

performing philosophy as a social act. Here, philosophy becomes a form of "collective labour"

that privileges the dialogic and the intersubjective.[67]

<div align="center">Austin's Performativity</div>

All three authors of the prosopographical accounts of Austin's teaching have made special

mention of Austin's authority. In his description of the Saturday morning sessions, Warnock

describes an ambiance marked by a tension between formality and informality. With regards to

Austin's comportment, he writes that he "cannot think of any comparable instance of personal

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[66] Ibid., 45.

[67] John Langshaw Austin. http://www.iep.utm.edu. (http://www.iep.utm.edu/austin/). Web. March 1, 2015.

authority so effortlessly exercised."[68] George Pitcher expresses the same sentiment, almost verbatim, when he writes that he has "never before, or since, witnessed a comparable display of natural authority."[69] While the meetings were said to be "exceptionally fluid, free…..continuously enjoyable and amusing—f*unny*, in fact", Warnock adds that they were "never just casual, and not even really relaxed" and that "it was always just a little as if the headmaster were present."[70] In describing the format of the Saturday morning sessions, he reports that "the physical and dialectical centre of gravity located itself, predictably, in the person of Austin", explaining that Austin "sat in a wooden armchair with the rest of us deployed in a rough semicircle facing him. And the discussion inevitably assumed the shape of the physical layout: the remarks of the others seemed to be directed not to the group as a whole but to Austin…."[71]

The authority of the speaker, which Austin is reported to have embodied, is in fact one of the requirements of a successful Austinian performative utterance. In Austin's theory, performativity concerns the illocutionary level of language, which—unlike the locutionary and the perlocutionary—is governed by its *conventional* nature. In Austin's paradigmatic example of the marriage ceremony, a ritualistic and legal question is posed and marriage is then "performed" by means of a linguistic act. The success of this performative, however, depends upon the speaker's adherence to a set of conventions, several of which implicate the very *identity* of the speaker. Agency is not something that can be exercised by just anybody; it accompanies privilege. Success is attributed to "certain persons" in "certain circumstances"—persons who are

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[68] Warnock, G.J, "Saturday Mornings," in *Essays on J.L. Austin*, ed. Isaiah Berlin, 32.
[69] George Pitcher, "Austin: a personal memoir," in *Essays on J.L. Austin*, ed. Isaiah Berlin, 21.
[70] Warnock, G.J. "Saturday Mornings," in Essays on J.L. Austin, ed. Isaiah Berlin, 32-33.
[71] Pitcher, 21.

"appropriate" and who perform a given action "correctly."[72] Although Austin's theories did not consider this in the 1950s, these conditions anticipate the question—taken up by Derrida, and then Butler—of whether agency might be something that can be performed.

The success, or in Austin's terms "felicity", of the illocutionary act, however, relies on the *ethos* of the speaker—not only upon his identity, character and ego, but also on his or her authority. The speaker's agency is dependent upon his or her presence: "something" is "being done by the person uttering….at the moment of uttering."[73] This requirement is built into the very grammar of the performative utterance. As is demonstrated by Austin's examples, explicit performative utterances are all structured with their verbs in the first person singular present indicative active tense. While Austin later abandoned the idea of the existence of a grammatical criterion that defines all performative utterances, he did maintain that they must all be reducible or expandable to this grammatical form. For example, he would admit that the implicit, monosyllabic performative utterance "Bull!" is just as successful as the explicit performative utterance "I warn you that the bull is about to charge."[74]

For literary critic J.Hillis Miller, Austin's conception of agency is influenced by the authority that he enjoyed as a white, male, upper class, European intellectual who held one of the most prestigious (and one of only three) Chairs of Philosophy at Oxford. First, such privilege allows Austin to segue between the serious tone of his philosophical argumentation and the rather grotesque examples that characterize his "undertext." Second, Miller identifies an underlying

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[72] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words,* 16.
[73] Ibid., 60.
[74] Austin, 55.

misogyny in *How to Do Things with Words*. Indeed, Austin's speaking "I" is implicitly male; it is the woman who is "taken" as wife, and the man who does the taking.[75] Queer theorists Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Andrew Parker have also drawn attention to the hetero-normative implication of exemplifying the marriage ceremony. For them, Austin's marginalization of the fictional bespeaks a homophobic rejection of the "perverse."[76] In any case, Austin's own privilege is manifested in his theory of performativity, and he embodied the condition of authority.

Interestingly, however, Pitcher writes that in his lectures, Austin "resorted to no stage effects of any kind", and Warnock makes a point of stating that Austin "could not bear histrionics."[77] In fact, as is well known, Austin completely excluded the theatrical, and the fictional in general, from his theory of performativity. This is made clear in the follow paragraph from *How to Do Things with Words*, which has been cited repeatedly by theatre scholars:

> …as utterances our performatives are also heir to certain other kinds of ill which
>
> infect all utterances. And these likewise, though again they might be brought
>
> into a more general account, we are deliberately excluding. I mean, for example,
>
> the following: a performative utterance will, for example, be in a peculiar way
>
> hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or
>
> spoken in a soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every
>
> utterance—a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such

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[75] J. Hillis Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 49, 50-51.

[76] Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, eds., *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 5.

[77] These quotes are from George Pitcher and G.J. Warnock, respectively, in Isaiah Berlin, ed., *Essays on J.L. Austin*, 18, 43.

circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—used not seriously but in ways

parasitic upon its normal use—ways which fall under the doctrine of the

etiolations of language. All this we are excluding from consideration.[78]

Although subsequent theories of performativity (most notably the one provided by

Derrida, which will be the object of analysis of the second chapter of my dissertation),

have taught us the dangers of interpretive models based on authorial intention, Austin's

critics have dedicated much textual space to questioning the motivations behind his

choice of the hardly benevolent terms "parasitic" and "etiolation". They have speculated

as to whether his exclusion of the fictional was ontological, methodological, ethical, or

even ironic. This last suggestion—that it could be ironic—is defended by the abundance

of literary allusions that permeate *How to Do Things with Words*. At times explicitly

and at other times implicitly, Austin cites or refers to Cervantes, Euripides, Voltaire,

Donne, Whitman, and others. The Shakespearean echoes are particularly common, with

allusions to Ariel's song in *The Tempest*, to the famous handkerchief in *Othello*, and to

the pound of flesh in *The Merchant of Venice*. Thus while Austin adamantly excludes

literature from his theory of performativity, he simultaneously relies upon it to

dramatize his arguments.

Performance studies scholar Shannon Jackson sees in Austin's work the propagation of a kind of

"anti-theatrical performativity" situated within many "anti-theatrical prejudices that have vexed

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[78] Austin, 21-22.

Western intellectual history."[79] For Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, the fact that despite Austin's attempts to marginalize the fictional, he relied upon it to construct his arguments, demonstrates that performativity has been "from its inception already infected with queerness."[80] Literary theorist Shoshana Felman, on the other hand, casts Austin as a rebel of sorts, and accuses his self-professed "heirs" (in a footnote she cites John Searle and H.P Grice) of failing to recognize the true performative dimension of his humor. For Felman, the "performative aspect" of Austin's work (what he *does* with words) lies in his literary allusions and his use of humor.[81] How, then, are we to reconcile Austin's clear exclusion of the fictional with his use of the fictional to expound his argument? And how might we distinguish between his theatricality and his performativity?

Between Orality and Technologies of Writing: Performativity's "Bifurcated History"

Few publications, multiple lecture series given at universities around the world, a tradition of Thursday evening and Saturday morning meetings, and a talk on the national radio station…the Austin that emerges from this portrait is one who clearly preferred to produce and disseminate his research on performative utterances orally, dialogically, collectively, and pedagogically as opposed to publishing the written word. Why might this be?

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[79] Shannon Jackson, *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 186.
[80] Parker and Sedgwick, eds., *Performativity and Performance*, 5.
[81] Shoshana Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, 99, 48.

By our contemporary standards, one might be tempted to attribute Austin's slim publication

record to some failure in scholarly productivity. Yet historical context helps clarify how

scholarly conditions informed not just how Austin shared his work, but the dramaturgical

structures he deployed within them. First, it appears that *not* publishing was common to the

culture of Oxford philosophy at Austin's time. According to Austin's disciple, the American

philosopher John Searle, who earned his Ph.D. as a Rhodes scholar at Oxford and went on to

make the most important contribution to the field of speech act theory following Austin's death,

"Oxford had a long tradition of not publishing during one's lifetime, indeed it was regarded as

slightly vulgar to publish."[82] (We should not forget that Wittgenstein, who taught at Cambridge

while Austin was at Oxford, only published one, slim book during his lifetime (*Tractatus-*

Logico-Philosophicus), yet left behind him a mountain of manuscripts, only a few of which have

been published today).

Austin's performative mode of doing philosophy is also at play within the dramaturgy of *How to*

Do Things with Words. In it, Austin offers scrupulous analyses of everyday language use and

envisions multiple taxonomies to sharpen our understanding of performative utterances. The text

unfolds in a temporality of the now. Austin leads his readers through a series of methodological

steps, often working by processes of exclusion to push an idea to its limits. We thus observe the

philosopher thinking in the present tense, and we think alongside him in real time. Throughout

the exposition of his ideas, Austin repeatedly confronts impasses. We, as his readers, become

spectators to the dramatization of both the construction of his ideas and their breakdown, as in

the case of the theoretical collapse of the performative/constative binary. Since

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[82] John Searle, "J.L. Austin (1911-1960)," in *A Companion to Analytic Philosophy*, Aloysuis P. Martinich and David Sosa, eds., (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 227.

this breakdown had of course already "occurred" before the lectures were given, Austin clearly chose to *restage* it for his audience.

J. Hillis Miller calls attention to the fact that Austin's work is situated within a strong philosophical tradition, reminding us that Plato's *Dialogues* also continually end at impasses in which Socrates says they must take up the subject again at a later time. Miller cites the end of *Protagoras*, in which Socrates realized that virtue cannot be taught, as a parallel to Austin's inexhaustible attempts at reaching his impossible goal.[83] For Judith Butler, Austin displays "compulsive efforts to scrap the latest conceptual architectonic in favor of a new one." She goes on to say that: "He is not sure of his way, and he leaves the legacy of his misfires on the page for us to read."[84] Shoshana Felman affirms this, observing that: "Austin's research is modeled on anaphora, on repetition and beginnings", and that a finite goal or conclusion is never reached. For her, the fact of needing to constantly begin again puts the very act of research into the realm of the performative, as opposed to the constative. The performative nature of research is only heightened when the research concerns the concept of performativity, which Austin himself had shown could not be judged by its truth conditions. As Felman rightly asks, "How, indeed, might one find the truth of that which, as such, deconstructs the criterion of truth itself?"[85]

In this sense, despite his obstinate pursuit of clarity, Austin clearly avoided positing traditional, formal philosophical arguments. In a sense, he never propounds an argument, ending his book, as I have already mentioned, by offering to his readers "the real fun of applying it in philosophy."[86]

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[83] Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, 23.
[84] Butler in Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, 121.
[85] Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, p.42-3.
[86] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 164.

Within this invitation, or solicitation, we may unearth a dialogical impulse, but also a *pedagogical* one. Austin was known to be an excellent teacher, and his influence was surely more widespread in this domain than it was through his publications. Austin began teaching philosophy at Oxford in 1935 and continued until his death. According to Berlin, it was his first classes that marked "the true beginning of Austin's career as an independent thinker."[87] Commenting on the fact that Austin proposes to "make a fresh start on the problem" of defining the performative utterance *half-way* through *How to Do Things with Words,* Warnock reminds us that: "in lecturing, Austin was not merely expounding, he was teaching."[88] Clearly, Austin felt that this method of guiding his students and readers through a re-enactment of his thought process would be more effective than offering a constructed, linear, and teleological argument.

Austin first introduced his theory of the performative utterance within the context of a seminar. He continued to develop his ideas over the course of multiple lecture series, beginning with "Words and Deeds", and followed by the William James Lectures, which were in turn reused at later lectures at Oxford. In a sense, each communication was like a public performance of a work-in-progress. Austin's writing process was an iterative one, in which oral and written communications fed back into each other, as in a loop. As such, his text was always already spoken, just as his speaking voice was always already textualized.

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[87] Berlin, *Essays on J.L. Austin*, 8.
[88] It is Austin who uses the expression "make a fresh start on the problem" in Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 91, and Warnock who claims that "in lecturing, Austin was not merely expounding, he was teaching" in Warnock, *J.L Austin*, 106.

This circular and iterative mechanics continued after Austin's death, with the eventual publication of *How to Do Things with Words*. That the book exists at all in its "final" published form owes everything to the work of two very dedicated editors. Taking as its base Austin's notes from the William James Lectures, the editors also consulted Austin's notes from the "Words and Deeds" lecture, the notes taken by those who attended his various lectures, the BBC talk and the Gothenburg lecture. The text we have today, in which we situate the origin of performativity, is in fact a highly hybrid object.

This said, the history of *How to Do Things with Words* is not so uncommon. This is a point Harvard theatre scholar and literary critic Martin Puchner made in his opening, keynote at the colloquium "Theatre, Performance, Philosophy: Crossings and Transfers in Anglo-American Thought": over the course of history, prophets often disseminated their teachings orally. As a result, many historical texts were in fact "written" by the students of the master after his or her death. Citing Jesus, Muhammad, and Socrates as ancient precedents, and Lacan and de Saussure as their contemporary equivalents, Puchner proposes that a closer look at these "scenes of instruction" could serve to problematize the priority or originality of the oral over the written word.[89]

I would suggest that the production history of *How to Do Things with Words* situates performativity in what Puchner has labeled the "bifurcated history" of philosophy and theatre between orality and technologies of writing. [90] Simply put, there is no single author of the

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[89] Martin Puchner, "The Drama of Ideas", (lecture presented at the symposium *Theater, Performance, Philosophy*, La Sorbonne, June 26, 2014).
[90] Ibid.

inaugural text on the performative utterance, just as there is no "pure" performative. In this way, the history of performativity complicates the very notion of authorship. We may recall that the words "author" and "authority" share a common etymology. Stemming from the Latin root "auctor", both imply an "founder, master, or leader". As of the early thirteenth century, the word "authority" suggests a "book or quotation that settles an argument", while the idea of an "author" connotes both "one who sets forth written statements" that are "original", as well as the figure of the father.[91] While poststructuralist thinkers such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida would deconstruct the relationship between the author and the text, Austin stood on the cusp of modernism and postmodernism, proposing, as Miller argues, a theory dependent upon the Cartesian ego and the full consciousness of the speaking subject, yet at the same time engaging in a practice that troubled these notions.[92]

My study of the contexts and methods through which Austin produced and disseminated his work on performative utterances has demonstrated how they complicate the notion of authority that Austin stipulated as a condition of a successful performative. It has also served to invalidate the narrative of the poor philosopher who published little. By rewriting this history, I offer up a portrait of a J.L. Austin engaged in a pragmatic practice in which philosophy *is* context. Austin clearly preferred dialogic, social, collective means of "doing" philosophy to the solitary practice of writing and publishing single-authored books that dominates academia today. His praxis of linguistic phenomenology may be best summed up in Austin's own words: "It takes two to make

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[91] "author". www.etymonline.com.
(http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=author&searchmode=none). Web. Accessed March 1, 2015.
[92] Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, 29.

a truth."[93] Said in another way, Austin put into play his philosophy about performativity *performatively*. Performativity is haunted, at its inception, by parasites, by literature, by the Other, by the ghosts that Austin tried so hard to exorcise, yet that—on some level of consciousness—he simultaneously allowed, or perhaps even encouraged, to haunt his philosophical voice.

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hauntology and the Metaphysics of the Voice

MARCELLUS
Peace, break thee off; look, where it comes again!

BERNARDO
In the same figure, like the king that's dead.

MARCELLUS
Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio.

-Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene I

As it turns out, I am not seduced by Austin's voice. His distinct 1950s British accent and nasal, tenor tonality have something of a distancing effect on me. Austin sounds like a typical British intellectual from his era: proper, sophisticated, erudite. Even when he breaks the lucid, sober tone of his philosophical argumentation and lets his fantastical humor surface through the grotesque examples that constitute what Miller calls his "undertext", Austin's voice remains composed, his intonation unchanged. [94] He speaks slowly, clearly, with marked pauses between sentences. I have read that in line with his ordinary language philosophy approach, Austin thought that one's tone of voice should remain the same when speaking philosophically and

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[93] J.L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 92, n.1.
[94] Miller, 49.

when engaged in every day conversations. Here again, though, I have to force myself to resist configuring the relationship between the clarity with which he speaks and the eternal search for clarity that guided his philosophical investigations, as a causal one.

Austin's voice, like all voices, is imbued with a colour or timbre that is ultimately individual. I wonder if this is what *affects* me when hearing Austin's voice. For, while I am not seduced by the experience, I am, on the other hand, quite touched. Austin died only three months after he delivered the Gothenburg lecture and housed in these sound bytes is the last known public, sonic record of his existence. To borrow a term from Derrida's semantic repertoire, the recording I am listening to represents a "trace"— "the mark of an anterior presence."[95] As Derrida described it, "a trace is never present, fully present, by definition; it inscribes in itself the reference to the specter of something else."[96]

The specter of something else. But what is this elusive something else? What is it that I stubbornly hope Austin's voice might reveal that is hidden or lost in his written texts, reconstructed as they are? As my frustration mounts, I recall the words of performance studies scholar Peggy Phelan who alluded to Freud when describing the difficulties of unearthing the relationship between the primary and the copy: "Any search for an origin is hysterical."[97] Like Derrida's specter, Austin's voice is marked by a temporal ambiguity that attests to his "having-been present in a past now."[98] But what if I never reach, find, know, or access Austin? What if he

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[95] Gayatri Chakrvaorty Spivak, preface to Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), xv.
[96] Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 151.
[97] Peggy Phelan, "Performance Theory Intensive", seminar at McGill University, March-April, 2014.
[98] Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 20.

never manifests or becomes "present"? What if the "something else" only refers me to another spectral object and throws me into an eternal chain of citational hauntings? As I write this, I feel somewhat guilty, for one should honour the dead. And the last thing I would want to do is offend a ghost…

MARCELLUS
It is offended.

BERNARDO
See, it stalks away!

HORATIO
Stay! speak, speak! I charge thee, speak!

Exit Ghost

– Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene I

In his literary analysis, Miller portrays Austin as a man "who has exorcised a ghost only to find that it keeps coming back" and states that: "literature is the ghost that haunts *How to Do Things with Words.*" He refers to the "ghost of poetry that cannot be exorcised", and claims that Austin's literary allusions involve "an intrusive apparition of the etiolated." It is said that literature "keeps rising from the dead."[99]

The figure of the ghost is a central trope within performance studies discourse. For Marvin Carlson, who organized an entire book about the haunted nature of the performing arts, "the present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations while these ghosts are simultaneously shifted and modified by the processes of recycling and

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[99] Miller, 18, 37, 49, 40.

recollection."[100] Richard Schechner's concept of "restored behavior", which describes the scripted nature of performance and ritual, is premised upon the surfacing of the ghostly past within present experience. In his theorization of restored behavior according to the formula of double negativity, the "not not me", Schechner provides the example of Laurence Olivier's production of *Hamlet*. He suggests that when on stage, Olivier both *is* and *is not* Hamlet. His words both do and do not belong to him, just as they do and do not belong to Shakespeare and to Hamlet.[101]

Derrida also references *Hamlet* in his 1993 work of political philosophy *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*.[102] That book's title alludes to the first line of *The Communist Manifesto* in which Marx and Engels wrote that: "A specter is haunting Europe– the specter of communism" (*Ein Gespenst geht um in Europa – das Gespenst des Kommunismus*). Throughout Derrida's text, multiple references to *Hamlet* invite the reader to draw a parallel between the ghost of an ideology and the ghost that haunts Shakespeare's protagonist. Here, Derrida introduces his notion of "hauntology" or the "science of ghosts"—a playful homophone for "ontology" in French. This term is mobilized to describe the paradoxical state of physical absence and immaterial presence with which the ghost is imbued. The specter exists between being and non-being; it both is and is not, such that the Prince of Denmark's musing "To be or not to be" might be replaced by: "To be *and* not to be". With hauntology then, the play between absence and presence at work in the signifier is transposed from a semantic

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[100] Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 2.

[101] Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 92.

[102] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

theory onto metaphysics, where it corrupts the unity of being and the consciousness and stability of identity.

In its negotiation between presence and absence, the voice may be said to be inherently hauntological. It strikes me that performativity resides at the locus of the same series of binary oppositions as the voice—those of presence and absence, materiality and immateriality, discursivity and corporeality, speech and writing, lack and excess. Austin's performative voice (a voice which vehicles a discourse about performativity) is produced by and within his body, yet it escapes and exceeds it. Initially the result of a physiological process in which the frequency of vibrations creates pitch, and resonance creates timbre, the voice then exits the body. As Slavoj Zizek writes in *On Belief*:

> An unbridgeable gap separates forever a human body from "its" voice. The
> voice displays a spectral autonomy, it never quite belongs to the body we see, so
> that even when we see a living person talking, there is always a minimum of
> ventriloquism at work: it is as if the speaker's own voice hollows him out and in
> a sense speaks "by itself", through him.[103]

This quality imbues the voice with an uncanniness that reminds me that the signifier always implies the death of the "thing", while the voice carries, yet also transcends, signification. In his famous essay "The Grain of the Voice", Roland Barthes theorizes the space of "encounter" or "friction" between language and voice as something that transcends the linguistic by implicating

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[103] Slavoj Zizek, *On Belief* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 58.

the "materiality of the body." Drawing on Julia Kristeva's distinction between the "phonotext" (the codes of communication, representation and expression) and the "genotext" (the diction of language that encompasses non-signifying structures), Barthes describes the grain as that which exceeds significance. The grain is at once "the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs."[104]

Within this formula, we may understand the grain of the voice as the intersection between orality, writing, and performance—the three elements at play within Austinian performativity. Austin's voice (which is both spoken and written) emerges through a process of writing (which is also speech). However, as I listen to Austin's lecture, I realize that unlike the apparition of Hamlet's father who, in the opening scene of the play is visible, but mute, Austin's ghost is invisible, but audible. He speaks, albeit *acousmatically*.

Acousmatic Sound: Reliving an "Ancient Tradition"

MARCELLUS
What, has this thing appear'd again to-night?

BERNARDO
I have seen nothing.

Enter Ghost

– Hamlet, Act I, Scene I

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[104] Ibid., 188. Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," in *Image – Music –Text* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 182, 188.

In 1955 (the same year that Austin gave the celebrated William James Lectures), the French composer and founder of concrete music Pierre Schaeffer published an article in which he used the term "acousmatic" to describe the experience of hearing a sound whose productive source is not visible. Schaeffer explains that the term, whose etymology derives from the Greek word "ἀκουσματικός" (akousmatikos) that stems from the root "ἀκούω" (akouō, "I hear"), was originally attributed to the uninitiated disciples of the ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras. Legend holds that the students in Pythagoras' sect underwent three years of training followed by five years of silence before they were elevated to the status of the "mathêmatikoi", or the learned. During this probationary period, the disciples were obliged to listen to their master's lectures from behind a black curtain. Only the initiated were privy to the ritualistic ceremonies of the Pythagorean order that took place behind this mysterious veil. Only they were permitted to see their master. The uninitiated were obliged to listen acousmatically.

For Pierre Schaeffer, the "ancient tradition" of Pythagoras and his students finds its contemporary equivalent in modern technologies such as the radio and the phonograph. Schaeffer describes the acousmatic experience in terms evocative of a Husserlian phenomenological reduction. By bracketing out the thing-in-itself and concentrating on the thing-as-perceived, the listener achieves a heightened awareness of the content of perception. What emerges is a "sound object" (*un objet sonore*) that "…marks the perceptive reality of sound as such, as distinguished from the modes of its production and transmission."[105]

[105] Pierre Schaeffer, "Acousmatics," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, eds., (New York: Continuum, 2004), 77.

The French film critic Michel Chion takes up Schaeffer's work on acousmatic sound in his 1999 book *The Voice in Cinema*, noting that because hearing (as opposed to vision) is omnidirectional, "the *acousmêtre* is everywhere."[106] Chion posits a ubiquitous voice – one that is both omniscient and omnipotent, and therefore evocative of the voice of God. Much as how, in the context of the cinema, acousmatic voice emanates from the "hors champs", Pythagoras' voice instructed his disciples from behind a screen, imbuing him with a godly and disembodied quality.

With his 2014 *Sound Unseen*, musicologist Brian Kane offers an impressive, fastidious study of the phenomenon of acousmatic sound that exposes many of the myths about the Pythagorean school as apocryphal.[107] In chapter two of his book, Kane forcefully demonstrates that none of the ancient texts on Pythagoras make mention of the veil behind which the philosopher allegedly taught.[108] In fact, drawing on the Syrian neoplatonic philosopher Iambuchus, who reports that the Pythagoreans spoke in a deliberately cryptic manner, Kane reveals that the veil in question may well have been figural or allegorical, and not literal. Kane's hypothesis is that Schaeffer and his followers perpetuated a very selective account of the Pythagorean legend with which they could mimetically identify.

Such myths constitute, as Kane points out, what French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy calls "primal scenes"—scenes that act as "founding fiction(s)" about our cultural origins: "Concentrated within the idea of myth is perhaps the entire presentation on the part of the West

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[106] Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 24.
[107] Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014).
[108] In addition to Aristotle, Kane looks to the uncited text by the Syrian neoplatonic philosopher Iamblichus (c. 245-325 C.E.) who influenced both Schaeffer and Diderot's accounts of acousmatics and Clement of Alexandria's (c.150-c215 C.E.) *Stromateis*.

to appropriate its own origin, or to take away its secret, so that it can at last identify itself, absolutely, around its own pronouncement and its own birth."[109] More poignant, then, than uncovering the historical "truth" about the "origin" of the Pythagorean veil—at least for my own purposes here—is to question this desire to identify a precise origin.

Over two millennia later, far removed both spatially and temporally from ancient Greece, I, too, engage in an acousmatic experience by listening to a lecture from behind the veil of a sonic screen. Like the proponents of electronic music discussed above, I, too, am inclined to narrate my affective, phenomenological experience by evoking the mythical acousmatikoi. Aligning my experience with theirs gives me the impression that I am restaging, or even reliving, an ancient tradition.

My encounter with Austin began with a performative action: the conjuring of a ghost. Once graced with its (hauntological) presence, I became part of a secondary audience of listeners who experienced Austin's teachings not *viva voce*, but like students in the myth of Pythagoras, acousmatically. As I perform silence, the disembodied voice of the tape recording exits the speakers of my laptop computer. When Austin speaks, it is through a form of ghostly ventriloquy, and my home becomes *unheimlich* as this familiar stranger enters the space.[110]

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[109] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Collins, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simon Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 53.

[110] In his famous article "Das Unheimliche" (first published in German in 1919), Sigmund Freud introduced the concept of the "unheimliche" or the "uncanny" to qualify the cognitive dissonance produced within a subject who experiences the return of something that is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar. See: Freud, Sigmund, "The Uncanny," in *The Uncanny*, David McLintock trans., (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

I was informed by the generous professors at the University of Gothenburg that there were many complications in digitizing the recording of Austin's lecture due to the fragile state of the original tape. Furthermore, because of the unusual speed at which the lecture was recorded, it had first to be slowed down and then sped up in order to recreate the original tempo of Austin's voice. Finally, because the mp3 file was too large, it had to be ripped in a smaller bitrate and converted into mono so that it could be sent to me via email. What I am listening to, then, is an object that has been highly manipulated in order to achieve the effect of the natural or the original. This state of affairs exemplifies Schaeffer's argument that, "…although it is materialized by the magnetic tape (here the mp3), the object….is not on the tape either. What is on the tape is only the magnetic trace of a signal."[111]

In 1959, this recording saved Austin's signifiers from disappearing immediately after their utterance. Severed from their origin, they continue to act or perform in the absence of their productive source. The uncanny technology of sound reproduction enables the voice to continue to perform and to exert agency in the absence, and even after the death, of its author. Applying Schechner's formula of double negativity to Schaeffer's theorization of a recording as a magnetic trace of a signal, the sonorous object with which I interact may be said to be "not not" Austin (it both and is not Austin). The recording deconstructs the hierarchy between source and signal. It also produces a substitute body—one that is both technological and textualized. Derrida discusses this idea of the abstract embodiment of the ghost in the following passage:

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[111] Schaeffer, "Acousmatics", 79.

For there is no ghost, there is never any becoming-specter of the spirit without at least an appearance of flesh, in a space of invisible visibility, like the dis-appearing of an apparition. For there to be a ghost, there must be a return to the body, but to a body that is more abstract than ever. The spectrogenic process corresponds therefore to a paradoxical *incorporation*. Once ideas or thoughts (Gedanke) are detached from their substratum, one engenders some ghost by *giving them a body*. Not by returning to the living body from which ideas and thoughts have been torn loose, but by incarnating the latter in *another artifactual body, a prosthetic body*, a ghost of spirit, one might say a ghost of the ghost…[112]

As I listen to Austin's embodied/disembodied/re-embodied (in his own words "etiolated" voice), it strikes me that his parasite—the ghost of fiction—has come back to haunt him, although in another sense than Miller proposed. The technology through which Austin disseminated his lecture eventually *turned him into a ghost*. This, then, is the fundamental uncanniness of telecommunications. Speech (which is always already writing) circles back on itself and becomes yet another form of writing. Because it is produced by and within the body, the voice gives the impression of a direct and intimate link to the subjectivity, and even the very flesh, of the other. But at the same time, it is marked an absence, a lack, and the impossibility of this connection. Austin seems displaced, and my efforts to reach him, seem increasingly to be in vain.

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[112] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 126.

In the recording, Austin's lecture is followed by a question and answer session, in which his voice is absorbed into a sea of other voices and ambient noises from the room. A door creaks open or shut, there is laughter, commotion. These sounds are in turn muffled by various parasites such as static and feedback from the microphone. The last intelligible sentence is spoken, not by Austin, but by one of his interlocutors. Addressing Austin in a Swedish accent, the unknown voice asks: "where are you going after…..?"

With that, the recording cuts off. Suddenly, I find myself surrounded by silence and by another kind of absence. The ghost is gone. Or is it? Est ce que le revenant va revenir? And so I end as I began: with a consciousness of consciousness, and with the waiting for an apparition. "Any search for an origin is hysterical." Full stop.

Chapter Two
Archive in Abstentia: Orality and Writing in Jacques Derrida's "Signature Event Context"

Always Already

Let us not begin at the beginning, nor even at the archive.

- Jacques Derrida, Archive Fever, p.1.

These are the words with which Jacques Derrida opens his 1995 book, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. They are also the words that I turn to for guidance when I emerge from my search for an audio-visual archive of Derrida's 1971 text "Signature Event Context" (hereafter referred to as "SEC")—empty-handed. Spoiled, perhaps, by my luck in acquiring the recording of Austin's "Performatives", I had come to assume that I would also have the opportunity to either see or hear Derrida deliver his deconstructionist intervention into Anglo-American speech act theory.

"SEC" is a key text for understanding Derrida's thesis about the indeterminacy of both context and meaning. It is also the next seminal conceptualization of performativity after Austin (and Searle). While textual analyses of this significant early work are multiple (both within philosophy and literary studies), acquiring an audio-visual recording of Derrida's delivery would establish the uniqueness of my own reading.[113] Within my greater project of thematizing my

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[113] For an excellent analysis of the philosophical issues broached in "SEC", see: Raoul Moati, *Derrida/Searle: Deconstruction and Ordinary Language*, trans. Timothy Attanucci and Maureen Chun (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). For a perceptive textual analysis from the perspective of literary studies, see: J. Hillis Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

phenomenological reception of each of the major, historical theorizations of performativity, I

was certain that "SEC" would represent a particularly compelling object of study. My hypothesis

was that it is by virtue of the interdependency of the oral and the written disseminations of this

text that Derrida was able to performatively enact his contestation of logocentrism and to

deconstruct the binary opposition between orality and writing. Bref: I needed this archive.

"SEC" was first presented as a conference paper during the 15th annual Congrès international des

Sociétés de philosophie de langue française in Montréal, Canada in August, 1971.[114] Currently

residing in Montréal myself, I began my search at the Université de Montréal where the

colloquium took place some forty-four years ago. Sadly, however, I quickly discovered that the

UdeM does not hold a copy of the recording. I subsequently conducted a virtual search of the

Derrida archives at the University of California at Irvine. Again, this did not heed any results. I

then reached out to Prof. Samuel Weber, one of the original translators of "SEC", but he was

unaware of whether or not the conference had been recorded in 1971.[115] If anybody were to

possess the recording, Prof. Weber told me, it would be Derrida scholar and translator Prof.

Peggy Kamuf, who is currently in the process of translating all of Derrida's seminars. Prof.

Kamuf, however, not only informed me that she did not have the recording herself, she also

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[114] The text was then published in *Marges de la philosophie* in 1972, and in *La Communication: Les Actes du XVe Congrès de l'Association des Sociétés de Philosophie de Langue Française* in 1973. In 1977, it was translated into English by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman and published in the revue *Glyph I*. The publication of "SEC" spurred a caustic retort from the American Analytic philosopher John Searle (a disciple of Austin) entitled "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida". This, in turn, provoked an acrimonious counter-response from Derrida entitled "Limited Inc a b c" (also translated by Samuel Weber). The two texts by Derrida, as well as a summary of Searle's rebuttal were published in *Limited Inc a b* c in 1988. This book was subsequently translated into French in 1990. A later translation of "SEC" by Alan Bass appeared in: Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

[115] I would like to thank Prof. Weber for the kindness and generosity he displayed when welcoming me as a participant in his Paris Program in Critical Theory (organized by Northwestern University in collaboration with Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3) in 2014-2015. Prof. Weber's teachings on Derrida were phenomenally insightful, and provided me with a framework for the research I conducted during the Derrida memorial colloquium at the École normale supérieure in October, 2014, and for the writing of this chapter.

expressed her strong doubts that one was ever made. Derrida, she reminded me, did not do

readings of published papers.[116] If "SEC" had not been recorded in 1971, it would not have been

recorded at any point after that. Little by little, I began to accept that the luck I had experienced

in acquiring the recording of Austin's "Performatives" would not extend to my research on

"SEC". Progressively, I began to realize that my fantasy of hearing or seeing Derrida read this

text became just that: a fantasy.

It is when I took a moment to consider the multiple significations of this last word that I began to

see a way out of my apparent impasse. The word "fantasy" provides a link between the idea of a

mental image and the figure of the phantom. Immaterially present, yet materially absent, the

phantom may be seen as the (paradoxical) embodiment of the Derridean concept of "hauntology"

(which he introduces as substitution for ontology). Hauntology, or the "science of ghosts", exists

within a chain of substitutable (yet not completely synonymous) Derridean neologisms such as

"trace", "différrance", "iterability", "spectrality", "pharmakon", "supplement", etc., which, in

their respective and nuanced ways, articulate how absence comes to corrupt the metaphysics of

presence.[117]

If my quest to locate the origin of the performative utterance in the mouth of Austin exemplified

the hysteria produced by any such search, it meant that I was already channeling Derrida in my

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[116] This is the first of many differences between Austin's and Derrida's writing praxes. My chapter on Austin demonstrated that Austin preferred to disseminate his knowledge orally. It exposed *How to Do Things with Words*, "Performatives" and "Performative Utterances" constitute three iterations of the same thesis. By contrast, Derrida never re-presented his papers. He was, of course, extremely prolific, publishing over forty books and hundreds of papers during his lifetime.

[117] One of the principle tasks of deconstruction (from Heidegger to Derrida) is the critique of the "metaphysics of presence", or the idea that we can apprehend Being and meaning in the immediate, temporal present. By building on Heidegger's theory that Being exists in time, Derrida would show that logocentrism is a direct result of the metaphysics of presence.

thinking about how the relationship between the original and the copy functions with respect to the archive. The Derridean *corpus* (and here we are invited to consider the embodiment of texts and the textualization of bodies) had "always already" been present in my reading of Austin. Or, perhaps deconstruction was "always already" at work within Austin's text.[118] I was also "always already" mobilizing a deconstructive understanding of genealogy—one in which linear chronology is replaced by iterative circularity. Transposed onto the theorization of the relationship between orality and writing, such a genealogy encourages an understanding of the spoken voice as always already textualized and, conversely, of the written text as always already spoken.

It is thus by no means surprising that it is Derrida's own phantom that manifests to signal a way out of my apparent aporia. "Let us not begin at the beginning, nor even at the archive."

Fine. But where, then?

<u>Contextualizing the Text</u>

Il n'y a pas de hors texte.

- Derrida, De la Grammatologie, p. 227

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[118] Building upon Heidegger's idea that Dasein anticipates itself, Derrida writes in *Memoirs for Paul de Man* that: "The very condition of a deconstruction may be at work in the work, within the system to be deconstructed. It may already be located there, already at work. Not at the center, but in an eccentric center, in a corner whose eccentricity assures the solid concentration of the system, participating in the construction of what it, at the same time, threatens to deconstruct. One might then be inclined to reach this conclusion: deconstruction is not an operation that supervenes afterwards, from the outside, one fine day. It is always already at work in the work." See: Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs for Paul de Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 76.

In *Archive Fever*, Derrida proposes to begin "rather at the word 'archive'."[119] He begins by tracing the etymology of that term to its root "arkhe". Drawing attention to the double allusion to "commencement" and "commandment" suggested therein, he retrieves both an "ontological" principle (nature/history) and a "nomological" principle (the law/authority) at work. In my case, with "SEC", I have one of two of what I consider to be interdependent objects, the second of which seems not to exist. "Present" is the material inscription. "Absent" is the recording of the live event (not to mention the live event itself). In other words (since we are to begin with the word), I have only written words—only the text.

Here, it would be impossible not to recall another of Derrida's aphorisms: "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte."[120] One of his most quoted phrases, it has been adopted as a kind of slogan for deconstruction. Put forth in his 1967 opus *Of Grammatology*, the phrase is often translated into English as: "There is nothing outside the text." Several scholars, however, have expressed their disdain for this translation, which, retranslated back into French, would read: "Il n'y a rien en dehors du texte." This formula is misleading because at no point does Derrida state that we can or should suspend reference, nor does he wish to imply that no material reality exists outside of language. Instead, he argues against the existence of a "transcendental signified", or a universal concept that functions across cultures and that can be fully represented by a (transcendental) signifier. For Derrida, meaning is produced between signifiers (either within a given text or intertexually) when "an infinite number of sign-substitutions come into play."[121] A more precise

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[119] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 1.

[120] Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1967), 227.

[121] The concepts of the "transcendental signified" and the "transcendental signifier" and the notion of "infinite play" are introduced in the essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences", published in: Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference (*London: Routledge), 1978.

translation of this phrase would thus be: "There is no outside-text."[122] Said in another way, meaning is contextual, but context can never be fully enclosed. In fact, in the Afterword to *Limited Inc*, Derrida states that the aforementioned phrase basically implies that "there is nothing outside context."[123]

Let us not begin at the beginning then, nor even at the archive. Let us begin instead by examining the context of the performance of this text. Three words: signature, event, context. Let us explore the (historical and intellectual) *context* of the (performative) *event* that Derrida sealed with his (divided) *signature* in 1971.

In 1967, just four years prior to writing "SEC", the thirty-seven year-old Derrida made his grand entrance onto the international philosophy stage with the publication of three major works: *De la Grammatologie* (in which he introduces his project of deconstructive criticism through the development of a "science of writing"), *La Voix et le Phénomène* (his most significant commentary on phenomenology, in which he deconstructs the hierarchy between expression and indication within Husserl's theory of the sign), and *l'Écriture et la difference* (a collection of several of his early essays that provide critical readings of Foucault, Levinas, and various streams of Structuralist thought). Just one year later, Derrida would publish another three important tomes: *Marges de la Philosophie, Positions,* and *La Dissémination*.

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[122] In her translation of *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak includes both "There is nothing outside of the text" and "There is no outside-text". See: Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 158.
[123] Jacques Derrida, "Afterword", *Limited Inc*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 136.

The virtuosity, vigor, and virility of "SEC" give a sense of the urgency with which the young

Derrida sought to mobilize deconstruction in order to intervene in both structuralism and

classical phenomenology. A retrospective and historical examination of the philosopher's corpus

would situate "SEC" within the work of the early Derrida, which addresses questions of

signification and meaning through deconstructive readings of classical texts.[124]

One can only imagine that in 1971, Derrida would have welcomed the fact that the designated

theme of the 15th annual Congrès international des Sociétés de philosophie de langue française

was "communication". In the introduction to "SEC", he engages in a meta-level reflection on the

nature of this notion, drawing attention to the fact that within the context of the event of this

philosophical colloquium, speakers are asked to deliver a communication (in French, a

conference paper may be referred to as "une communication") on the very subject of

communication.

From here, Derrida lays out his goals for "SEC". First, he seeks to demonstrate that "context is

never absolutely determinable" and that "its determination can never be entirely certain or

saturated." Secondly, he wishes to show that accepting this first postulate would in turn

"necessitate a certain generalization and a certain displacement of the concept of writing."[125] In

fact, "SEC" uses the Congrès' general theme of communication as a springboard from which to

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[124] Although several scholars (for example Simon Critchley) have criticized the idea that we can make a clear distinction between the "early" and "late" Derrida on the grounds that his early works are also inherently political, it is undeniable that his later works address ethical and political issues such as sovereignty, justice, hospitality and forgiveness in a more explicit manner.

[125] Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context", *Limited Inc*., trans Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 3.

develop a complex and nuanced reflection on one of Derrida's most cherished subjects—that of writing itself.

"SEC" is divided into three sections. In the first, entitled "Writing and Telecommunication", Derrida introduces his expanded conception of writing. In the second, entitled "Parasites. Iter, of Writing: That It Perhaps Does Not Exist.", he discusses the repercussions of this thesis for Austin's theory of the performative utterance. In the last section, Derrida reflects upon the subject of the signature.

While exposing the major arguments put forward in "SEC", I will advance my thesis that, with this text, Derrida envisions a uniquely performative mode of writing with which to disseminate his theory of performativity. I will argue that it is by virtue of the interdependence of the oral and textual performances of "SEC" that he may deconstruct the ontological separations between orality and writing and fictional and non-fictional discourse. In the absence of an audio-visual trace of the live event, I will analyze how this interdependency manifests in the materiality of the written text by way of Derrida's performative play with mise-en-page.

Iterability and the Performative Transformation of the Concept of "Writing"

In the first section of "SEC", Derrida takes issue with the commonly accepted concept of writing as a means of transmitting a univocal conceptual content. He argues that this communicational, representational, and expressive model views writing as a metaphysical extension of the human voice. In order to provide a paradigmatic example of this perspective, which he believes has been

perpetuated throughout the history of philosophy from Plato's *Phaedrus* onward, Derrida quotes

the eighteenth-century French epistemologist, Etienne Bonnot de Condillac. In his 1746 *Essay on*

the Origin of Human Knowledge (*Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*), Condillac

claimed that writing was born out from man's need to communicate his thoughts,

representations, and ideas to "persons who are absent." Derrida's analysis of Condillac's account

of writing, however, exposes the notion of absence discussed therein as a "continuous

modification and progressive extenuation of presence."[126] For Derrida, writing involves not the

extension of presence, but instead a *rupture* in presence. He argues that a given mark must

continue to function outside of its initial context and beyond the intentional reach of the

author/emitting subjectivity. He insists that writing presupposes the possibility of the absence of

the sender, the receiver, the signified, and the referent. With respect to this last item, one of the

questions that guides this chapter is the following: how might we rethink the notion of absence in

writing if we consider (performative) writing itself *as* a referent?

In order to characterize the particular nature of absence proper to the written mark, Derrida

introduces his notion of "iterability". The Latin etymology of this neologism (the root "iter"), he

explains, comes from the Sanskrit word "itara", meaning "other". Iterability combines the ideas

of sameness and difference, repetition and alterity. This inherent duality ensures a given mark's

ability to be disengaged from its original context of enunciation and to function within new

contexts. Because signs do not belong to any given context, it also follows that they may be *cited*

ad infinitum.

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[126] Ibid., 4-5.

For Derrida, however, iterability is not a full-fledged concept. It is rather a "quasi-concept."[127]

What this means is (as he explains in a footnote to the Afterword to *Limited Inc*), while

iterability may be included in the list of concepts central to Derridean deconstruction, its

specificity lies in the fact that it is also a *feature* of each of these concepts:

> …the list of these words is not closed, by definition, and it is far from limiting
>
> itself (currently) to those that I cite here or see often cited (*pharmakon*,
>
> *supplement*, *hymen*, *parergon*). To those whom this interests, I indicate that if
>
> the list remains indeed open, there are already many others at work (*au travail*).
>
> They share a certain functional analogy but remain singular and irreducible to
>
> one another, as are the textual chains from which they are inseparable. They are
>
> all marked by iterability, which however seems to belong to their series.[128]

As a feature of différance—Derrida's most famous neologism, which incorporates the double

logic of differal and difference—iterability is marked by a temporality that exceeds self-

presence. Founded upon a deconstructive theory of the semiotic signifier as trace or deferral of

presence, the alternative ontology of writing put forth in "SEC" operates precisely according to

such a differential iterability.[129]

In this short, but dense, opening section of "SEC", Derrida advances arguments with rather epic

implications. He demonstrates that, while the common concept of writing as a transparent means

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[127] Jacques Derrida, Afterword to *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 119.
[128] Ibid., 155.
[129] While in "SEC", Derrida opts to keep the name/word "writing", this displaced conception of writing coincides with his notion of "archi-écriture" developed in works such as *Of Grammatology* and *Margins of Philosophy*.

of communication is founded upon the idea of the ontological extension of presence, writing is in fact governed by absence or, in other words, by a structural iterability. This implies that all our enunciations are modes of citation; we would not be able to "communicate" if words did not carry traces of the past. The myths of originality and pure presence at the foundation of logocentric theories are debunked by this notion, which exposes our enunciations as linguistic repetitions. For Derrida, this specific type of absence that characterizes writing is in fact a feature of *all* means of communication (spoken and written). It is by means of this logic that he may inaugurate his expanded, displaced, and transformed conception of writing.

In light of this, I wish to suggest that integral to performativity is a process of transformation. Conversely, the transformation of an existing concept is, de facto, a performative act. Derrida himself addressed the relationship between performative interpretation and transformation several years after he wrote "SEC". In *Specters of Marx* (1993), he discusses a mode of interpretation that "transforms the very thing it interprets (transforme cela meme qu'elle interprète)."[130]

In the case of "SEC", we may identify a meta-level of performativity at work. In Austinian terms, we could say that Derrida wishes to replace the commonly accepted idea of writing as constative, with a conception of writing as performative. As I explained in my first chapter, Austin had distinguished between constative utterances such as "It is raining", which serve to describe a pre-existing state of affairs, and performative utterances such as "I bet you it will rain tomorrow", which produce the event that they designate. (In the latter sentence, a bet is made).

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[130] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx,* trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 30-31.

Derrida's transformation of the concept of writing entails a move away from the notion of writing as representation toward a conception of writing as creation.

Parasites: When the Exception Becomes the Rule

In the following section of "SEC", Derrida explores the consequences of iterability for Austin's theory of the performative utterance. This fact alone makes "SEC" unique: the text represents one of Derrida's only explicit engagements with Analytic philosophy. The title of this section, however, references one of the classic texts from the history of the Continental tradition. "Parsites. Iter, of Writing: That It Perhaps Does Not Exist", as Derrida later explains in "Limited Inc a b c", is borrowed or parasited from the title of the 5th of Descartes' *Metaphysical Meditations*, "De essentiâ rerum materialum; et iterum de Deo, quod existat", or "Concerning the Essence of Material Things, and Again Concerning God, That He Exists."[131] In place of the Enlightenment thinker's affirmation of the existence of God, however, Derrida-the-poststructuralist approaches the question of the existence of the commonly accepted notion of writing with skepticism.

While this cryptic substitution is enacted light-heartedly, its implications are anything but. As the American literary critic J. Hillis Miller states, the substitution contains a serious postulate concerning the possible consequences of graphematics for the Western metaphysical tradition. The conceptual substitution enacted in this title provides an excellent example of the performative play in Derrida's writing. In Miller's words, "the title manifests a certain form of

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[131] Derrida, "Limited Inc. a b c", 85.

iterability in action, not just in theory", since Derrida "wants to do what he talks about."[132] In my own words, Derrida *performs his theory of performativity*. He envisions a transformative *action* through which to relay the content of his thesis— an action that is, as I will shortly demonstrate, materialized in his books.

In this section of the text, Derrida clearly states that what initially interested him about the performative utterance was the fact that it is "the most event ridden utterance there is." He applauds Austin for introducing a theory of communication that does not simply "designate the transference or passage of a thought-content", but instead "the communication of an original movement (to be defined within a general theory of action)." He notes the originality of the fact that the performative utterance "does not have its referent…..outside of itself", or in other words that it "does not describe something that exists outside of language and prior to it", but instead "produces or transforms a situation." In addition, he reads into Austin's substitution of illocutionary force for "truth value" as the condition of success for a performative utterance, a distinctly Nietzschean gesture. Taken together, Derrida sees these facts as proof that Austin had "shattered the concept of communication as a purely semiotic, linguistic, or symbolic concept."[133]

At the same time, Derrida offers some major critiques of Austin's theory. He argues that the primacy of the consciousness of the speaking subject in Austin's examples of successful performative utterances essentially makes of his theory of communication, one governed by the *intentionality* of the speaking subject. Derrida notes that this vision "implies teleologically that

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[132] J. Hillis Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 97, 98, 99.
[133] Derrida, "Signature Event Context", 19, 13, 13, and 14, respectively.

no residue (reste) escapes" the unity of meaning, and that there can be neither polysemy nor dissemination.[134]

While Austin was primarily concerned with the conventionality of the circumstances for the production of a performative utterance, Derrida insists instead upon the *structural* conventionality intrinsic to languge itself—i.e., its iterability. With the introduction of iterability, the primacy of intention in Austin's theory (which is emphasized even more strongly in John Searle's general theory of speech acts) collapses. For Austin, it is assumed that communication occurs when a listener receives and understands the self-contained meaning intended by a speaker; in Derrida's poststructuralist theory, a speaker can never completely control the meaning of his or her utterance. As philosopher Raoul Moati has pointed out in his excellent book about the polemical dispute between Derrida and John Searle that erupted over the Austinian heritage, the conception of intentionality mobilized by Derrida is thus clearly indebted to Husserlian phenomenology.[135]

The conceptual framework on which "SEC" is constructed is not only neo-phenomenological, however. It is also psychoanalytic. Iterability introduces what Derrida calls a "dehiscence and a cleft" into the absolute presence of the intention of what, in "Limited Inc a b c", he would articulate as the conscious *ego*.[136] It is here that Derrida's debt to Freud is most evident. In "Limited Inc a b c", Derrida argues that the unconscious has been "absolutely excluded by the

[134] Ibid., 14.

[135] As Moati points out, one of the major sources of misunderstanding and conflict in the polemical dispute between Derrida and Searle stems from the fact that they mobilize very different accounts of intentionality. While Derrida's was neo-phenomenological, Searle's was indebted to both logic and pragmatism (most specifically, to the work of Paul Grice). See: Raoul Moati, *Derrida/Searle: Deconstruction and Ordinary Language*, trans. Timothy Attanucci and Maureen Chun (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 14.

[136] Derrida, "Signature Event Context", 18.

axiomatics (which is also an axiology) of current speech act theory." There, he refers to the unconscious "not only as the great Parasite of every ideal model of a speech act (simple, serious, literal, strict, etc.)", but also as "that parasite which subverts and dis-plays, parasitically, even the concept of parasite itself as it is used in the theoretical strategy envisaged by Austin or Searle."[137] In Derridean thought, authorial intention is not denied, but it is not the sole authority that governs a given speech act. In Derrida's words, "the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance (l'énonciation).[138] In deconstructive terms, intention is reconceptualized as différance; it is "a priori différante: differing and deferring, in its inception."[139]

As we may recall, it was fiction that Austin had explicitly relegated to the status of the parasite and excluded from his theory of performativity. In demonstrating the iterable and citational nature of all signs, Derrida, however, had effectively deconstructed the ontological barrier between non-fictional and fictional language and dispelled the subordination of the latter to the former. For Derrida, parasitism is in fact a *condition of possibility* for every utterance, making iterability a "'quasi'-transcendental" feature of language.[140] The "paradoxical but unavoidable conclusion" that he comes to is that "a successful performative is necessarily an 'impure'

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[137] Derrida, "Limited Inc a b c...", 74.
[138] Derrida, "Signature Event Context", 18.
[139] Ibid., 56.
[140] In the *Afterword* to *Limited Inc*, Derrida writes the following: "That it might belong without belonging to the class of concepts of which it must render an accounting, to the theoretical space that it organizes in a (as I often say) "quasi"-transcendental manner, is doubtless a proposition that can appear paradoxical, even contradictory in the eyes of common sense or of a rigid classical logic. It is perhaps unthinkable in the logic of such good sense. It supposes that something happens by or to set theory: that a term might belong without belonging to a set. It is of this too that we are speaking when we say "margin" or "parasite." See: Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 127.

performative" since "parasitism does not need the theater or literature to appear."[141] While

Austin excludes the parasite from his general theory of performative utterance, in Derrida's

logic, the exception essentially becomes the rule and the margin is incorporated into the centre.

As literary theorist James Loxley gracefully summarizes it, "if successful performatives are

necessarily citations of a sort, then the derivative is already at work in the original, and the

etiolating parasite actually characterizes or constitutes the rigorous host."[142]

In Austin's marginalization of fiction, Derrida recognized a tendency to which he was

particularly attuned: the subordination of one concept to another within a system of binary

oppositions. For Derrida, such metaphysical binaries (such as presence/absence, male/female,

reality/illusion, inside/outside, reason/passion, speech/writing) are never neutral; they are always

also hierarchies, meaning that they contain value judgments. It was precisely the inherent

violence of this subordination that he sought to expose through deconstruction.

It should be noted that Derrida was generally very reluctant to define deconstruction, choosing

his words extremely carefully whenever he did speak publicly on the topic. On those occasions,

he often proceeded negatively. Deconstruction, he has said, is "neither an analysis nor a

critique." It is "not a method and cannot be transformed into one." It is "not even an act or an

operation." It is also not "a school of thought", and "even less so is it a philosophical system."[143]

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[141] Derrida comes to the "paradoxical but unavoidable conclusion" that "a successful performative is necessarily an 'impure' performative" in Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context", 17. The idea that "parasitism does not need the theater or literature to appear" is put forth in Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, 89.
[142] James Loxley, *Performativity*, 75.
[143] The claims that deconstruction is "neither an analysis nor a critique", that it is "not a method and cannot be transformed into one", and that it is "not even an act or an operation" are made by Derrida in Derrida, Jacques, "Letter to a Japanese Friend", *Derrida and Différance*, David C Wood and Robert Bernasconi (eds.), Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988, p.3, 4, and 5, respectively. The claim that deconstruction is not "a school of thought", and

At the end of "SEC", however, he offers some rare, affirmative insights into the mechanisms at work within deconstruction. He explains that the process consists of a "double gesture, a double science, a double writing" in which binary oppositions are both reversed and displaced. In his words, this is a "labour—metaphysical or not— *performed*" (my emphasis) on the conceptual systems and historical fields in which deconstruction wishes to intervene.[144]

With this in mind, it is easier to understand why Derrida was so vigilant in his critique of Austin's (even temporary or methodological) exclusion of fiction. He saw a clear parallel between Austin's relegation of fiction to the status of a "parasite" and the parasitic status to which writing had been attributed (with respect to speech) throughout the history of philosophy. In fact, the one Austinian quote that Derrida chose as an epigraph to "SEC" is the following one: "Still confining ourselves for simplicity to *spoken* utterance."[145]

Essentially, Derrida identifies, in *How to Do Things with Words*, a form of logocentrism—the belief in the epistemological superiority of speech to writing due to its proximity to an emitting and supposedly transcendental source. The critique of logocentrism is of course one of the fundamental premises in Derridean deconstruction. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida accuses structural linguist Ferdinand de Saussure of logocentrism when he argues that de Saussure's phonetic theory of language posits writing as a representation of speech. In Austin's thought, Derrida recognizes a dangerous perpetuation of this metaphysical myth of speech as reliant upon the continuous intentional presence of a speaker's consciousness, and of writing as the

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"even less so is it a philosophical system" is made by Derrida during an interview with Roger Pol Droit, printed in Droit, Roger Pol, Qu'est-ce que la deconstruction?", *Le Monde*, October 12, 2004, 3.
[144] Derrida, "Signature Event Context", 21.
[145] Ibid., p. 21.

representation of such speech. As I have demonstrated, "SEC" overturns the metaphysical opposition between speech and writing by reconfiguring the relationship between absence and presence. The result is an expanded conception of writing in which, as the last section of this chapter will argue, performativity and materiality are inextricably linked.

A Counterfeit Signature

Within this new regime of writing (in which writing is no longer considered a derivative of speech), the written signifier may continue to act or perform in the absence of its author. No longer tethered to its productive source, it continues to have efficacy, and in a sense agency, as it extends into the future, while still carrying a trace of its past.

This point is beautifully demonstrated in the last section of "SEC", in which Derrida offers a clever analysis of signatures—a subject that Austin had briefly evoked in *How to Do Things with Words*. There, when searching for a grammatical criterion by which to characterize performative utterances (a search which ended in an impasse), Austin had privileged the first person, present indicative active voice. He argued that such utterances were unique due to the presence of the "utterance-*origin*" (i.e., the speaker)—a term that Derrida subsequently replaced with "source". Austin claimed that in performative utterances, the speaker may be referred to in one of two ways:

a) In verbal utterances, *by his being the person who does* the uttering—what we may call the utterance-*origin* which is used generally in any system or verbal reference-co-ordinates.

b) In written utterances ('or inscriptions'), by his appending his signature (this has to be done because, of course, written utterances are not tethered to their origin in the way spoken ones are).[146]

Derrida's analysis is focused on the relationship between signatures, the present, and the source. He observes that signatures operate according to a temporal ambivalence: they simultaneously suggest both the non-presence of the signer and his or her "having-been present in a past *now*." As such, the signature both affirms and denies the link between an enunciation and its productive source. Like all graphematic marks (i.e., those that are written as opposed to spoken), the signature is characterized by a structural iterability: "By corrupting its identity and its singularity", its sameness "divides its seal (sceau)."[147]

In 1976, in his textual analysis of the American Declaration of Independence, which was also first presented orally (at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, which is symbolic in that it was Thomas Jefferson's place of residence), Derrida returned to the subject of the temporal structure of the signature. There, he made the perceptive observation that independence was both *described* and *produced* through this inaugural document. In other words, the Declaration was both constative and performative, and this duality was a necessary feature of its efficacy. The subjects who signed the Declaration were actually brought into existence as signing subjects through the act of signing.[148] In this sense, their signatures were/are both authentic and counterfeit. As

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[146] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 60-61.

[147] Derrida, "Signature Event Context", 20

[148] The concluding paragraph of the American Declaration of Independence states that: "We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and

Derrida simply but elegantly phrased it, "the signature invents the signer." Implied herein is the

idea that it is through the *act* of signing that the independent political subject is performatively

produced. This process occurs through a "fabulous retroactivity" in the tense of the future

perfect.[149]

Most importantly, Derrida's poststructuralist theory of performativity configures agency in a

radically different way from Austin's speech act theory. While for Austin agency relies upon the

consciousness and presence of the speaking subject who pre-exists its (speech) acts, for Derrida

agency is derivative: agency arises from iteration. As J. Hillis Miller has pointed out, this reflects

the fact that Austin's theory still depends upon a Cartesian subject while Derrida's represents a

move toward a postmodern subject who is constituted by its performances.[150]

"SEC" ends with a succinct and powerful paragraph:

> The-written-text of this-oral-communication was to be delivered to the
>
> Association des sociétés de philosophie de langue française before the meeting.
>
> That dispatch should have been signed. Which I do, and counterfeit, here.
>
> Where? There. J.D.[151]

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the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor." As such, the "we" become "representatives" through the act of signing.

[149] Jacques Derrida, "Declarations of Independence," *New Political Science,* vol. 7, no. 1. (1986): 10.

[150] Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, 59-61.

[151] Derrida, "Signature Event Context", 21.

Beside this remark is Derrida's signature. (See Figure 7). Thus, with this concluding stylistic figure, the author both signs and counterfeits his text. He performatively demonstrates the iterability and citationality of the signature as a species of the graphematic mark, and hints at the interdependency of the oral and written disseminations of his work.

With this last gesture, Derrida also exposes the divided origin of the signing subjectivity (in this case, his own). Because an origin that can be divided is no longer an origin ("une origine divisible n'est plus une origine"), we may read this conclusion as a *re*-iteration (and we have already observed that every iteration is always a re-iteration) of the idea that every signature-event (and in fact every speech act) is impure, counterfeit, divided, plagiarized.[152] Paradoxically, the signature suggests both the presence and the absence of this signing subject. Functioning metonymically, it stands in by contiguity for the identity of its author—an identity that is both displaced and divided.

While "SEC" is a text about communication, writing and performativity, it is also a text about authorship. Derrida was adamant about liberating language from the intentionality of the signing subject; he insisted that a mark's illocutionary force continued in the absence of its author.[153] Liberated from its emitting subjectivity, language itself may be said to be imbued with a form of agency. As Derrida writes in the first section of "SEC":

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[152] Jacques Derrida, "Philosophie et Communication," in *La Communication: Actes du XVe Congrès de l'Association des Sociétés de philosophie de langue française, Université de Montréal 197*, ed. Venant Cauchy (Montréal: Editions Montmorency, 1973), 397.

[153] This is of course somewhat ironic when one considers Derrida's own almost mythological status as "star" philosopher, particularly within the United States. For an informative account of the influence of French poststructuralist philosophers on American academia, see Francois Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida,*

To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a sort of machine which is productive in turn, and which my future disappearance will not, in principle, hinder in its functioning, offering things and itself to be read and to be rewritten. When I say "my future disappearance" (*disparition*: also, demise, trans.), it is in order to render this proposition more immediately acceptable. I ought to be able to say my disappearance, pure and simple, my nonpresence in general, for instance the nonpresence of my intention of saying something meaningful (*mon vouloir-dire*, *mon intention-de-signification*), of my wish to communicate, from the emission or production of a mark. For a writing to be a writing, it must continue to "act" and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, but because of a temporary absence, because he is dead, or, more generally, because he has not employed his absolutely actual and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his desire to say what he means, in order to sustain what seems to be written "in his name".[154]

What in 1971 was an abstract hypothesis regarding Derrida's own "future disappearance" is now a concrete reality. Derrida is dead. He can no longer answer for "SEC" the way he did in his lifetime (during the ongoing polemical debate with John Searle, for example). And yet, this text is still legible. It still speaks, acts, and performs in the (no longer hypothetical, but now empirical, radical) absence of its author. We still read it and read into it new interpretations and meanings.

Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States, trans. Jeff Fort (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
[154] Derrida, "Signature Event Context", 8.

<u>Coda: The Body of the Text</u>

While philosophy is traditionally expressed through formal, logical argumentation, Derrida's writing is dialogic, literary, and performative. Why these three adjectives? Deconstruction may be said to be *dialogic* in that it is constituted as a response to the historical texts with which it engages. (In the case of "SEC", Derrida's absent interlocutor is Austin, but more common "ghosts" include Hegel, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Freud, and Levinas.) I am suggesting that it was necessary for Derrida to envision a *literary* mode of writing with which to express his deconstruction of the ontological barrier between fiction and non-fiction so that the form or style of his writing reflected its conceptual content. I maintain that in producing a text about performativity—about language that performs the act that it designates—it was imperative that Derrida engage in a performative writing praxis.

In *Of Grammatology*, published just four years before "SEC", Derrida famously declared the closure of metaphysics and heralded the "epoch of writing" in which presence would be superseded by the logic of différance, iterability, spectrality, and the trace.[155] A close reading of "SEC" would suggest that within this logic, it is not logic/logos that governs this new field of writing, but rather performativity.

As I have demonstrated, "SEC" is *performative* in the sense that its signified is determined, or constituted, by its signifiers. The signifiers in question are both linguistic and graphic. As such,

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[155] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 6.

the performativity of "SEC" exists both at the level of language/concept and at the level of the text's graphic design or mise-en-page. As I previously noted, the last paragraph of the text is divided into two columns, the second of which depicts Derrida's handwritten signature (see again Figure 7). Here, Derrida's performative mise-en-page speaks to the interdependency of the two versions of "SEC".

Derrida begins "Limited Inc a b c", his counter-response to John Searle's "Reply" (to "SEC"), with this same double-column structure (see Figure 8). In this way, the mise en page puts on show the intertextuality of the two works. The break into the two-column structure comes two paragraphs in to "Limited Inc a b c". To preface it, Derrida writes: "Thus, I place in the margin (but why must I already repeat it? I 'mets à gauche'—placing it on the left, but also putting it aside, in reserve) the question that begins with 'What is the nature of the debate….'"[156] The French expression "mettre à gauche" means to put something (in general, money) aside for the future. Here, Derrida wishes to put aside the question regarding the nature of the debate with Searle. He places it "in the margin"—an expression that evokes the issue of the marginalization of writing-as-parasite with which both "SEC" and "Limited Inc a b c" are concerned. The double-column mise en page is thus also a literal and graphic translation of this mental operation.

What Derrida writes in the left-hand column is the following:

What is the nature of the debate that seems to begin here? Where, here? Here? Is

it a debate? Does it take place? Has it begun already? When? Ever since Plato,

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[156] Derrida, "Limited Inc a b c", 29.

whispers the prompter promptly from the wings, and the actor repeats, ever since Plato. Is it still going on? Is it finished? Does it pertain to philosophy; to serious philosophy? Does it pertain to literature? The theater? Morals? Politics? Psychoanalysis? Fiction? If it takes place, what is its place? And these utterances—are they "serious" or not? "Citational" or not? "Used" or "mentioned"? "Standard" or not? "Void" or not? All these words are, I assure you and you can verify it yourselves, "citations" of Searle.[157]

The above passage represents a particularly rich object of study for the analysis of Derrida's writing from the perspective of performance philosophy. First of all, it is full of explicit theatrical allusions with Derrida referencing the theatrical "dispositif" through his image of the actor on stage and the prompter in the wings. The reference to Plato also invites us to consider the shared "origins" of theatre and philosophy in Western history. Here, Derrida is reminding us of the fact that the ancient Greek philosopher wrote in dialogue—a theatrical form. In *The Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocations in Theater and Philosophy*, theatre scholar Marvin Puchner proposes that although parts of the history of philosophy have been marked by an anti-theatrical prejudice, the dialogical nature of Plato's writing is evidence that philosophy and theatre have been connected for over two thousand years. For Puchner, these two rhetorical forms exist in the "bifurcated history" between orality and technologies of writing—a history in which I wish to situate both Austin and Derrida's work on performativity.[158]

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[157] Derrida, "Limited Inc a b c", 29-30.
[158] Martin Puchner, "The Drama of Ideas". (Paper presented at the *Theater, Performance, Philosophy*: *Crossings and Transfers in Anglo-American Thought* symposium, La Sorbonne, Paris, France, June 26, 2014).

The above citation from "Limited Inc" also includes an implicit reference to Austin. As my

first chapter recalled, Austin had excluded all forms of what he referred to as "non-serious"

speech acts (including fiction, theatre, poetry, and jokes) from his theory of performative

utterances. When discussing the necessity of a speaker's sincerity for the successful

performance of a speech act, Austin cites the counter-example of Hippolytus. Paraphrasing

Euripides, Austin puts the following words in the mouth of Hippolytus: "my tongue swore to,

but my heart (or mind or other backstage artiste) did not." In a footnote immediately

following, Austin writes: "But I do not mean to rule out all the offstage performers—the

lights men, the stage manager, even the prompter; I am objecting only to certain officious

understudies, who would duplicate the play."[159]

Derrida's reference to the prompter and to the theatre is thus a clear allusion to *How to Do

Things with Words*. In this way, the intertextuality of Derrida's mise en page extends beyond

a reference to "SEC", and makes a clear reference to Austin, who was of course Searle's

former teacher and intellectual predecessor, as well as the subject of the Derrida/Searle

debate. This intertextual reference recalls Derrida's admission that the phrase "there is

nothing outside of the text" essentially means that "there is nothing outside of context."

Let us now look at the right-hand column of the paragraph in question from "Limited Inc a b

c". There, we may read the following:

> And I repeat (but why must I repeat again?) that I could have pretended to begin
>
> with a false start (*faux-départ*) with whatever seemed to be the "first" or

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[159] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 9-10.

"primary" utterance used or mentioned—I don't know which—in the *Reply*, as I

read it, "originally", in manuscript.

On top, at the left, above the title, I then read the following:

"Copyright © 1977 John R. Searle"[160]

Reading the two columns together, it is clear that Derrida believes that in placing the Copyright

symbol above his text, Searle wished to protect himself from the possibility of what Austin had

referred to as any "officious understudies" duplicating his text. In "Limited Inc a b c", Derrida

mocks this fear by citing (i.e. duplicating) nearly all of Searle's "Reply". (As this chapter has

demonstrated, for Derrida, iterability, as an intrinsic feature of all speech acts, is marked

precisely by the tensions between innovation/creation and duplication/citation.)

But Derrida does not stop here. "Limited Inc a b c" is divided into twenty-three sections, each of

which is subtitled with a letter of the alphabet (beginning with the letter "d"). This may be seen

as a graphic and performative translation of the didactic and patronizing tone of the text;

essentially Derrida is teaching Searle the "abc's" of speech act theory. This is particularly

insulting given that Searle was known as *the* Analytic authority on speech acts. Derrida pokes

fun at Searle's apparent need to protect the "originality" and the "truth" of his text and of his

ideas. Relating this anxiety about authorship and identity back to his discussion of signatures in

"SEC", Derrida breaks "Searle's seal (itself already fragmented or divided);"[161] (Here, we may

recall Derrida's argument that a divided origin is no longer an origin.) In a continued

performance of humiliation (one could almost read the polemical exchange between the two

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[160] Derrida, "Limited In a b c", 29-30.
[161] Ibid., 36.

philosophers a kind of intellectual Hip hop battle), Derrida proceeds to distinguish between the individual person and the "presumed and collective author of the Reply." From this point on in the text, he refers to the former as "Searle", and the latter as "Sarl"—the French acronym for "Societé à responsabilité anonyme". The English translation of this judicial term would be "Society with Limited Responsibility/Liability". It is herein that we find the key to the title of the text.

The two-column format that appeared briefly in both "SEC" and "Limited Inc a b c" would structure the entirety of Derrida's 1974 book *Glas*. Inspired by French playwright Jean Genet's 1967 *Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrant déchiré en petits carrés bien réguliers, et foutu aux chiottes*, each page of *Glas* has two columns which are written in different typography; the first is about Hegel and the second about Genet. (See Figure 9 for an example).

In *Jacques Derrida*, Geoffrey Bennington's 1993 biography of Derrida that the two scholars co-authored, the two-column structure returns once again. This time, however, the columns are horizontal. While the top two-thirds of each page are comprised of "Derridabase", Bennington's biography, the bottom third of each page is comprised of "Circumfessions", Derrida's commentary that seeks to explore areas of his work not addressed by Bennington's analysis. The book also contains photographs from Derrida's past, as well as images from the history of art. (See Figure 10 for an example).

Similarly, in *Voyager avec Jacques Derrida—La contre-allée* (1999), which was co-authored with Catherine Malabou, the two philosophers reflect upon the notion of the journey. There,

Malabou questions what it means to travel alongside (the father of) deconstruction. That book is interspersed with postcards and photographs received by Derrida, which serve to inscribe the space of the personal into the space of the philosophical. (See Figure 11 for an example).

Chora L Works documents Derrida's 1985 collaboration with American architect Peter Eisenman on the design of the Parc de la Vilette in Paris. This book also includes essays, photographs, and transcripts of correspondence between the collaborators. Here, however, Derrida and Eisenman push the envelope even farther. The book has ten square-shaped holes cut into it, making it impossible to read many of the sentences in their entirety. Thus, the experimentation with form goes beyond graphic design, touching the very materiality of the object of the book. (See Figure 12). By inhibiting the reader from reading many of the words, the authors invent a performative strategy that enacts Derrida's critique of intentionality in Anglo-American speech act theory.

In the above three collaborations (*Jacques Derrida*, *Voyager avec Jacques Derrida*, and *Chora L Works*), the dialogical, literary and performative quality of Derrida's writing is strikingly apparent. As co-authored works, all three contain dialogues between their creators. The literary tone of the books is also exploited in that they all self-consciously narrate the story of their respective collaborations. Lastly, they all materialize their performativity through their mise en page.

That Derrida would conclude "SEC" with this experimentation with mise en page is highly appropriate. In it, form and content reflect one another. In addition to envisioning a performative mode of language with which to disseminate his theory of performativity, Derrida developed a

graphic mode of depicting his theory about graphematics. Here, it is noteworthy to recall that not only does Derrida follow Austin's invitation to consider the illocutionary *force* of an utterance, throughout both "SEC" and "Limited Inc a b c", he also employs the term "mark" instead of "word" or "sign". In this way, he extends his analysis not only to both spoken and written signs, but also to both linguistic and non-linguistic signs. As Miller suggests, we might replace the term "speech act" with the more inclusive "sign act."[162] Here, it is not difficult to imagine how Judith Butler saw in Derrida's thesis about the iterability of the semiotic signifier the invitation to consider the iterability of our corporeal performances. It is Butler's theory of gender performativity that will be the subject of my next chapter. For, if the search for origins produces hysteria and the relationship to the archive induces fever, in both cases, it is the *body* that reacts. What I wish to propound with this chapter is the idea that the experimentation with graphics, shape, and mise en page demonstrate that "SEC", which is one of Derrida's key early texts on semiotics and linguistic theory, is also very much concerned with embodiment and materiality. "SEC" teaches us that signification, iterability, and materiality are inextricable.

In J. Hillis Miller's words, ""Limited Inc a b c" is deliberately and self-consciously a tissue of (written) performative utterances."[163] My chapter has highlighted two important performative actions executed in "SEC": the introduction of a neologism (iterability) and the transformation of a concept (writing). I believe that Miller's use of the word "tissue" is quite suggestive here. The etymology of the word "text" comes from the Latin verb "textere", meaning "to weave, to join, fit together, braid, interweave, construct, fabricate, build."[164] The emphasis on tactility, creation,

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[162] Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, 116.
[163] Miller, 76.
[164] "text". www.etymologieonline.com. (http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=text). Web. Accessed August 25, 2015.

and action in these verbs provides a productive analogy for thinking about how performativity is enacted through the materiality of Derrida's texts. I maintain that with "SEC", Derrida engaged in a performative praxis in which writing exists as its own referent.

"Signature Event Context" was a historical, performative event. As both an oral communication presented during an academic conference and a written, published text, "SEC" was created for multiple audiences (and in Derrida's texts—both spoken and written—there is often a clear consciousness of the audience). First, there were the spectators who saw and heard Derrida's "live" reading. Second, there are the readers (of which I am one) of the printed versions. I suggest that while both the oral and written disseminations of "SEC" constitute performances, the *event* of "SEC" (one of the three words that make up the article's title) is constituted by the interdependency of the two. Moreover, as the last paragraph emphasizes, both the oral and written disseminations are parasited or haunted by the absent presence, or the present absence, of each other.

It is significant that the stylistic *gesture* (and we may note in passing that the Latin etymology of the word "gesture" is directly related to corporeality) with which Derrida concludes "SEC", exposes the simultaneity of speech and writing within the philosopher's own writing process. This fact reminds us of the processual nature of performativity. If in classical theories of writing, writing is seen as a representation of speech, and speech in turn as a representation of thought, "SEC" subverts this chronology. Derrida clearly conceived of the two versions simultaneously. From its inception, "SEC"'s performativity was bound up in the interdependency between

speech (orality) and writing (materiality). As a material trace of the live event, yet a trace that, in a sense, preceded its own origin, the text self-consciously *incorporates* (i.e. absorbs into its *body*) the absence of its Other into its own material, embodied form.[165] One of the reasons "SEC" does the above is in order to contest the logocentric tradition. As such, it performs the acts that is describes.

In conclusion, I would like to cite a phrase that I wrote in the introduction to this chapter and then retract it. Previously, I stated that: "the luck I had experienced in acquiring the recording of Austin's 'Performatives' would not extend to my research on 'SEC'". After confronting the absence of my sought-after audio-visual archive, I now believe that my luck lies in its lack. Although the fact that there is no known recording of this reading in existence is of course completely coincidental, this state of affairs subverts, in a truly Derridean manner, the classical hierarchies between speech and writing and presence and absence. "Present" (yet not) is the material inscription, and "absent" is the recording of the live event.

Let us not begin at the beginning then, for the beginning does not exist.

Let us not begin at the archive, for the archive seems also not to exist.

Let us not begin with writing, for according to Derrida, writing also (barely) exists. Following "SEC", however, "writing" might.

So let us begin (again) here. Where? There.

Chapter Three
A Choreography of Gestures: Judith Butler and the Philosopher's Body

The Phenomenology of Jetlag and the Invisible Theatre of "Hello"

Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.

-Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, p.110

Thus suddenly an object has appeared which has stolen the world from me.

-Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p.255

The time is out of joint.

-Shakespeare, Hamlet. Act I, Scene V

The first time I saw Judith Butler in person, I had the instinct to greet her. So accustomed was I to her rhetorical style—both to the cadences and rhythms of her speech and to her mannerisms and gestures—that I had the feeling that I knew her. Indeed, she seemed *familiar* to me. So familiar, in fact, that when I crossed paths with her at a philosophy colloquium, it felt only natural for me to say "hello"—to utter that single word, indexical, implicit, performative utterance that dramatizes one's recognition of the Other through an act of interpellation.

To say hello is, on a very basic, existential level, to acknowledge your existence. The fact that this linguistic utterance is generally accompanied by an embodied gesture such as a wave, a handshake, or "des bises" (the lack of a current English term for this last expression for the French practice of greeting by kissing on the cheek "speaks" to the difficulty of translating

certain cultural practices), reminds us that performativity is as much about corporeality as it is about discursivity. That this greeting is generally accompanied by the embodied action of looking also suggests that to say hello is to say that I see you, I will engage with you. In the spirit of Hegel and Sartre, it is an acknowledgment of my consciousness of your consciousness and thus of my consciousness of my own consciousness.[166] Very simply put, I need you and you need me to "be".

I was not thinking about being and consciousness (nor about being and time or being and nothingness, for that matter) when I ran into Judith Butler for the first time. I was, rather, thinking about coffee. The context was the following: it was June, 2014, and I was in Paris to attend the "Theater, Performance, Philosophy: Crossings and Transfers in Contemporary Anglo-American Thought" symposium organized by the Performance Philosophy network. I had just stepped out of the Amphithéâtre Richelieu and was walking down the hallway of the Sorbonne University to get myself an espresso from the automatic vending machine (the only place that one can procure coffee in French universities) before Butler's plenary lecture was to begin. While the coffee from these machines is admittedly terrible, I was jet-lagged from my trans-Atlantic flight, desperately in need of caffeine, and did not have time to sit on a terrace on the Place de la Sorbonne. Beggars, as the saying goes, can't be choosers; vending machine coffee would have to suffice.

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[166] For Hegel's account of how self-consciousness is achieved through conflict with alterity, see the section of *Phenomenology of Spirit* on desire, including "The Truth of Self-Certainty" and "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage": G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 104-119. For Sartre's account, in which shame becomes the fundamental mood of intersubjectivity, see the section of the first chapter of the third section of *Being and Nothingness* on "The Existence of Others" entitled "The Look": Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 252-265.

In retrospect (and phenomenological description always takes the form of a retrospective recollection of a pre-reflective experience), it must have been in the millisecond immediately following Butler's emergence as a figure out of the background in my perceptual field that my instinct to greet her surged. I had, of course, to suppress this instinct; one does not greet strangers and Judith Butler does not know me. We have never met and I am not a public figure. The sensation that I know her stems only from the hours I have spent watching recordings of her lectures over the years—lectures that, like those of other "star" scholars, are readily available online in the era in which we live.

In the "augenblick" of our (failed) encounter, however, this recollection/realization came to me slightly too late.[167] As a result, somewhere in the corridor of the Université Sorbonne between the Amphithéâtre Richelieu and the automatic coffee machine, a rather awkward performance took place. In it, I initiated the beginning of a salutation, only to retract it in the same breath. The result was an aborted speech act that could only have sounded like a glottal stop and resembled a graceless gesticulation. Combined, these truncated verbal and embodied gestures must have produced a very clumsy, uncoordinated choreography (and not one that a former dancer such as myself would be proud to perform).

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[167] In his *Logical Investigations*, Edmund Husserl uses the phrase "im selben Augenblick" (in the instant of the blink of an eye) in order to describe what he believes to be our unmediated experience of psychic acts in the present moment. In *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology*, Derrida critiques what he calls the metaphysics of presence in Husserl's phenomenology by arguing that différance is at play within the temporal stage that Husserl referred to as "retention" (our memory of the past now that has just elapsed). By insisting upon the literal meaning of Husserl's expression and transposing the domain of the visual onto the domain of the audio, Derrida makes a case for the presence of alterity within what Husserl understood as the autoaffective experience of hearing oneself speak. See: Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, Vol.2, (Abington: Routledge, 2001), and: Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, trans. Leonard Lawlor (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011).

In my defense, I offer the following hypothesis: jetlag (and I use this term both literally, to refer to the physiological condition characterized by the desynchronization of circadian rhythms, and figuratively, as a metaphor for the conceptual and perceptual grappling with the enigma of "culture") alters one's phenomenal temporality. With it, time stretches or condenses, speeds up or slows down, such that a given experience may seem to simultaneously fly by in a millisecond and to suspend indefinitely. One's capacity to react to stimuli (or to censor one's instinctual responses, as the case may be) may be hindered by the dizziness brought on by this elasticity. Perhaps on that day in June, 2014 after what must have been my hundredth trip across the Atlantic Ocean, jetlag was a contributing factor in the temporal "lag" between my affective processing of Butler's presence in the horizon-world and my delivery of an appropriate, intentional response.

I take solace only in the fact that this off-site spectacle was so microscopic that it most likely passed as a form of invisible theatre. Luckily, all eyes were on the main stage. In fact, I was in Paris as a spectator myself—there to watch and listen to a cast of protagonist philosophers take the (academic) stage at an event dedicated to exploring the recent shift within the humanities toward new forms of performance philosophy. For just as I need you and you need me to "be", performance needs its audience to exist. While performativity resides on the side of the performer or actor, theatricality exists in the consciousness of the spectator. Thus, while Judith Butler does not know me, she knows that her rhetorical performances are observed, sustained, and supported by an auditorium of anonymous eyes.

Setting the Stage: All Eyes on Identity

While it is indisputable that Judith Butler does not know me, whether or not I may say that I know Judith Butler is less certain. What is certain is that were I to make that epistemological claim, I would have to premise it with a clause specifying that the Butler that I do know is one who is offered through language and reproduced by technology. While I do not know the individual person/embodied subjectivity Judith Butler, I am familiar with the texts signed by that author, just as I am familiar with how that author-function habitually stylizes herself through discursive and embodied speech acts during her public performances.[168]

As the most celebrated queer and gender theorist of our era, the author of the next, seminal, historical texts on performativity after Austin and Derrida, and the philosopher whose name is most closely associated with performativity today, this author also writes *about* subjectivity and embodiment. Her nuanced analyses of the relational practices of sex, gender, and sexuality have contributed much to contemporary understandings of both the constitution and deconstruction of another notion that has been in the limelight since the 1970s: that of identity.

In 1996, the late British cultural theorist Stuart Hall published an important piece entitled "Who Needs Identity?" in which he surveyed the cross-disciplinary critique of identity within postmodernist thought.[169] A brief review of that text will serve to elucidate the debates

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[168] In his well-known 1969 text "What is an Author?", Michel Foucault analyzes the historical evolution of the figure of the author and the relationship between an author and his or her text. He proposes that "the writing subject endlessly disappears" and gives way to the author as a function of discourse. See: Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?", trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977). 124-127.

[169] Stuart Hall, "Who Needs Identity?," *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. S. Hall and P. du Gray (London: Sage Press, 1996), 15-20.

surrounding identity in the intellectual climate of the humanities in the 1970s and 1980s and set the stage for the entrance of Butlerian performativity.

Noting the apparent contradiction in the fact that identity was popularized within academic discourse at the very moment that it was subjected to critical examination, Hall isolates two contexts in which he still believes it productive to probe the subject. The first is when the term is stripped of its essentialism by being put under erasure ("sous rature"). In this deconstructive practice that Derrida inherited from Heidegger, a given signifier is literally crossed out on a page, but remains legible (See Figure 13 for an example of Heidegger's practice, as demonstrated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her "Translator's Preface" to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, and Figure 14 for an example of Derrida's own practice in that same book). It thus exists in a state of absent presence, or present absence, communicating Derrida's belief that, while it has become inadequate, it is impossible to extricate from our conceptual vocabulary. Putting concepts under erasure offers us new ways of thinking with, about, and also beyond, them. For Hall, the practice is unique because it seeks not to replace or supersede essentialist concepts, but to reconceptualize them. In his words, "the line which cancels them, paradoxically, permits them to go on being read."[170] When putting the word "Being" or "identity" under erasure, there is a mise en abyme of reconceptualizations at play: what is being challenged is the idea of the self-same identity of the word/concept of identity, and the idea of and belief in identity as a way of determining ourselves and others. Importantly, this deconstructive practice is enacted typographically. As such, putting concepts under erasure represents another instance in

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[170] Ibid., 1.

which the performativity of Derrida's writing is expressed through the very materiality—and by extension, the corporeality—of his texts.

The second context in which Hall deems it generative to continue to think about identity is when attempting to rearticulate the relationship among subjectivity, agency, and discursive practices. Here, however, he finds it more fruitful to consider the processes of *identification* through which identity comes to be understood as emerging through, or in relation to, difference (i.e., to the Other, but also to its own lack). Hall unpacks the notion of identification (which he admits is almost as complex as, yet much more serviceable than, identity) in terms that clearly resonate with Derridean thought—both in the sense of their deconstruction of binary oppositions and in their acknowledgement of the play of différance:

> ….identification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency. Once secured, it does not obliterate difference. The total meaning it suggests is, in fact, a fantasy of incorporation. (Freud always spoke of it in relation to "consuming the Other"). Identification is, then, a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination, not a subsumption. There is always "too much" or "too little"— an overdetermination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality. Like all signifying practices, it is subject to the "play" of différance. It obeys the logic of more-than-one. And since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the

production of "frontier effects". It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process.[171]

Hall points out that the notion of identification figures in the intellectual history of both discourse analysis and psychoanalytic theory—an observation that prompts him to embark upon the ambitious task of theorizing the link between psychic and social reality. Here, he advances his own, original definition of "identity" as:

> …the meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand discourses and practices which attempt to "interpellate", speak to or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be "spoken".[172]

The evocation of "interpellation" in turn obliges Hall to historicize that concept, which describes the process through which a subject is hailed by discourse. He traces its first use to French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's 1971 essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses". In that canonical text (which has since been referred to as the "ISAs essay"), Althusser had squared Marx and Engels' theory of ideology with Lacan's theory of the mirror stage in order to make a case for the speculary structure of ideology—i.e., for the way in which individuals are constituted as subjects by discourse through their identification with a given ideology. Hall reviews the major flaw in Althusser's "ISAs" article identified by British sociologist and

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[171] Ibid., 2-3.
[172] Ibid., 5-6.

political theorist Paul Hirst: that in order to be interpellated, the Althusserian subject would have to already be capable of receiving recognition. With this critique, Hirst had demonstrated that Althusser presupposed an already constituted subject, thereby identifying a major impasse in his theory of ideology.[173]

From here, Hall moves on to examine how the same set of philosophical problems surrounding the question of identification that Hirst had located in Althusser's theory of ideology are addressed in the work of Michel Foucault. While Hall applauds Foucault's important contributions to the theorization of the formation of subjectivity as the effect of discourse, he also identifies certain shortcomings in his account of identification. He critiques Foucault's early "archeological" works for their excessive formalism and his subsequent "genealogical" texts for the "totemic value" they bestow on the body at the expense of acknowledging the existence of a psychic interior.[174]

It is only in his late work on sexuality, Hall observes, that Foucault addressed the role of the subject in offering up a *response* to the discourses that interpellate it. Interestingly, in the late Foucauldian work on the "aesthetics of existence", or the "stylization" of the self, Hall recognizes a mechanism that corresponds to what, today, we would name "performativity".[175] Sadly, the development of this work was aborted by Foucault's premature death. It is, however, remarkable to consider that in Hall's account, Foucault was on the precipice of developing

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[173] Hirst, Paul, *On Law and Ideology* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1979).
[174] Hall, "Who Needs Identity?" 10-11.
[175] Ibid., 13.

something comparable to a theory of performativity at the time of his death. What Hall astutely observes in the evolution of Foucault's thought is the philosopher:

> being pushed, by the scrupulous rigor of his own thinking, through a series of conceptual shifts at different stages of his work, towards a recognition that, since the decentering of the subject is not the destruction of the subject, and since the "centring" of discursive practice cannot work without the constitution of subjects, the theoretical work cannot be fully accomplished without complementing the account of discursive and disciplinary regulation with an account of the practices of subjective self-constitution.[176]

Hall applauds Foucault for coming to this realization, but laments the fact that he did not manage to suture a theory of how subjects are interpellated by discourse to a theory of how subjects are constituted. According to Hall, it is not that Foucault chose not to do this, but rather that his own philosophy prevented him from doing so. Because he viewed psychoanalysis as a form of disciplinary power, Foucault was unable to take into consideration the role of the unconscious. As a result, Hall describes Foucault's body of work as a "discursive *phenomenology* of the subject", yet one that is tainted by an overemphasis on intentionality.[177]

For Hall, the necessary bridge between the discursive and the psychic that was absent in Foucault's theorization of the constitution of subjectivity was finally built in the work of Judith Butler. So important was this link to Hall, that he dedicated the concluding pages of his 1996

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[176] Ibid., 13.
[177] Ibid., 14.

study of the reconceptualization of the notions of identity and identification within critical theory to a summary of Butler's work on gender performativity. There, he reviewed how her theorization of identity, which is rooted in identity politics, and specifically in third-wave feminism, considers sex and gender as the materialized effects of regulatory systems of power.

At the time that Hall's article was published, Butler's seminal texts on performativity—her 1988 article "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", her canonical 1990 work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, and *Gender Trouble's* 1993 sequel *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*—had already reached critical acclaim. In the two decades since then, Butler has produced a profoundly influential body of philosophical thought in which performativity figures as a central trope. In fact, it is largely through this work that performativity has taken centre stage in contemporary critical theory.

Butler's theory of gender performativity emerged within the climate of third-wave, academic feminism's critical rethinking of identity (in tune with Hall's analysis) as the intersection between multiple modes of *identification*. Many feminist theorists writing during the 1990s sought to replace the conception of "woman" as a monolithic identity category with one that accommodates difference. Of the belief that "the complexity of gender requires an interdisciplinary and post-disciplinary set of discourses", Butler drew upon the post-war phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty, the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, the poststructurliast philosophy of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze,

and Jacques Derrida, as well as the feminist theory of Monique Wittig, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva.[178]

Within this interdisciplinary framework, Butler uses the concept of performativity to contest expressive or ontological models of gender and to dispel the widespread assumption of a mimetic and causal relationship between the layers or structures of identity known as sex, gender, and sexuality. It is thus no surprise that Butler is introduced at the apogee of Hall's article; her theory of gender performativity satisfies his two conditions for a productive discussion of identity: it is non-essentialist and it proposes an account of subject constitution based on the reconfiguration of the relationships among subjectivity, embodiment, agency, and discursive practices.

While Hall was most interested in how Butler bridges Foucauldian theory and psychoanalysis, this chapter will highlight the phenomenological, theatrical, and Derridean heritage of Butler's theory of performativity. I will stage Butler as a transitional figure—one who produced the next seminal, historical theorization of performativity after Austin and Derrida, and one who enacts new modes of performative writing today. To this end, I will focus on two rhetorical performances that span Butler's career: her 1988 text "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", in which she introduced her theory of gender performativity, and her 2014 lecture "When Gesture Becomes Event", in which she reconsiders how her early work on gender performativity resonates with Bertold Brecht's epic theatre. In the first section on "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", which was expanded upon and incorporated into the third chapter of *Gender Trouble*, I will recall how

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[178] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), xxxiv.

Butler built on phenomenological and theatrical conceptions of the "act" to provide a feminist and queer genealogy of subject formation. I will then briefly highlight how, in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, she drew on Austin's theory of speech acts to develop a theory of gender acts, and on Derrida's theory of the iterability of the semiotic signifier to propound a theory of the iterability of the embodied gesture. Turning to "When Gesture Becomes Event", I will then consider the performativity of Butler's own embodied gestures in her lecture *about* gesture. I will also mobilize phenomenological accounts of temporality and Derrida's concept of "teletechnologies" to question the differences between the perceptual experiences of viewing a "live" versus a "mediatized" lecture. Narrating my own phenomenological experience of both of the above, I will posit the performative event as an encounter with the other.

"Performative Acts and Gender Constitution": From Speaking Performatively to Being Performative

In 1988, Judith Butler introduced her theory of performativity in an article entitled "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory". It is no coincidence that the piece was first published in The John Hopkins University Press' *Theatre Journal*: the text considers how gender is enacted in relationship to phenomenological, anthropological, but also theatrical conceptions of the act. As the article's title implies, however, Butler's focus is on how phenomenology—a philosophy that studies structures of consciousness from the perspective of the subject's lived experience of the perceptual world—might serve in developing a feminist account of gender constitution.

Butler is particularly interested in how the post-war, French existentialist phenomenologists

Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty conceive of the subject not as the originator of

its acts, but rather as the product of its acts. How, she asks, might these philosophies nourish a

feminist genealogy of gender constitution?[179] Early in her article, Butler cites what is

undoubtedly de Beauvoir's most famous phrase from her groundbreaking 1949 work *The Second*

Sex: "One is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman." In the differentiation between sex and

gender implied in this phrase, many feminist theorists located a shift away from a deterministic,

essentialist account of gender toward a constructivist one.[180] In Butler's philosophy, this

distinction precipitated a theory of performativity.

Embedded in de Beauvoir's phrase, we may also discern her existentialist belief that existence

precedes essence. Later in *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir clearly expressed that viewpoint when

she wrote that: "An existent *is* nothing other than what he does; the possible does not exceed the

real, essence does not precede existence: in his pure subjectivity, the human being is nothing. He

is measured by his *acts* (my emphasis)."[181] It is de Beauvoir's reversal of the common

understanding of the temporal relationship between a subject and its acts that informs Butler's

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[179] For Butler's more extensive analyses of the existentialist phenomenology of De Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty, see: Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simon de Beauvoir's Second Sex", *Yale French Studies*, No. 72 (1986): 35-49, and Judith Butler, "Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description: A Feminist Critique of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*", *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophy*, ed. Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young, (Indiana University Press, 1989), 85-100.

[180] Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 301. When Butler wrote "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" in 1988, she quoted the original 1953 English translation of *The Second Sex* by H.M. Parshley and published by Alfred. A. Knopf. When it was brought to public attention (as well as to de Beauvoir's attention) that in this translation, almost fifteen percent of the original text was missing, de Beauvoir scholars insisted that the text be retranslated. In 2009, a new version was published by Jonathan Cape, this time translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malanovy-Chevallier. In the original translation, quoted by Butler, de Beauvoir's original French phrase, "On ne naît pas femme, on le devient", reads: "One is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman." In Borde and Malanovy-Chevallier's translation, the phrase reads: "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman". For Butler's reading of *The Second Sex*, see: Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex", *Yale French Studies*, No. 72, (1986): 35-49.

[181] De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 270.

theory of gender. In "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", Butler writes that gender is

"in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts precede", but instead "an

identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of*

acts."[182]

Importantly, because these acts are embodied, Butler believes that they create the deception that

gender is a natural phenomenon. Her definition of gender as a "performative accomplishment

compelled by social sanction and taboo" suggests that gender complies with (hetero)normative

ideals.[183] However, deeply interested in practices that disrupt, subvert, or critique these

normative gender expressions, Butler conceived of performativity as constitutive of both

regulatory ideals and that which resists them. In the first section of "Performative Acts and

Gender Constitution" entitled "Sex/Gender: Feminist and Phenomenological Views", Butler sets

out to explore how phenomenological conceptions of the act may serve her two-tiered project of

theorizing the ways in which gender identities are constructed through bodily acts and imagining

the possible ways that such identities might be transformed. She finds the theoretical basis for

her project in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of being-in-the-world.

In the preface to his 1949 opus *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty introduced his

philosophical project by way of a dialectical structure. He began by stating that, while

phenomenology is the study of essences, it "places essences back within existence." In addition,

because it seeks to articulate the conditions of possibility for experience, it constitutes a form of

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[182] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre,* ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 519.
[183] Ibid., 520.

transcendental philosophy. However, Merleau-Ponty also argues that, the "world is always 'already there' prior to reflection."[184] In an affective moment it solicits us and in an intentional moment we offer a (bodily) response. Together, these gestures produce meaning. As such, in opposition to classical transcendental philosophies which posit the constituting consciousness as the absolute source of meaning, Merleau-Ponty's articulates an embodied, perceptual Consciousness. In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, it is thus the inherently expressive medium of the body that both responds to the world and configures meaning in it.

In "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", Butler quotes the sentence from the section of *Phenomenology of Perception* entitled "The Body in its Sexual Being" that states that man, and thus by extension the body, is "a historical idea, not a natural species."[185] Within this phrase, we may observe Merleau-Ponty's articulation of the processual nature through which the body acquires and expresses meaning. As Butler recalls, de Beauvoir had cited Merleau-Ponty's above quote in *The Second Sex* in order to argue that gender, too, is a product of history, genealogy, and culture, and not an innate, biological, or natural fact. It is in this way that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy resonates with de Beauvoir's project of challenging Western philosophy's traditional equation of women with facticity, immanence, and nature, and men with freedom, transcendence, and culture.

Building on the Hegelian master-slave dialectic to expose how subjectivity is constituted through conflict with alterity, and on the existentialism that she developed alongside her lifelong partner Jean-Paul Satre to articulate the intersubjective nature through which beings achieve self-

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[184] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2012), xxx.
[185] Ibid., 170.

consciousness in relation to an Other, de Beauvoir had forcefully demonstrated that the relationship between male and female subjects was asymmetrical. In "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", Butler also references Sartre's suggestions of a "style of being"—an idea that she sees paralleled in Foucault's genealogical notion of a "stylistics of existence"—when she posits gender as a "*corporeal style*, an 'act', as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' itself carries the double-meaning of 'dramatic' and 'non-referential'."[186]

Where phenomenology proves less useful to Butler's account of gender constitution is in its reliance upon a willing and agential subject. In order to represent the pre-reflective level of our lived experience, Merleau-Ponty had developed a two-tiered body schema comprised of a "habitual body" and an "actual body." The first layer accounts for the ways in which the past becomes sedimented within us, while the second describes the body in its present state of possibilities. The body schema is premised on the idea that the subject *intentionally* actualizes the possibilities with which it is presented.[187] Extending Merleau-Ponty's theory, Butler describes the body as "a continual and incessant *materializing* of possibilities."[188] However, just how the body materializes possibilities, or how these possibilities are materialized (as the case may be), is understood differently in these respective philosophies.

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[186] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", 521-522.

[187] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 84. Here, it is important to recall that Merleau-Ponty, like Derrida, works with Husserl's principle of intentionality, which stipulates that Consciousness is always Consciousness of something. This is to be clearly contrasted with Austinian and Searlean conceptions which follow Paul Grice's theory that equates intentionality with speaker meaning.

[188] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", 521.

Merleau-Ponty's account of how meaning is intentionally expressed and perceived is premised upon the existence of an agential subject. Butler's account of gender performativity, on the other hand, moves toward a non-subjectivist model. Translated into grammatical terms, Butler expresses this in the following way:

> It is, however, clearly unfortunate grammar to claim that the there is a "we" or an "I" that does its body, as if a disembodied agency preceded and directed an embodied exterior. More appropriate, I suggest, would be a vocabulary that resists the substance metaphysics of subject-verb formations and relies instead on an ontology of present participles.[189]

In de Beauvoir's belief that woman is a historical idea and not a natural fact, i.e., that she is something one becomes, as opposed to something one innately "is", Butler discerns a similar voluntarism. She believes that de Beauvoir understands gender according to the Sartrean notion of a "project", which, again, depends on the existence of a willing, agential subject.[190]

In summary, then, following Merleau-Ponty and de Beauvoir, Butler argues that the (gendered) subject is historically situated and posterior to its acts. However, in contrast to Merleau-Ponty's account of expressivity that understands agency as the process by which a subject takes up possibilities, and to de Beauvoir's suggestion that becoming a woman is a willful project,

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[189] Ibid., 521.

[190] In *Being and* Nothingness, Sartre maintains that as existential subjects, we are always free to make choices. By working toward individual goals or "projects", we transcend our facticity, or our concrete situations. See: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956).

Butler's account of gender constitution sees agency as arising from the repetition of acts. In this sense, her theory of gender performativity reconceptualizes not only the notions of "gender" and "performativity", but also that of "agency".

We live, Butler maintains, within a system of compulsive heterosexuality. Sanctioned by the incest taboo, this system, which has the reproduction of the species as its ultimate goal, relies on the polarization of identities into sexes and genders that are marked as male and female, masculine and feminine. How, then, might phenomenology contribute to a feminist genealogy of the constitution of gender that dispels the myth of a causal relationship among sex, gender, and sexuality? This is the question that propels the second section of "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", entitled "Binary Genders and the Heterosexual Contract".

Butler's hypothesis is that phenomenology might be of service if its individualist conceptions of the act are expanded. Here, Butler draws upon theatrical and anthropological conceptions of the act. The language with which Butler describes these more collective, social acts is, itself, full of theatrical metaphors. In her words:

> The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again.[191]

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[191] Ibid., 526.

Applying anthropologist Victor Turner's theory that ritual social dramas are characterized by repetition (which involves both reenactment and re-experience) to her theorization of gender, Butler proposes that while gender acts are individually enacted, they conform to collective cultural codes.[192] Here, she once again uses a multitude of theatrical metaphors to propound her argument:

> As a public action and performative act, gender is not a radical choice or project that reflects a merely individual choice, but neither is it imposed or inscribed upon the individual, as some post-structuralist displacements of the subject would contend. The body is not passively scripted with cultural codes, as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural relations. But neither do embodied selves pre-exist the cultural conventions which essentially signify bodies. Actors are always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance. Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as a play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives.[193]

In a statement that recalls the distinction between "serious" and "fictional" utterances in Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* that was later deconstructed by Derrida in "Signature Event Context", Butler distinguishes between the performances of social and theatrical acts. She points

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[192] Victor Turner, "Social Dramas and Stories about Them," *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 7, No. 1 (1980): 141-168.
[193] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", 526.

out that, because we know that theatre is "just" theatre, and thus symbolic or fictional, theatrical

acts may be "de-realized". This is not the case, however, with our perceptions of off-stage,

quotidian social performances that, she argues, are based on ontological claims.[194]

As a result, the same action may produce different effects on its viewers, depending on whether

it takes place on or off stage. Here, Butler provides her classic example of the transvestite:

"Indeed, the sight of a transvestite onstage can compel pleasure and applause while the sight of

the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence."[195]

For Butler, then, the difference is contextual (an example that clearly backs Derrida's claim that

meaning is always contingent upon context). It is measured in terms of what Austin would have

called its "perlocutionary effect" (the effect produced in the spectator *by* the accomplishment of

the act).[196] In theatrical terms, it is measured by its theatricality. Theatre scholar Josette Féral

proposes that this concept, which often appears in theatre studies scholarship as a theoretical

partner to performativity, may be measured in terms of a "spectator's awareness of a theatrical

intention addressed to him." For Féral, it is the spectator who "transforms an action into fiction",

thereby "re-semiotizing" a space. Theatricality is thus the result of a perceptual dynamic linking

the observer with the object of his or her gaze.[197] In Butler's formulation, it appears that it is the

absence of theatricality in quotidian performances that can potentially cause anxiety in the

onlooker and, in turn, put the transvestite at risk.

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[194] Ibid., 527.
[195] Ibid. 527.
[196] Austin, J.L., *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 101.
[197] Josette Féral, "Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language", trans. Ronald P. Bermingham *SubStance*, Vol. 31, No. 2/3, Issue 98/99: Special Issue: Theatricality (2002): 94-108.

Butler ushers in the example of the transvestite for more fundamental reasons, however. As she explains, transvestites challenge ontological assumptions about gender by calling into question the age-old distinction between reality and appearance. While some might conclude that a transvestite plays on the tensions between his or her "true", internal gender and a false, performed gender, according to Butler, transvestites mock the very idea of the existence of a "true" gender. In this logic, if a transvestite's gender performances are performative, it follows that *all* gender performances are performative. Simply put, there is no such thing as a "real" or "authentic" gender.

In the concluding section of her article, "Feminist Theory: Beyond an Expressive Model of Gender", Butler reiterates her philosophical and political interest in developing a "critical genealogy" of gender constitution. Such a genealogy, she maintains, requires an expanded phenomenological conception of the act as historically situated, collectively shared, and performative. Here, the adjective "performative" necessarily negates the possibility that such acts are expressive, and thus that gender is ontological. Instead, gender attributes "constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal."[198]

The Austinian and Derridean heritage of *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*

In 1990, two years after she wrote "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", Butler published her major opus, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. The book

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[198] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", 530 and 528.

was instantly hailed as an important work of feminist theory and a founding text of queer theory. In it, Butler continues her task of developing a feminist genealogy of the identity category "woman". However, while in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" she drew primarily on phenomenological conceptions of the act, in *Gender Trouble* she bridges phenomenology with both Foucauldian theory and the feminist psychoanalysis of Luce Irigaray, Monique Wittig, and Julia Kristeva.

In this work, gender is understood as the effect of power in a phallogocentric and normative system of compulsory heterosexuality. It is described as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid, regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being." Gender is framed as a doing, but importantly "not a doing in which the subject may be said to preexist the deed", since the agent is considered an object of its acts. To Nietzsche's claim in *On The Genealogy of Morals* that "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed", Butler adds the corollary: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."[199]

Despite the fact that, in describing gender as a form of citation or fiction, *Gender Trouble* is evocative of Derrida's reformulation of Austin's theory of the performative utterance in "Signature Event Context", there is no mention of either of these texts in *Gender Trouble*. Instead, in the preface to the 1999 re-edition of her book, Butler cites Derrida's reading of Kafka's parable *Before the Law* as her main source of inspiration:

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[199] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (*New York: Routledge, 2007), 5, 34, and 185.

I originally took my clue on how to read the performativity of gender from Jacques Derrida's reading of Kafka's "Before the Law". There the one who waits for the law, sits before the door of the law, attributes a certain force to the law for which one waits. The anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object. I wondered whether we do not labor under similar expectations concerning gender, that it operates as an interior essence that might be disclosed, an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates. In the first instance, then, the performativity of gender revolves around this metalepsis, the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself. Secondly, performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration.[200]

Despite Butler's account of how she developed her theory of gender performativity, her construal of gender as a "metalepsis" is clearly reminiscent of Derrida's deconstructive account of the temporality of performativity. He developed this subject through his analysis of the signature in both "Signature Event Context" and "Declarations of Independence". In this latter text, he demonstrated that the independent political subject is performatively produced through

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[200] Ibid., vx.

the act of signing, such that "the signature invents the signer."[201] The way in which a

performative temporality subverts the assumed relationship between a subject and power is at

stake in both Butler's reading of Derrida's reading of Kafka and Derrida's analysis of the

Declaration.

It was only in *Gender Trouble*'s 1993 sequel, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of*

Sex, that Butler had directly engaged with the intellectual history of performativity. In this book,

she went on construe the materiality of the body, too, as the sedimented effect of power. There,

sex, like gender, is understood as the product of the performative reiteration of norms. Wary,

however, of constructivist theories that reduce the body to a passive facticity that is acted upon

by an external, cultural force, Butler proposed to see matter "not as a site or surface, but as a

process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and

surface."[202] In this reconceptualization of matter as a process of materialization, we see a clear

echo of the reconceptualization of identity as a process of identification that Hall recognized as

proper to postmodernist analyses.

As in *Gender Trouble*, Butler's approach in *Bodies That Matter* is interdisciplinary. She draws

on texts by Plato, Freud, and Lacan as well as on contemporary works of literature and film. She

also directly addresses Derrida's reading of Austin's theory of the performative utterance. In the

following passage, the Derridean heritage of Butler's account of performativity is manifestly

clear:

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[201] Jacques Derrida, "Declarations of Independence," *New Political Science,* vol. 7, no. 1 (1986), 10. See pages 20-21 of my second chapter for an analysis of this text.
[202] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex (*New York: Routledge, 1993), 9.

…performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And, this repetition is not performed by a subject. Rather, it is the condition of possibility for the subject. Iterability implies that "performance" is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production.[203]

In contrast to the Austinian subject which pre-exists its acts, the Derridean and Butlerian subject comes into existence *through* its acts. Inspired by Derrida, Butler recast performativity as a theory of agency. While Butlerian performativity involves the reiteration of norms, it also leaves space for a subject's resistance to these norms. For Butler, the political promise of the performative lies in the space performativity opens for acts of resignification. These include the reappropriation of terms such as "queer" that strip an insult of its power by turning them into a sign of resistance, or practices such as drag which highlight the citational quality of all gender expressions. By transposing the iterability of the semiotic signifier onto the level of the embodied gesture, Butler demonstrated that the mechanisms that operate within language also structure corporeal expression. The genealogy of sexual identity that she developed in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, clearly contests both humanist discourses that presuppose a universal male subject and those feminisms of sexual difference that are premised upon the polarization of gender identities. It is equally dismissive of a prescriptive heterosexuality.

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[203] Ibid., 95.

<u>Time Machines: Back to the Future in the Blink of an Eye</u>

Fast forward twenty years (the blink of an eye or an eternity). Behind us is the highly politicized

intellectual climate of 1990s American identity politics and the third-wave academic feminism of

Gender Trouble and *Bodies That Matter*. It is now June, 2014 and I have just performed my

infelicitous (yet hopefully also invisible) performative greeting for a seemingly oblivious Judith

Butler in the corridors of the Université Sorbonne. Back in my seat, I am sipping my bad,

vending machine espresso out of a plastic cup. It is not inconsequential that both the coffee and

the cup (the latter like an anachronism) are of the kind you get on airplanes. I am still jet-lagged.

The time is (still) out of joint. In fact, the France that I am in feels older than pre-Millennium

America. It is as if I have gone *back* to the future.

Perhaps it is the nineteenth-century ornate, floral motifs and gold woodwork adorning the pale,

green walls of the auditorium that give me this impression. Or perhaps it is the large fresco by

French painter Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret (1852-1929) entitled "Apollon et les muses au sommet

du Parnasse," which hangs at the front of the auditorium simultaneously evoking French

Naturalism and Greek and Roman mythology. Or perhaps, still, it is the Latin words inscribed

above this mural, "Pacem summa tenet", translated into French as "Nous tenons la paix". Or

maybe it was simply my morning walk through the Quartier Latin. In any case, the past is alive

in the historical present.

Rewind about seven hundred and fifty years. It is 1257 and the Collège de Sorbonne, one of the

colleges of the medieval Université de Paris, has just opened its doors to its first students. Jump

forward again to the Reformation when, despite King Francis I's tolerant attitude toward the French Protestants or "Huguenots", the Collège sides with the more conservative Catholic population. It was at this moment, in 1662, that Richelieu, the Proviseur and soon to be Cardinal and chief Minister to Louis XVIII, constructed the famous Chapel Richelieu (where, somewhat eerily, his tomb still lies today). Jump-cut to the French Revolution, when the Collège was suppressed, only to be restored by Napoleon in 1808. Onward still, to the Restoration when, in 1896, the Duc de Richelieu commissioned a new auditorium to honor his predecessor.

It is in this auditorium that I now sit. The architecture has remained untouched since 1896, despite the fact that the university was occupied during the cultural revolution of May '68, after which French students renamed it the "People's University". From under the banner that reads "Pacem summa tenet" (we keep the peace), then, Apollo (God of music, of sun and light, of knowledge, poetry, prophecy, healing and medicine, but also the plague) along with his muses, surveyed the scenes of violence between police and students. They were witnesses to that social history, just as they would have been witnesses to much of France's intellectual history.

In the 1960s and 1970s alone, they would have been privy to lectures by philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Georges Bataille, Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Fançois Lyotard, Hélène Cixous, Louis Althusser, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Rancière, Etienne Balibar, and Jean-Luc Nancy. These thinkers, as Hall summarized in "Who Needs Identity?", were instrumental in teasing out the complex links between subjectivity, discursive practices, and embodiment. "Real" audiences on the other side of the Atlantic would have to wait somewhat longer to read their work. Their corpora were only

"imported" to the USA in the late 1960s and 1970s where, united under the umbrella terms "poststructuralism" and "French theory", they were integrated into Humanities curricula in the 1980s and following.

At the current moment in time, however, the work of the above philosophers is being re-exported to France under a transformed guise by American critical, gender, and performance theorists. Avital Ronell describes this phenomena well when, responding to a question posed to her in an interview by the French psychoanalyst Anne Dufourmantelle, she states that:

> … everything started with this original translation, through the betrayal of origins, the 'return to sender,' boomerang effects. America is after all a text that endlessly reads Europe, that is read by Europe, that comes back to Europe, that tries to separate itself, to become independent time after time.[204]

As the subtitle, "Crossings and Transfers in Contemporary Anglo-American Thought", suggests, it is in part this trans-Atlantic, intellectual "aller-retour" that inspired the 2014 Theater, Performance, Philosophy (TPP) conference. In their call for papers, the event organizers address this phenomenon in the following terms:

> The goal of this conference is two-fold. On the one hand, it will serve to introduce works on this topic that are little known in France. Just as, in the 1970s, when American universities seized upon the works of French

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[204] Avital Ronell and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Fighting Theory: Avital Ronell in Conversation with Anne Dufourmantelle*, trans. Catherine Porter (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 122.

philosophers in order to derive from them new ideas, creating the *French Theory*

corpus, this conference aspires to instigate a return-effect of contemporary

Anglo-American thought, enriched by *French Theory*, into French

universities.[205]

The six keynote speakers at the TPP conference—Alphonso Lingis, Jon McKenzie, Martin

Puchner, Catherine Malabou, Avital Ronell, and Judith Butler—all belong to what Malabou has

baptized "la génération d'après" (or the "generation following") in reference to the above

structuralist theorists.[206] They were invited because they embody philosophy's recent turn

toward performative modes of discourse. It was my interest in this purported shift toward new

forms of performance philosophy that attracted me to the colloquium in the first place. I wanted

to see how these critical theorists would enact and reflect on new forms of performance

philosophy. But why did I opt to attend this event in person instead of waiting until the lectures

were disseminated online so that I could watch them from the comfort of my home in Montréal?

After all, there were (as there always are) enough reasons *not* to travel: time, money, and carbon

footprint among the first to come to mind). Did I simply not have the patience to endure the

"tele", or delay, between the moment of their (locutionary and embodied) peformative utterances

and my reception of them? Or did I hope that the delay would not only be reduced, but actually

erased, by a "live" encounter? When the organizers of the TPP colloquium write that "the event

of thinking comes to be inscribed in flesh and voice", is it implied that it is necessary for one to

see that flesh and hear those voices "live" in order to fully experience the *event* of thinking?

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[205] "Call for Papers". *www.tpp2014.com*. Web. Theater, Performance, Philosophy Call for Papers. Aug. 31, 2014.
[206] At the age of eighty-two (then), Alphonso Lingis is an exception.

Despite the nuanced deconstruction of "identity" that Butler performed in her texts on gender performativity from the late 1980s and early 1990s, it appears that in 2014, part of me still somehow hoped that in her live lecture, she would embody her thought. I would certainly be disappointed, however, were I now to understand that this former version of myself had crossed the ocean because she had once again been seduced by the logocentric myth of presence. Had I not learned my lesson once and for all through my hysterical search for the "origin" of performativity in Austin's (ghostly) voice? Apparently not. But I was not alone. Far from it, in fact. The Amphithéâtre Richelieu was packed with scholars, artists, and students from all over the world who were waiting for Butler to take the stage. What kind of knowledge did we all hope to gain from this "live" encounter that we could not gain from a mediatized one? In philosophical terms, what changes in the intersubjective encounter (with performance philosophy) when both of the embodied subjectivities in the equation come face to face?

Perceiving the Performing Body in Time

As I previously stated, my feeling that I "knew" Butler prior to my arrival in Paris was based solely on my having viewed so many video recordings of her conferences over the years. Through them, I had become familiar with the body that she publicly performs—one that is habitually stylized by its locutional and embodied speech acts.

The video recordings of Butler's conferences are examples of "teletechnologies"—Derrida's term for the historically situated set of practices and apparatuses (such as radio, television, and

today the Internet) that comprise the media.[207] In a series of filmed interviews conducted by French philosopher Bernard Stiegler and published in book form under the title *Echographies of Television*, Derrida offers some insightful reflections on how these technologies transform both our modes of perception and the bodies that they represent. He points out that the prefix "tele" denotes the idea of distance, lag, or delay.[208] The etymology of this word comes from the ancient Greek term meaning "far off, afar, at or to a distance."[209] This notion of distance accounts for the delay between the moment of enunciation and the moment of broadcast, and thus reception, within teletechnological communication. However, for Derrida, even when a transmission is said to be "live", its apparent liveness is merely a "live effect (un effet de direct), an allegation of live."[210] In fact, he maintains that *all* perceptual experience is structured by a place of traces, including those events that take place in what is popularly called "real time":

> …there is no purely real time because temporalization itself is structured by a
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> play of retention or of protention and, consequently, of traces: the condition of
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> possibility of the living, absolutely real present is already memory, anticipation,
>
> in other words, a play of traces.[211]

In the philosophy of temporality elaborated here in the context of Derrida's reflections on teletechnology, we may observe a clear Husserlian heritage. In *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (1893-1917), Husserl's theorization of the question of internal

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[207] Robert Briggs, "Teletechnology", *Derrida: Key Concepts*, ed. Claire Colebrook (New York: Routledge, 2015), 1.
[208] Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Ecographies of Television* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 38.
[209] "Tele". Web. http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=tele. Accessed August 20, 2014.
[210] Derrida and Stiegler, *Ecographies of* Television, 40.
[211] Ibid., p.40.

time consciousness, which he claimed to be the most "important and difficult of all phenomenological problems", Husserl suggested that at any given instant, we experience three layers of time: the now, the now that has just occurred and that extends our immediate memory into the present, and the imminent now that we anticipate. These phases are given the names of: "primal impression", "retention", and "protention", respectively. [212]

In his 1967 *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology*, Derrida uses the concepts of différance and the trace to argue that alterity is always at play within (temporal) identity:

> As soon as we admit this continuity of the now and the non-now, of perception
> and non-perception in the zone of originality that is common to originary
> impression and to retention, we welcome the other into the self-identity of the
> Augenblick, non-presence and non-evidentness into the *blink of an eye of the
> instant*.[213]

We thus clearly see in the above passage that Derrida's claim that there is no "real time" is based on a deconstructive critique of Husserlian phenomenology. Difference operates within the present of every "augenblick". Alterity permeates identity at the very level of our internal time consciousness. Teletechnologies transform our perceptual experience by emphasizing the delay that already exists in all communication. But both the time of history as marked by technological

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[212] Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (1893-1917), trans. John Barnet Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers), 1991.

[213] Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. Leonard Lawlor (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 56.

advancements and the temporality we perceive through our inner time consciousness are always already "out of joint".

It is not only our perceptual experience that is transformed by teletechnologies, however. It is also the bodies that they represent. Because they capture both voices and gestures, these media give us the impression of a direct, transparent access to the subjectivities of their speakers. This impression, however, is an illusory one. Interestingly, Derrida cites actors and intellectuals as prime examples of those whose (performative) bodies undergo mutations from their regular public lectures and interviews, both of which are often recorded. Speaking of his own experience of teaching, Derrida writes that:

> It is necessary to cultivate a very particular awareness in order to realize that, when you arrive in a room full of people, sit down in a chair, and start talking for two hours without being interrupted, you are playing in a very artificial theater, in which you invent yourself another body. Unless you are just leaving room for this other body, which was waiting for this all along, and which finds in all this a place of desire.[214]

In "The Philosopher's Body: Derrida and Teletechnology", critical theorist Carsten Strathausen makes note of the distrust and annoyance that Derrida manifests towards the entire film apparatus surrounding him during the shooting of Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman's 2002 documentary, *Derrida.* Strathausen advances the contentious proposal that in these filmed

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[214] Derrida and Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, 96.

interviews, Derrida's body language communicates as much as, or perhaps more than, his words. He suggests that because of this, it may be argued that Derrida's concern in these interviews is primarily his own body as well as "the body in general, the phenomenal body as the locus of affects and sensations."[215]

This proposal is radical because, as is commonly known, Derrida equated classical phenomenology with a metaphysics of presence. On this subject, Strathausen cites critical theorist Tilottama Rajan, who makes the bold claim that Derrida failed to differentiate between transcendental phenomenology (i.e. Husserl's neo-Kantian philosophy) and existential phenomenology (i.e. the philosophies of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty). In popular accounts, Derridean deconstruction constitutes an intervention into both Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics and Husserl's phenomenology. In Rajan's genealogy, however, it is said to constitute a transposition of phenomenology onto linguistics. In her words, we might read Derrida's early work as "a deconstruction of transcendental phenomenology that draws on existential phenomenology so as to work towards a 'thought of the trace' that is irreducible to phenomenology but still a part of it."[216]

Although I argued in my second chapter that the performativity of Derrida's texts is expressed through their materiality and that this provides an invitation to locate the body in the "body" of his texts, so to speak, this is clearly a retrospective and external reading. Derrida was generally critical of the work of both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty and he did not write explicitly about the

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[215] Carsten Strathausen, "The Philosopher's Body: Derrida and Teletechnology", *The New Centennial Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2009): 142.

[216] Tilottama Rajan, *Deconstruction and the Remainders of Phenomenology: Sartre, Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 99.

phenomenal body. His three major works on Husserlian phenomenology—*The Problem of Genesis in the Philosophy of Husserl* (written between 1953-4 and published in 1990), *Edmund Husserl's 'The Origin of Geometry': An Introduction* (1962), and *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays in Husserl's Theory of Signs* (1967) were concerned with the questions of genesis, origin, and language, respectively. (Butler, however, as this chapter has highlighted, drew explicitly upon Merleau-Ponty's work on embodied consciousness in order to propound her theory of gender performativity.)

I am suggesting here that teletechnology is an important site within Derridean thought for thinking the body and time together. Teletechnologies accentuate the fact that différance (which involves both deferral and difference) is always already at play *both* within our internal time consciousness and within our corporeal performances.

In *Echographies of Television*, Derrida rejects the idea that the rise of teletechnologies represents a paradigmatic shift in communication. He argues that writing is itself an ancient form of teletechnology, as evidenced by, for example, scribes who recorded speech on material supports.[217] As I summarized in my second chapter, in his 1971 "Signature Event Context", Derrida demonstrated that différance operates within both writing and speech. Transposing his deconstruction of the binary opposition between orality and writing onto the relationship between a lecture and its teletechnological reproduction, then, we may say that writing is to speech as video recording is to live lecture. For if writing seems intuitively to be the most distant media and the voice a guarantor of presence (again, a myth that Derrida dedicated much ofhis

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[217] Derrida and Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, 38.

career to demystifying), the (live) body intuitively bears the promise of even more proximity.

And as the history of philosophy (which has always subjugated the body to the mind) has

asserted, one should not make false promises.[218]

When seeking to understand the role of the body in performative disseminations of Butler's

theory of gender performativity, it may be beneficial to look outside philosophy to scholarship

that celebrates both embodied practices and fiction. The extensive work done by performance

theorists and art historians on the relationship between live and mediatized art forms may be

particularly helpful in theorizing the ontological and epistemological statuses of these media.

The art form of performance has traditionally been thought to depend upon a spatial and

temporal co-presence between performer and audience. Performance Studies scholar Peggy

Phelan illustrates this popular view when she argues that the ontology of performance is

contingent upon its non-reproducibility. In her 1997 book *Unmarked: The Politics of*

Performance, she writes that:

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[218] In addition to Immanuel Kant's assertion to this end in his major 1785 work of moral philosophy, *The Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals*, we may look to the historical texts on performativity itself for examples of this belief. In John Searle's 1969 *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, the promise is the paradigmatic example of an illocutionary act. In J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, the promise was already cited as an example of a performative utterance. For Austin, this implied that promises are not subject to truth conditions; they cannot be true or false but, rather, only felicitous or infelicitous. For Austin, words are to be the "outward and visible sign ……of an inward and spiritual act" (HTD, p. 9). When stipulating that he excludes fictional utterances from his theory of performativity, Austin cites *Hippolytus*. Paraphrasing and prolonging Euripides' protagonist's lines which, in the original text state that "Twas but my tongue, 'twas not my soul that swore", Austin writes: "my tongue swore to, but my heart (or mind or other backstage artiste) did not". In a footnote, he adds that he does mean "to rule out all the offstage performers—the lights men, the stage manager, even the prompter", but objects "only to certain officious understudies, who would duplicate the play" (Austin, *HTD*, 10). This could be taken to imply that for Austin, it is the *embodied* aspect of the speech act that runs the risk of dishonesty or moral corruption; the body is associated with fiction, and fiction with lies.

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved,

recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of

representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other

than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy

of reproduction, it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology.[219]

Philip Auslander, another important contemporary performance theorist, staunchly disagrees. In

his 1999 book *Liveness: Performance in a Mediated Culture*, Auslander deconstructs the binary

opposition between live and mediatized performances—an opposition that, he maintains, tends to

conflate the former with the "real" and the latter with the artificial. Auslander specifies that this

dialectical model is often evoked to assert the (ontological, ethical, and moral) superiority of

liveness over mediatization—an observation that clearly recalls Derrida's observation that binary

oppositions always suggest implicit hierarchies.[220]

The most sophisticated critique of the idea that performance somehow betrays its own ontology

when reproduced or documented is carried out by the American art historian Amelia Jones. In

her 2012 article, "Temporal Anxiety: 'Presence' in Abstentia: Experiencing Performance as

Documentation" (an extended version of her 1996 article "Absence in Abstentia"), Jones

critiques the idea that one's knowledge of historical works of performance art is any less valid or

complete if the work is experienced through documentation (i.e., video or photographs) as

opposed to live. Jones ardently rejects the idea that live performance offers the spectator

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[219] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, 146.
[220] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge: 2008), 3.

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unmediated access to the body of the performer. In fact, she argues that: "there is no possibility

of an unmediated relationship to any kind of cultural product, including body art."[221]

Drawing on the Derridean notion of a "supplement", Jones suggests that the live event and the

document exist in a state of "mutual supplementarity" such that "the body art event needs the

photograph to confirm its having happened", while "the photograph needs the body art event as

an ontological 'anchor' of its indexicality." While Jones admits that our phenomenological

experiences of perception are different in these two circumstances, she maintains that "neither

has a privileged relationship to the historical 'truth' of the performance." In fact, she argues that

despite the fact that live performances offer the possibility of "flesh-to-flesh" encounters, while

mediatized performances do not, both are "equally intersubjective."[222]

Auslander and Jones both reject Phelan's ontology of performance as inherently non-

reproducible. However, while Auslander's book presents a sustained critique of Phelan's

Unmarked, Jones also finds material there to support her own claim that body art represents a

decentering of the Cartesian subject.[223] In "Temporal Anxiety", she quotes the following passage

from Phelan:

> Performance uses the performer's body to pose a question about the inability to
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> secure the relation between subjectivity and the body per se; performance uses

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[221] Amelia Jones, "Temporal anxiety/'Presence' in Abstentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation", *Archaeologies of Presence: Acting, Performing, Being*, eds. Nick Kaye, Gabriella Giannachi, and Michael Shanks (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), 203.
[222] Ibid., 212, 203, 203-204.
[223] For the detailed elaboration of this argument, see: Amelia Jones, *Body Art/ Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1988.

the body to frame the lack of Being promised by and through the body—that

which cannot appear without a supplement…performance marks the body itself

as loss…for the spectator the performance spectacle is itself a projection of the

scenario in which her desire takes place.[224]

For Jones, it is specifically the *performativity* of body art that foregrounds this lack by bringing

to light the complex relationship between the body and subjectivity:

Body art, through its very performativity and its unveiling of the body of the

artist, surfaces the insufficiency and incoherence of the body-as-subject and its

inability to deliver itself fully (whether to the subject-in-performance her/himself

or to the one who engages with this body).[225]

How might Jones and Phelan's reflections on the performativity of body art help to understand

the role of the body in (both live and mediated) philosophy lectures about performativity?

How might the case study of a lecture given by Judith Butler on the very subject of how gender

performativity relates to theatrical performance help us flesh out the intimate links between

discourse, embodiment, and subjectivity in the performance of theory?

While Derrida recognized that teletechnological images are constructed through processes of

selection and editing, he, like Jones, rejects the idea that they refer back to a fully present, pure,

complete, or "original" event. Just as there is no pure "real time" and there are no purely "real"

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[224] Phelan, *Unmarked*, 151-2.
[225] Jones, "Temporal anxiety/'Presence' in Abstentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation", 208.

bodies/identities that are not inhabited by otherness, there are no events that are self-contained—

they all rely on supplementarity and are also all supplementary. However, at the same time,

Derrida does admit that there is something specific about the voice. "The voice", he writes

"makes language an event."[226] How might Derrida's reflections on the voice be extended to the

realm of corporeality when considering the TPP (event) organizers' statement that in

performance philosophy, "the *event* of thinking comes to be inscribed in flesh and voice"?

Because performativity simultaneously involves both repetition and innovation, it, like

différance, is fundamentally concerned with the event. And the event, as Derrida so beautifully

writes, "is another name for that which, in the thing that happens, we can neither reduce nor deny

(or simply deny). It is another name for experience itself, which is always experience of the

other."[227] Perhaps that is why I was in Paris, then: in Paris to experience the event as encounter

with the philosopher's performative body. Apt, then, that Butler's plenary lecture should be

entitled "When Gesture Becomes Event".

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[226] Derrida and Stiegler, *Ecographies of Television*, 101.
[227] Ibid., 11.

Chapter Four

Plasticity and Performativity:
Catherine Malabou and the Question of the Post-performative

A Letter from Paris

A letter arrives in the mail. I see immediately that it is from "Outremer"; the large stamp in the

top, right-hand corner of the medium-sized, brown envelope reads "République Française, Lettre

prioritaire Internationale". This is not the only indication of the letter's provenance, however.

Across the bottom half of the envelope, my name and address are written in a distinctly

"European" style of cursive writing. In the instant that I recognize this, I also recall the moment

when I first became aware that handwriting is, or can be, culturally specific. As such, two modes

of perception—the processing of new information and the recollection of a past event—occur

simultaneously.

In my memory, I am in seventh or eighth grade in Toronto. At thirteen or fourteen years of age, I

still require parental permission to miss school. Following protocol, I present my teacher with a

signed note from my father, visiting from Luxembourg, informing her of my upcoming absence.

Upon reading it, she comments not on its content, but rather on its mode of inscription: "Your

father is European!" She then proceeds to show me that she has a similar style of handwriting,

thereby implying that she, too, is from "the Continent".

Years later, while working on my MA degree at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, I would learn that this rhetorical strategy is an instantiation of what Aristotle referred to as the use of "topoi" or "loci communes" to emphasize commonalities between interlocutors.[228] While in junior high I was not yet familiar with these Latin terms, I did intuitively sense that my teacher's gesture was an amicable one intended to unite us through a supposedly shared cultural connection and, by extension, a value system. What I did not necessarily comprehend was that such a seemingly benign observation about cultural difference could, in certain circumstances, lead to potentially injurious politics.

That identity is only defined in relation to difference is of course not news. The mechanism is as old as Western philosophy itself. Aristotle's principle of non-contradiction (which essentially stipulates that X cannot be non-X) logically derives from the axiomatic rule (subsequently named the "law of identity" by logicians) that X is X. That a certain predicate is essential to a subject means that it defines its very *essence*; without it, it is not what it is.[229]

The identity/difference dyad is one of the metaphysical binaries that, over two millennia later, Derrida would deconstruct. Drawing attention to the hierarchy implied by this binaristic thought, which privileges what it considers the unity and self-presence of identity over the absence and impurity of alterity, Derrida would reverse and displace this opposition. In his early work from the 1960s and 1970s, he forcefully demonstrated how this dyad was echoed in another binary opposition: that of speech and writing.[230] For Derrida, Western philosophy's subordination of

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[228] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1403a18–19.
[229] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV 3 1005b19–20.
[230] For the most extensive argument on this subject, see: Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

writing to speech, based on the belief that the latter is purer, more present, and temporally prior to the former due to its proximity to a transcendental consciousness, is "logocentric". By introducing his neologism of "différance", which combines the verbs "to differ" and "to defer", Derrida argued that all identity is marked by alterity and difference, thereby challenging the logic of either/or.

Derrida was not, of course, the only thinker to warn us of the ethical ramifications of the pitting of identity against difference, self against other. The questioning of how the way these fundamental categories are conceptually configured contributes to and reflects both imbalances in the distribution of power and discursive and material violence experienced by marginalized subjects is at the heart of many streams of critical theory. Scholars working in the fields of feminist theory, postcolonial theory, and queer theory, among others, have drawn attention to the fact that the history of Western thought presupposes a subject that is white, male, and heterosexual. How, they ask, can we expand traditional categories of subjecthood by positing identity as a site that accommodates difference?

In my memory from junior high, my heritage was pointed out by someone who identified with it, and thus experienced her own subject position as distinct from the norm (here, North American). In North America—I feel it imperative to state—European heritage is generally romanticized, but not exoticized. As a white woman of European descent, my 'otherness' is relative; the intersecting identity markers that coalesce to form my subject position generally grant me privilege, and not discrimination or disadvantage. The one mark of difference I do bear is my

femaleness.[231] This difference is performatively enacted at the level of my gender expression, performatively inscribed in the materiality of my flesh, and performatively expressed in my intersubjective encounters. As these encounters are mediated by language, in the body of a text (corpora), a reader may find traces of the body (corps) of its author. But what is the relationship between ontological difference and sexual difference, and beyond the surface level of handwriting, how are these different differences (if they are different) performed in the writing of philosophy?

I turn the envelope over in my hands. There, on the back flap, in the same "European" script, I read the name "Malabou", followed by a return address in Paris. I had been expecting this letter. After months of research into contemporary French philosopher Catherine Malabou's work, involving close readings of several of her key texts and lectures, and trips to both Paris and London to hear her speak, I had finally decided to contact her directly. One of the major proponents of the "new" French philosophy, Malabou belongs to what she, herself, labels "la génération d'après" (by which she intends the generation following Structuralism).[232] From my study of her corpus, I had come to understand that her signature concept of "plasticity", which has become something of a byword in contemporary philosophy, rescinds theories of performativity. I had, however, come to this conclusion via a process of deduction based on my interpretation of Malabou's implicit allusions to performativity. Worried about the tenuousness

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[231] The strangeness of this word "speaks" to the sometimes belatedness of language to life. While gender and sex are performatively *en*gendered through language, language itself must be adapted to accommodate both new configurations of sexual identity, and deconstructed conceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality. While the word "femininity" is the most common adjective used to describe the quality of being female, it has certain connotations of attributes that I do not intend here. "Femaleness" is not unproblematic either, as it seems to stress the cultural translation of a biological fact.

[232] Catherine Malabou, "The Following Generation", trans. Simon Porzak, *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 20, No. 2, (2012): 20.

of this methodology, and fearful that it could lead me to invoke a straw (wo)man, I traveled to

London to take part in the 2016 London Graduate School's Summer Academy in the Critical

Humanities on the theme of gender and sexual difference in Derrida where Malabou, alongside a

group of key Derrida scholars, would speak.[233]

Malabou opened her plenary lecture, entitled "Who Are Derrida's Women?", with the following

question: "does woman start where Being ceases to be?" In what followed, she addressed

Derrida's writing on the question of the feminine in philosophy in his 1978 book *Spurs:*

Nietzsche's Styles and argued that both Derrida's and Nietzsche's formulations of the feminine

deprive woman of her essence. For Malabou, this anti-essentialism, which she sees paralleled in

theories of gender performativity, represents yet another form of violence perpetrated on women.

Furthermore, she maintains that all such anti-essentialist theories are guilty of an ontological

error: they confuse essence and Being. For Malabou, because Being is plastic, plasticity is first

and foremost an ontological, and not an artistic, phenomenon. (As I will demonstrate in this

chapter, her argument here is that plasticity needs to be delocalized from the field of the visual

arts—and particularly sculpture, to which it is generally assigned—and instated in the field of

ontology). Despite the prevalence of art and literature in deconstruction, then, Malabou insisted

that literature can never deconstruct ontology, and that ontology must thus be privileged.

How, I asked myself, could she say this? How could Catherine Malabou, the long-time disciple

of Derrida, whose work collapses the ontological barriers between fictional and non-fictional

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[233] The 2016 edition of The London Graduate School's Summer Academy in the Critical Humanities was organized by Prof. Tina Chanter and Prof. Simon Morgan Wortham and featured lectures by: Emily Apter, Geoffrey Bennington, Tina Chanter, Peggy Kamuf, Elisa Marder, Catherine Malabou, Willow Verkerk, and Ewa Ziarek.

modes or writing, or between philosophy and art, stand before us and proclaim with such certainty that literature can never deconstruct philosophy? It was my bewilderment about this statement that prompted me to email Malabou and ask her to comment further on the implications of plasticity on performativity. For, if performative writing often involves literary allusions, role-playing, and other theatrical strategies, and Malabou argues that such tactics do not have the power to deconstruct ontology, can we not logically deduce that her concept of plasticity denies the potential potency of performative writing?

In her email response to my email, she directed me to a short article she had written entitled "Sujet: Femme" that appeared in the Dec. 2014 issue of the French periodical *De(s)générations* (entitled *De(s)générations des feminismes)* in which she addressed the topic of performativity directly. As it was difficult to access, Malabou generously offered to photocopy her print version and send it to me. She ended her email with a word of caution: "Don't expect a miracle, it's a short text."

Although some impending deadlines prevent me from working with Malabou's letter for a few days, I carry it around with me during this time. I am not sure why I do this. Perhaps I am just content to have a tactile object, as the hermeneutic and exegetical nature of my research in philosophy rarely requires interaction with physical archives. With this letter, I suddenly have a material inscription that is addressed directly to me. This, I tell myself, is something. I have something, some *thing*. Maybe, then, what I hope is that this thing—at once a material trace, a graphic inscription, and a plastic object—will help me understand the implications of Malabou's

thesis that plasticity has come to supersede Derridean writing as the contemporary "motor scheme" on theories of linguistic and gender performativity.

<u>Plasticity as Motor Schema</u>

When a philosopher or student of philosophy hears the name "Catherine Malabou", the first word that comes to mind is "plasticity". This concept forms the backbone of Malabou's investigations into subjects as diverse as Hegel's dialectic, Heidegger's deconstruction of metaphysics, Derrida's reformulation of writing, Freud's psychoanalysis, contemporary neuroscience, and the question of the feminine in philosophy. The etymology of the term is derived from the Greek root "plassein", which means "to model" or "to mould."[234] Plasticity thus designates the capacity to give, receive, and annihilate form. It is situated in the tension between creation (as in the way sculpture takes shape) and destruction (as in the explosion of a bomb). It demonstrates both an openness and a resistance to change. Importantly, for Malabou, the ability of matter to both form and be formed is directly related to the notion of transformation; after it has been molded, matter takes on a new state. This quality is exemplified by plastic surgery, but also by the plastic arts—once sculpted and fired, the material form (be it clay or marble) is permanently altered.

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[234] Catherine Malabou and Judith Butler, "You Be My Body for Me: Body, Shape, and Plasticity in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*", in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur. (New York: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011), 623.

Plasticity's provenance lies in Hegel's theorization of subjectivity in the preface to his 1807

opus, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. There, in the section on the role of the subject in

argumentative thinking, Hegel writes:

> 64. One difficulty which should be avoided comes from mixing up the
>
> speculative with the ratiocinative methods, so that what is said of the Subject at
>
> one time signifies its Notion, at another time merely its Predicate or accidental
>
> property. The one method interferes with the other, and only a philosophical
>
> exposition that rigidly excludes the usual way of relating the parts of a
>
> proposition could achieve the goal of *plasticity*.[235]

For Malabou, the quality of plasticity makes the (Hegelian) subject "susceptible to changes of

form", yet it also grants it "the power to bestow form."[236] The role of plasticity in Hegel's

theorization of temporality, futurity, and dialectics was the subject of Malabou's doctoral

dissertation, which was supervised by Derrida and later became her first book. Published in 1996

under the title *L'Avenir de Hegel: plasticité, temporalité, dialectique*, it was translated into

English in 2004 under the title *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic*. In

this work, Malabou argues against the popular reading of Hegel advanced in interwar France by

Alexandre Kojève when she purports that because Hegel's philosophy demonstrates an openness

to alterity, it is capable of producing ideas about futurity.[237] In this way, Malabou makes a strong

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[235] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 39.
[236] Malabou and Butler, Ibid., 623.
[237] Between 1933 and 1939, the Russian-born French philosopher Alexandre Kojève gave a series of lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in Paris in which he emphasized both Hegel's idea of the end of history and his master-slave dialectic. These lectures, which ushered in a form of existential Marxism, were profoundly influential for a generation of French intellectuals including: Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Lacan, Georges Bataille, André Breton, and Raymond Aron.

case for the continued relevance of Hegelian philosophy post-deconstruction. *The Future of Hegel* opens with a long forward by Derrida entitled *Le temps des adieux: Heidegger (lu par) Hegel (lu par) Malabou* (*A Time for Farewells: Heidegger (read by) Hegel (read by) Malabou*) in which Derrida explores Malabou's central hypothesis. Also in 2004, Malabou and Derrida co-authored the book *Voyager avec Jacques Derrida—La contre-allée* (*Counterpath: Traveling with Jacques Derrida*) in which the two philosophers take up the question of what it means to travel alongside deconstruction. Interspersed with postcards that Derrida sent to Malabou between the years of 1997 and 1998, the book stages deconstruction as a kind of counter-Odyssey.

Malabou's reading of Hegel's conception of being as plastic opens it to processes of transformation and metamorphosis. It is this rethinking of ontology that inspired Malabou's next work in which she investigates how plasticity resonates in Heidegger's reflections on being. In *Le Change Heidegger, du fantastique en philosophie*, published in 2004 and translated into English in 2012 under the title *The Heidegger Change: On the Fantastic in Philosophy*, Malabou focuses on what she refers to as "the triad of change": Heidegger's repeated use of the terms "Wandel", "Wandlung", and "Verwandlung", or change, transformation, and metamorphosis, respectively. Her reading suggests that, contrary to how Heidegger is generally read, his conception of being is both mutable and relational. This reinterpretation of Heidegger's theorizations of "Wesen" (essence) and being/Being emphasizes the principle of exchange between ontological regimes.

Unlike her former mentor Derrida, Malabou sees within the concept of "presence" the possibility of change and transformation. In *La Plasticité au Soir de l'Écriture* (2004), translated into

English in 2009 under the title *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*, Malabou argues that, from Hegel to Heidegger to Derrida (and thus from dialectics to destruction to deconstruction), the notion of form underwent a progressive reconceptualization. As its title suggests, this work brings the implications of plasticity to bear on the subject of writing. It is here that Malabou makes her central claim that plasticity has come to supplant the Derridean notion of writing as a contemporary "motor scheme"—i.e., as the defining characteristic of an epoch. What Malabou proposes is no less than a new (plastic) materialism; a way of thinking the graphic and the plastic together. Moving away from a Platonic vision of form, she encourages us to engage "deconstruction in a new materialism."[238]

After approaching the notion of plasticity ontologically in her work on Hegel, Heidegger, and Derrida, Malabou turned to recent work in neuroscience (in which the term is pervasive) in order to approach plasticity *epistemologically*. In her 2004 work *Que faire de notre cerveau?,* translated into English in 2009 under the title *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, she questions how the notion of "neuroplasticity" could produce a consciousness of the historicity of the brain—an idea that she aligns with the structure of contemporary capitalism. There, to plasticity's capacity to both give and receive form, she adds the capacity to *annihilate* form (as exemplified by the plastic explosive). In the 2007 *Les Nouveaux Blessés: de Freud à la neurologie, penser les traumatismes contemporains*, translated into English in 2012 under the title *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage*, Malabou puts neuroscience in dialogue with Freudian psychoanalysis in order to further explore the idea of "destructive" or "negative" plasticity through a consideration of psychic trauma (i.e., neuronal lesions and

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[238] Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 61.

cerebral pathologies). In it, she explores how post-lesional identities are in fact formed through the destruction of form. This subject is further investigated in the 2012 *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, in which Malabou looks at how physical and psychic trauma can contribute to a new reading of both the Freudian death drive and the very notion of identity. In this work, she distinguishes between the cerebral event (Ereignis) and the sexual event (Erlebnis) and argues that the former transforms subjectivity while the latter does not because sexual events are always assimilated by the subject. Here, Malabou considers the potential cross-fertilisation between the paradigm of sexuality proper to psychoanalysis and the paradigm of cerebrality proper to neuroscience.[239] Coauthored with Adrian Johnston and published in 2013, *Self and Emotional Life: Merging Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Neuroscience* examines how the three disciplines listed in the book's subtitle triangulate in theorizing a subject's affective experience. In her most recent work, *Avant demain: épigenèse et* rationalité, published in French in 2014 and translated into English in 2016 under the title *Before Tomorrow: Epigenesis and Rationality*, Malabou returns to Continental philosophy to offer a response to the critique of the Kantian transcendental advanced by contemporary speculative realism.[240]

In the midst of writing the above series of works that explore neuroplasticity, Malabou wrote a book on a very different subject: that of the question of the feminine in philosophy. Published in

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[239] Ian James, *The New French Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 103.

[240] With his highly influential 2006 book *Après la Finitude: Essai sur la nécessité de la contigence* (translated into English in 2008 as *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*), French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux (one of the major proponents of speculative realism) advanced a fierce critique of the Kantian *a priori* and the Kantian transcendental subject. In it, he contests what he refers to as Kant's "correlationism" (i.e. the assumption of a mutual dependency between human beings and the world). In *Before Tomorrow: Epigenesis and Rationality*, Malabou offers what she believes would be Kant's response to speculative realism—namely that it is not so easy to relinquish the transcendental. See: Quentin Meillassoux, trans. Ray Brassier, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2010), and Catherine Malabou, *Before Tomorrow: Epigenesis and Rationality*, trans. Carolyn Shead, (London: Polity Press, 2016).

2009, *Changer de différence, le féminin et la question philosophique* was translated into English in 2011 under the title *Changing Difference: The Question of the Feminine in Philosophy*. Each of the four essays that comprises the book is dedicated to Derrida and each offers a different perspective on the question of the meaning of the feminine in philosophy. The book is unprecedented in that it puts the theory of sexual difference proper to (European) continental philosophy into dialogue with the theory of gender performativity proper to (North American) queer and gender studies. Speaking from her own, subjective position, Malabou asks what it means to be a "woman philosopher", given that both deconstruction and gender performativity deny the existence of a female "essence". In this groundbreaking work, Malabou develops a unique, non-essentialist theory of the essence of femininity: said essence is said to resist its own deconstruction. In other words, it is plastic.

Many of Malabou's readers have focussed their analyses on the encounter she stages between post-deconstructive readings of Hegel and Heidegger and contemporary neuroscience. This encounter is indeed remarkable, as (with some exceptions) it has traditionally been analytic (not continental) philosophers who engage with neuroscience. In what follows, I will focus on the potential of the dialogue between two other aspects of Malabou's thought: her work on writing and her work on the question of the feminine in philosophy. My goal here is to examine the implications of plasticity on both the performativity of language and the performativity of the (gendered) body and, by extension, to re-evaluate the relevance of performativity in the work of one proponent of the "new" French philosophy. This dialogue is one that I will construct, however, as Malabou herself has not yet addressed this cross-over in a significant way. What is the implication of Malabou's new materialist philosophy on the status of performativity in the

context of post-poststructuralism and the ontological (re)turn? Has plasticity come to supplant performativity? Or, if, as Malabou suggests, philosophical concepts are inherently plastic, may we maintain that performativity is always already plastic? How do plasticity and performativity relate and how can they be examined together to theorize the ways in which the discursive and the material interact in the production of subjectivities? How might they be thought together to provide an account of how the gendered body is written into the philosophy text?

To address these questions, I will flesh out Malabou's theory of plasticity in her two texts that address the Derridean notion of writing: the 2010 article "The End of Writing: Grammatology and Plasticity", and the 2004 book *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*. Next, I will argue against Malabou's claim that literature cannot deconstruct philosophy by highlighting the performativity at play within Malabou's own writing about the end of writing. In so doing, I will argue that she depends upon a certain mode of performative writing to instate plasticity as a motor schema. Lastly, I will consider how to reconcile this contradiction given the anti-performativity of Malabou's article, "Sujet: Femme".

<u>The End of Writing? Grammatology and Plasticity</u>

With his 1967 *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida sought to inaugurate a "science of writing". This science would replace the "vulgar" (i.e., logocentric) understanding of writing that Derrida believed had been perpetuated throughout the history of Western philosophy from the ancient

texts of Plato and Aristotle up to the General Linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure.[241] For

Derrida, this tradition reduced writing to a mode of representation or transcription of speech,

which it considered superior due to the putative proximity of speech to a transcendental

consciousness. Central to grammatology was the substitution of this view of writing with the

expanded notion of "arche-writing" (archi-écriture). Encompassing both speech and writing,

arche-writing deconstructs the hierarchical binary opposition between these two terms. Operating

according to the play of différance and the trace, in which meaning is constantly deferred and

signs refer, *ad infinitum*, to other signs, arche-writing rejects the metaphysics of presence proper

to the logocentric, or phonocentric, tradition.

As Catherine Malabou points out in "The End of Writing? Grammatology and Plasticity", such a

science (or grammatology) has, however, never existed. It was never fully developed or

implemented—not by Derrida and not by anyone else. In fact, Malabou reminds us that, outside

of *Of Grammatology* (including both the texts contemporaneous to it and those posterior to it),

Derrida never referred to the grammatological project. Why might this be the case? Malabou

offers two reasons for grammatology's failure. The first is the "aporetic character of

deconstructive writing"[242] that Derrida himself noted, as evidenced by the following quote from

Of Grammatology's exergue:

> I would like to suggest above all that, however fecund and necessary the
>
> undertaking might be, and even if, given the most favorable hypothesis, it did
>
> overcome all the theological and metaphysical impediments that have limited it

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[241] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 56.
[242] Malabou, "The End of Writing?", 432.

hitherto, such a science of writing runs the risk of never being established as

such and with that name. Of never being able to define the unity of its project or

its object. Of not being able either to write its discourse on method or to describe

the limits of its field.[243]

Thus, while Derrida laid the foundations for a science of writing in *Of Grammatology*, he also

admitted that the undertaking would most likely never come to fruition. Because "the conditions

of the possibility of grammatology are precisely the reasons for its impossibility", Malabou

concludes that grammatology's "failure" was "programmed…by grammatology itself."[244]

In Malabou's opinion, the second reason for grammatology's non-success is the "logical

weakness or paradox" in Derrida's notion of arche-writing. To this paradox, she gives the name

"the plasticity of writing". Malabou argues that, as a form of conceptual transformation, arche-

writing represents a "plastic surgery" of the commonly accepted notion of writing.[245] However,

this act of semantic and ontological expansion is *not* an operation integral to writing. For

Malabou, it is rather by virtue of their possible *plasticity* that concepts' meanings may transform

over time:

> The semantic powers of displacement or plasticity that make a word or concept
>
> the critical and hermeneutic emissary of an epoch are thus necessarily borne by a
>
> historical tendency…All thought needs a scheme, that is, a motive, produced by

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[243] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 4.
[244] Malabou, "The End of Writing?", 432.
[245] Ibid., 435.

a rational imagination, enabling it to force open the door to an epoch and open

up exegetical perspectives suited to it. To think is always to schematize, to go

from the concept to existence by bringing a transformed concept into

existence.[246]

In "The End of Writing? Grammatology and Plasticity", Malabou stresses the fact that the

transformation or reformulation of a concept is never arbitrary. It is always a product of, and a

response to, a specific intellectual climate and historical context. Derrida's expansion of the

concept of writing took place during what, in 1967, he baptized the "epoch of writing"—a

historical moment that followed the closure of metaphysics. In that intellectual climate, which

was dominated by structuralism and linguistics, he had argued that writing (in its expanded

sense) had become even more prominent than language.[247] Under the banner of "writing",

Derrida included a wide variety of modes of inscription:

> And thus we say "writing" for all that gives rise to an inscription in general,
>
> whether it is literal or not and even if what it distributes in space is alien to the
>
> order of the voice: cinematography, choreography, of course, but also pictoral,
>
> musical, sculptural, "writing". One might also speak of athletic writing, and even
>
> with greater certainty of military or political writing in view of the techniques
>
> that govern those domains today. All this is to describe not only the system of
>
> notation secondarily connected with these activities but the essence and the
>
> content of these activities themselves. It is also in this sense that the

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[246] Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 13.
[247] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 27, 6-7.

contemporary biologist speaks of writing and *pro-gram* in relation to the most

elementary processes of information within the living cell. And, finally, whether

it has limits or not, the entire field covered by the cybernetic program will be the

field of writing.[248]

In Malabou's words, Derrida, as self-ascribed "grammatologue", sought to elevate writing to the

status of a "motor scheme" (*scheme moteur*). By "motor scheme", she intends "an encounter of a

pure image, that is, of a concept—here arche-writing, or différance—with an existent real given

to intuition—here the fecundity of the graphic sign in the form of a code, program or

inscription."[249] Thus, while a motor scheme arises within a given culture at a particular historical

moment, it requires the intentional work of a philosopher to "intuitively" sense its prevalence

and instate it as an interpretive tool. In other words, a motor scheme is plastic; it operates

according to a play of give and take, or solicitation and response.

Malabou's central argument is that writing is no longer an appropriate tool with which to

apprehend contemporary configurations of the real. As such, it is no longer the preeminent motor

scheme. We are no longer living, Malabou declares, in the epoch of writing, but instead in an era

in which plasticity has become the paradigmatic figure. Backing her argument with examples

from genetics, neurobiology, and cybernetics, she maintains that plasticity has become "the

critical and hermeneutic emissary" of our epoch. It is "the dominant motif of interpretation and

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[248] Ibid., *Of Grammatology*, 9.
[249] Malabou, "The End of Writing?", 437.

the most productive exegetic and heuristic tool of our time", as well as the "systemic law of the deconstructed real."[250]

Where Derrida and Malabou diverge is in the way he sees the substitution of one concept for another as integral to the order of writing, while she does not. For Derrida, "historicity itself is tied to the possibility of writing." Arche-writing implies a "mutation in the history of writing, in history as writing."[251] This statement implies that writing *can* incorporate the non-grammatological nature of its supplements. Malabou, however, maintains that if this were true, "it would no longer be a grammatology, but a plastology, a genesis of the plastic formation of schemes." The major aporia that Malabou identifies in *Of Grammatology* is its incapability to consider the end of writing. She goes as far as to critique Derrida's grammatological project for its "blindness" toward the nongraphic or plastic origin of arche-writing.[252]

Writing's plasticity constitutes its "nonwritten" or "nongraphic" part—that which "interrupts the trace of the trace to substitute for it for an instant the formation of the form."[253] On first thought, a deconstructionist philosopher would undoubtedly raise an eyebrow at this evocation of form that seems to imply a return to the metaphysics of presence that Derrida dedicated much of his career to deconstructing. (The Aristotelean distinction between form and matter is, after all, one of the key metaphysical tenets.) Malabou maintains, however, that there *is* a way to conceptualize form outside of metaphysics. For her, it is precisely because we are no longer living in the era of writing, but instead in the era of plasticity, that such a reconceptualization of

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[250] Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 13, 57.
[251] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 27, 8.
[252] Malabou, "The End of Writing?", 439.
[253] Ibid., 437, 438.

form is possible. In our current context of post-deconstruction or post-poststructuralism, Malabou seeks to engage "deconstruction in a new materialism."[254] The new materialism in question is rooted in the concept of plasticity. The method of plastic reading that she calls for "aspires to the metamorphosis of deconstructive reading."[255] In the words of philosopher Ian James, her work might be characterized as a "metamorphic materialist ontology."[256] Malabou thus revives, but also reconfigures, the "metaphysical concept" of plasticity not in order to reify binary oppositions, but rather in order to advance a novel conception of form as essentially mutable.[257] In this way, according to her logic, if metaphysics could be deconstructed, it is because being is essentially transformable. It, too, is *plastic*.

(A Plastic Reading of) *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*

Unlike Derrida (and Levinas), Malabou believes that "traces take form." As my exposition of *The End of Writing* demonstrated, however, for Malabou, form is plastic. In *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*, she traces the historical metamorphosis of form from Hegel to Heidegger to Derrida. There, she asks: "Is 'form' (either Form or Gestalt in Heidegger) a strictly traditional concept, or does it have a future beyond metaphysics? Can it 'cross the line' or displace itself? Can it transform itself?"[258]

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[254] http://egs.edu. (http://egs.edu/faculty/catherine-malabou). Web. Accessed March 18, 2017.
[255] Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 61, 52.
[256] James, *The New French Philosophy*, 83.
[257] Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 10.
[258] Ibid., 60, 28.

These questions lead Malabou to revisit her complex analyses of how plasticity characterizes both the process of temporization in Hegel's account of subjectivity and the principle of exchangeability at work in Heidegger's ontology in *The Future of Hegel* and *The Heidegger Change*, respectively. While a close reading of these texts exceeds the limits of this study of the dynamic interchange between plasticity and performativity, what *is* key for the present discussion is Malabou's examination of the relationship between form and difference, or form and the trace post-metaphysics and post-deconstruction. For Malabou, the implications of this question are great. The potential convertibility of trace to form corresponds to a rebellion against what she identifies as the "dematerialization and demonetarization of contemporary philosophy"—a trend that she believes began with deconstruction.[259] For, as Malabou reminds us, for Derrida, *all* theories about form (eidos or morphe) are held hostage by the metaphysics of presence.[260] In "Form and Meaning" Derrida writes:

> How could it be otherwise? As soon as we utilize the concept of form—even if
> to criticize *an other* concept of form—we inevitably have recourse to the self-
> evidence of a kernel of meaning. And the medium of this self-evidence can be
> nothing other than the language of metaphysics. In this language we know what
> "form" means, how the possibility of its variations is regulated, what its limit is,
> and in what field all imaginable objections to it are to be maintained. The system
> of oppositions in which something like form, the formality of form, can be

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[259] By "dematerialization", Malabou is referring to deconstruction's privileging of language over materiality. By "demonetarization", she implies the erasure of the "ontological economy" or exchangeability between trace and form, or between Being and being. It is this erasure that Malabou seeks to correct by instating plasticity as a motor schema. See: Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 45.
[260] Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 48.

thought, is a finite system. Moreover, it does not suffice to say that '*form*' has a

meaning for us, a center of self-evidence, or that its *essence* as such is a given

for us: in truth, this concept cannot be, and never could be, dissociated from the

concept of appearing, of meaning, of self-evidence, of essence. Only a form is

self-evident, only a form has or is *an essence*, only a form *presents itself* as such.

This is an assured point, a point that no interpretation of Platonic or Aristotelian

conceptuality can displace. All the concepts by means of which *eidos* or *morphè*

have been translated or determined refer to the theme of *presence in general*.

Form is presence itself. Formality is whatever aspect of the thing in general

presents itself, lets itself be seen, gives itself to be thought.[261]

Because it exceeds being, metaphysics, and presence, the Derridean trace can take no form. For

Derrida, dissemination is characterized by displacement, but not by metamorphosis. Malabou, on

the other hand, posits form as the "metamorphizable but immovable barrier of thought." Against

Derrida, she boldly argues that "writing will never abolish form" and that "the trace will never

pierce the figure."[262]

It is notable that to support her claim that traces can take form, Malabou provides an example not

from philosophy or theory, but from the plastic arts: that of the Italian sculptor Giuseppe Penone.

Still active today, Penone was a member of the Italian *arte povera* (i.e., poor or impoverished

art) movement that emerged in Italy in the 1960s in opposition to both European abstract

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[261] Derrida, "Form and Meaning", trans. Alan Bass, in *Margins of Philosophy*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 157-8.
[262] Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 49.

painting and American Minimalism. Like his *arte povera* colleagues, Penone makes use of

"poor", or pre-industrial, materials with the goal of collapsing the divides between humankind

and nature, and art and life. Malabou interprets Penone's work as being dedicated to "*forming*

the trace, as if the trace were the raw material of an *ultrametaphysical development of the*

concept of form and hence an *ultrametaphysical development of the understanding of sculpture*."

Unlike the traditional conception of form, this ultrametaphysical conception, which Malabou

refers to as "the other form", is one of "absolute exchangeability" or "ontological porosity."[263] In

other words, it is characterized not by presence, but by plasticity.

It is in the negotiation between these two senses of the concept of form that Malabou sees an

opening for an exchange among dialectics, destruction, and deconstruction. She sees in this space

the possibility for "a new approach toward things and texts, a new reading method." This

method, which she refers to as "plastic reading", is *structural* in that it considers the *form* of

philosophy post-destruction and deconstruction.[264] On this subject, Malabou is transparent about

her belief that it is no longer relevant for philosophers to perform deconstructive textual

analyses. She maintains that what is needed is—instead—a new form of reading (as well as a

new reading of form) that is neither purely traditional, nor purely deconstructive. The goal of

plastic reading would then be to "*reveal the form left in the text through the withdrawing of*

presence, that is, through its own deconstruction." It should show "how a text *lives its*

deconstruction."[265]

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[263] Ibid., 50.
[264] Ibid., 51.
[265] Ibid., 52.

Importantly, Malabou argues that the development of a mode of plastic reading would require the delocalization of plasticity from the fields of aesthetics and art (and in particular sculpture, to which it is generally assigned). In other words, she champions a deastheticization of form. Furthermore, Malabou ventures that this shift would also require a break with philosophy's traditional understanding of art as a mode of presentation, or of a conferring of form to presence: "The relationship to form that I am trying to reveal here is both a relation to the formal (as ideality) and the figural (as corporeality)." In order to back this argument, she draws upon Jean-François Lyotard's theory of the formal and the figural as "discourse events". In his 1971 book *Discourse, Figure*, Lyotard explained that the two terms of the title refer to the "relief of language". Malabou applauds Lyotard for not conflating art with language, but instead positioning art as "part of the referential function of language."[266] She quotes the following passage from *Discourse, Figure*:

> It is important not to misunderstand this by concluding that there is nothing but text. The world is a function of language, but language includes a world-function; all speech constitutes that which it designates in the world, as a thick object to synthesize, a symbol to decode; but these objects and symbols present themselves in an expanse in which they can be shown, and this expanse on the edge of discourse is not itself the linguistic space in which the work of meaning takes place, but a kind of worldly, plastic, atmospheric space in which one must move about, circle around things, to vary their silhouette and be able to offer such and such a meaning that was hitherto hidden.[267]

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[266] Ibid., 54, 55.

[267] Jean-François Lyotard, *Discours, Figure*, 4th edition, (Paris: Klincksieck, 1985), 83.

When articulating the relationship between the plastic and the graphic, Malabou draws upon

Lyotard's above expression "an eye at the edge of discourse."[268] In her philosophy, it is plasticity

that makes meaning visible (but not present). Plasticity is "the condition of existence of meaning

in as much as it confers its visibility upon it, without this being confused with its presence."[269]

By conceptualizing plasticity outside the field of aesthetics, Malabou wishes to emphasize the

"figural-textual depth" in philosophical discourse between metaphysical form and deconstructed

form (a mode of thinking with clear Heideggerian and Derridean undertones).[270] Plasticity thus

refers to both "a new mode of being of form and a new grasp of this mode of being" (i.e. a motor

schema).[271]

Although neither Lyotard nor Malabou employs the term, what they are both describing above is

the *performative* function of language. Linguistic performativity accounts precisely for the

capacity of speech to constitute that which it describes. As I recounted in my first chapter, Austin

initially introduced his idea of the performative utterance in contrast to the constative utterance.

While the latter form was said to describe a pre-existing state of affairs, the former was said to

actually bring such a state of affairs into existence.[272] Thus, when Lyotard discusses the

"worldly, plastic atmosphere" that is situated on the "edge of discourse", he is essentially

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[268] Ibid., 129.
[269] Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 56.
[270] Malabou's suggestion of the differentiation between metaphysical and deconstructed form recalls the deconstructive practice—initiated by Heidegger and continued by Derrida—of putting concepts under erasure. By simultaneously exposing the limits of a metaphysical concept and acknowledging its place in the history of thought, this practice serves to transform concepts.
[271] Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 56-7.
[272] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

referring to the extra-linguistic effects of linguistic performativity.[273] Here, it is interesting to

note that Lyotard's term "world-function" echoes the language used by several performance

theorists in their theorizations of performativity.[274] In addition, his assertion that the plastic space

is one in which we must "move around" in order to confer meaning on a linguistic object (i.e. a

symbol/sign/utterance), emphasizes the embodied, phenomenological nature of the

intersubjective exchange and the co-constitution of meaning between subject and interpretive

object.

Similarly, when Malabou posits plasticity as that which confers form upon meaning (elsewhere,

she describes "the poetical and aesthetic force that is the fundamental, organizing attribute of

plasticity" as "its power to configure the world"), she, too, is alluding to a performative process

of meaning production.[275] However, whereas theories of performativity emphasize the process

through which the discursive inter-relates with the material, Malabou's theory of plasticity

describes the process through which materiality gives form to meaning. In response to Malabou's

argument (itself derived from Lyotard's) that art is part of the referential function of language, I

would draw upon Derrida's astute observation that the performative does not have its referent

outside of itself or prior to itself, to propose that performative art is *self*-referential.[276] While one

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[273] Interestingly, when Lyotard did employ the term "performativity" explicitly in his famous work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, he did so not with regards to language or art, but rather to theorize the techno-scientific capitalist knowledge economy that he believes accompanied the postmodern turn. See: Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[274] James Loxley, for one, discusses performativity's "world-creating" power, while in his discussion of performativity, Timothy Gould notes the "world-creating" aegis of the Greek polis. (See: James Loxley, *Performativity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p.72, and Timothy Gould, "The Unhappy Performative" in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 1995), 32.

[275] Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?,* trans. Sebastian Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 39.

[276] Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context" in *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 1-23.

could argue that all language and all art is performative (and this is not untrue if one follows

Austin's conclusion—which resulted in the collapse of his initial constative-performative binary

opposition—that constative utterances also involve the performance of perlocutionary acts, while

performative utterances *describe* as well as perform), some language and some art is more self-

consciously so.[277] Performative language, like performative art, consciously foregrounds the

processes of its meaning-production. In the words of art historian Amelia Jones, performative

artworks "convey the signs of their own fabrication."[278]

The Performativity of *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*

Despite Malabou's dismissal of performativity and her claims that literature cannot deconstruct

ontology, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* is a highly performative text. In this section, I will

demonstrate that she employs many performative strategies—through language—to instate

plasticity as a motor scheme. This point is suggested by philosopher Clayton Crockett in his

foreword to *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*. There, Crockett writes that with this book,

"plasticity replaces Derridean writing as a motor scheme by which to think and *do* philosophy"

(my emphasis).[279] The choice of the verb "to do" clearly frames plasticity as an action. Echoing

the title of the inaugural text on the performative, Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, it

invites us to situate Malabou's praxis within performance philosophy.

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[277] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 1962.

[278] Amelia Jones, *Material Traces: Time and the Gesture in Contemporary Art*. Catalogue Text for exhibition. Available online at: http://ellengallery.concordia.ca/.(http://ellengallery.concordia.ca/piste-de-reflexion/les-traces-materielles-la-temporalite-et-le-geste-en-art-contemporain/?lang=en). Accessed March 27, 2017.

[279] Clayton Crockett, preface to *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, by Catherine Malabou, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), xvi.

This "doing" of philosophy is continued in the body of the text. *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* is a double portrait—one of the philosopher who wrote it and one of the central concept around which her work revolves. Described by Crockett as an "intellectual autobiography" and by Malabou as a "conceptual portrait", the book is written in the first person.[280] In a sense, then, it is at once an autobiography and a biography. As it chronicles Malabou's intellectual history by revisiting her previous books on her major influences (Hegel, Heidegger, Derrida, and Freud) and tracing the process through which plasticity became a motor scheme, it may also be read as a *genealogy* of this concept. As Brenna Bahndar and Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller write in their review of *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, "in this book, Malabou looks back at her own travels with plasticity, tracing both the return to herself that is essential to Hegelian ideas of subjectivity—a presence—while disrupting that presence, the *now* in which she writes, exploring the gaps between metaphysics and its other."[281] I would suggest that, in returning to her previous writings on plasticity, Malabou performatively enacts the return to self proper to Hegel's account of the constitution of subjectivity—a process which she puts on show for her readers. (Here, we may recall that while for Austin and Derrida performativity is primarily a theory about the production of meaning, for Butler it accounts for the process through which subjectivities are formed.) Malabou does this with a variety of strategies including: the use of image, metaphor, analogy, theatrical, artistic and literary allusions, and the direct address of her readers.

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[280] Crockett and Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, xi, 2.

[281] Brenna Bhandar and Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller, "Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction (Review)", review of *Plasticity and the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*, by Catherine Malabou, *Theory and Event* 14, 1 (2011). Accessed March 4, 2017, doi: 10.1353/tae.2011.0008.

Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing opens with an image: that of the transformational or articulated

mask. This type of mask, used by Indigenous peoples in North America, China, Siberia, and New

Zealand during ritual dances, is composed of two sides separated by a hinge. Behind the first

divided face lies another mask, also divided. As such, these masks are in a sense "masks of

masks."[282] For structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, transformational masks are

composed of a "plastic" and a "graphic" component.[283] The plastic element consists of all

aspects that compose the face and body of the mask, while the graphic one incorporates all the

ornamentation or decoration. For Lévi-Strauss, these two components exist in a relationship of

functional opposition, to the point that they transform one another's modes of signification. For

Malabou, this implies that transformational masks "reveal the interchangeability or conversion

between plastic and graphic, image and sign, body and inscription." As such, she believes that

they are perfect metaphors for representing "*the differentiated structure of all form* and hence the

formal or figural unity of all difference and articulation."[284]

Malabou also draws upon the image of the transformational mask to illustrate her own variegated

"philosophical personality." She understands her body of thought (informed by Hegel,

Heidegger, Levi-Strauss, Freud, Derrida, and contemporary neuroscience) as an intersection of

two logics of negation. The first is dialectical (and thus Hegelian) and the second, deconstructive

(and thus Heideggerian and Derridean). However, for Malabou it is not simply a case of a

common dialectical opposition between dialectics and differentiation; there is also a temporal

differentiation at work, which implies that thinking negativity always takes place in multiple,

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[282] Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 2.
[283] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, vol. 1, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 261.
[284] Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 3, 2.

synchronic temporalities. When Malabou performs the Hegelian return to self, then, destruction

and deconstruction are also at play. These three movements transform one another. It is in this

way that the artifact of the transformational mask serves as an analogy for the "dislocated" face

of Malabou's philosophy.[285]

In the end, though, Malabou chose not to be consumed by negativity, opting instead to focus on

transformation:

> I gave up on making the negative, destruction, time(s) or plasticity itself my
>
> subjects to focus instead on discovering the metamorphic structure that
>
> authorizes the shift from one era of thought and history to another. This
>
> metamorphic structure did not belong entirely to the dialectic, destruction, or
>
> deconstruction, although it articulates all three of them. I devoted myself to
>
> considering the most mobile aspect of the mask: its transformability. This is how
>
> I eventually came to recognize and accept that my question is about
>
> transformation.[286]

In order to write the metamorphic structure of philosophy (or in Malabou's terms, the

"metabolism of philosophy"), Malabou adopts the rhetorical device of the metaphor.[287] The very

title of her book employs such a figure of speech; plasticity is introduced as a motor schema at

the *dusk* of writing. Dusk is such a common and rich literary motif that it reaches the status of a

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[285] Ibid., 4, 10.
[286] Ibid., 27.
[287] Ibid., 27.

trope. Conscious of this, Malabou offers her readers several interpretations of her title. Her first

proposal is that dusk might evoke the famous sunset in the Introduction to Hegel's *Elements of*

the Philosophy of Right.[288] This association, Malabou notes, would conflate plasticity with the

dialectical sublation of writing. Another interpretation would recall Freud's characterization of

the melancholic state of insomnia as a kind of dusk, in which case plasticity could never fully

supplant writing.[289] Another reading, still, would emphasize Lévi-Strauss' evocation of dusk in

Tristes Tropiques when describing his arrival in the Doldrums—a region whose hostile

environment he associated with the transition from the Old World to the New World.[290] Here,

dusk would represent the frontier between writing and plasticity. The association of dusk that

speaks most to Malabou, however, is Heidegger's. In "Language in the Poem" (in *On the Way to*

Language), Heidegger associated dusk with metamorphosis: "From another sense and another

image, evening transmutes…thinking…"[291] It is for this reason that Malabou sees in dusk an apt

image for dialectic, destruction, and deconstruction; each one, she maintains, "appears as a

movement of transformative rupture."[292]

The dusk of writing also corresponds to the *dawn* of plasticity, which implies, for Malabou, not

only both the creation and the annihilation of form, but also both the creation and annihilation of

presence. Plasticity is a "structure of transformation and destruction of presence and the

present." Unlike in Derrida's lexicon, in Malabou's parlance presence signals change, which

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[288] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W, Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
[289] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia", *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1981, 1919), 17:57.
[290] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Russell (New York: Athenaeum, 1968), 77-78.
[291] Martin Heidegger, "Language in the Poem", in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper One, 1982), 172.
[292] Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 17.

involves the process of coming into image. As such, plasticity confers not only form, but also *visibility* on meaning. In Malabou's words, "to be present is to enter into *phantasia*, that is, into the very *mobility that shows (itself)*."[293] In order to back this argument, Malabou quotes Heidegger, who wrote that for Heraclitus, "what is imagelike does not consist in what is fabricated, like a copied imitation. The Greek sense of 'image'—if we may use this word at all—is 'coming to the fore', phantasia, understood as 'coming into presence'."[294]

Thus, in employing metaphor to institute plasticity at the dusk of writing, Malabou's text is both performative *and* plastic. It is performative because it enacts what it describes. It is plastic because it gives image and form to thought. From this, two important conclusions can be drawn: 1) both performativity and plasticity involve processes of transformation and 2) these concepts are not mutually exclusive.

The conceptual substitution of the Derridean notion of writing with the concept of plasticity is not a negation of deconstruction, but—again—a way to examine the form that a text takes post-deconstruction. The title of the first section of *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, "Variations I, for Jacques Derrida", expresses this debt. The choice of the term "variations" is a clear musical allusion to the structure of theme and variation common in both classical and jazz music. As Malabou states on the first page of her book, the work is situated at a specific moment in which "the global problem of the end of writing and a personal moment of mourning coincide."[295]

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[293] Ibid., 9, 30.

[294] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, David Farrel Krell, and Frank A. Capuzzi (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987) 3:29. For a more extensive account of Malabou's reading of image, presence, and change in Heidegger's phenomenological ontology, see: Catherine Malabou, *The Heidegger Change: On the Fantastic in Philosophy*, trans. Peter Skafish (New York: SUNY Press, 2012).

[295] Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 1.

Although Malabou does not say who she is mourning, we may infer that she is referring to Derrida, who passed away on October 8, 2004, months before *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* was published.

Another instantiation of the performativity of *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* is Malabou's recurrent direct addresses to her readers. "Entering the evening dusk", she writes in the first few pages of the book, "I ask that you read these pages—the story of the past they tell, the future that they portend—the same way that the shutters on these masks fold out…" This appeal is echoed on the following page: "To enter this twilight, I ask that you read my books as forming a single, continuous attempt to situate the symbolic rupture between the plastic and the graphic component of thought for each face of the philosophical works or problems under consideration." Then, two pages later, she once again addresses us: "As we enter the falling dusk, I ask that you consider my mask as an object composed of several aspects soldered down the middle by a difference, or even an opposition."[296] These repeated appeals to the reader take the form of performative speech acts. Written in the second person and structured as direct addresses, they demonstrate the author's consciousness and solicitation of her reader, or audience.

Malabou's awareness of her audience is echoed in another statement she makes early in her text. When discussing the various thinkers and systems of thought that influence her philosophy, Malabou uses the expression "the actors and their parts."[297] This use of theatrical vocabulary to describe a philosophical project that seeks to delocalize a concept from the field of the arts and

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[296] Ibid., 2, 3, 5.
[297] Ibid., 6.

bestow on it an ontological sense, recalls Austin's use of the fictional in his theory of performativity that vehemently excluded fiction. I have already discussed another instance of this contradiction in Malabou's work: despite the fact that she seeks to deastheticize form, she still makes recourse to the work of sculptor Giuseppe Penone in order to demonstrate the very capacity of traces to take form.

How to Do Things with an Afterword

Malabou's use of examples from literature to communicate her philosophical project is continued in the "Afterword" to *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*. There, when explaining why the book is both a conceptual portrait and an autobiography, Malabou addresses the (somewhat surprising) subject of "the impossibility of fleeing." She aligns this problem, which she expresses alternately as the question of "how to escape within closure itself", with Freud's notion of the drive, in which attempts at flight manifest as phobias.[298] For Malabou, the only possible response in such situations is formation, transformation, or metamorphosis. She writes:

> This structure, the structure of the formation of a pathway as a "way out" in the
>
> absence of a "way out" is central to my book. I name "plasticity" the logic and
>
> the economy of such a formation: the movement of the constitution of an exit,
>
> there, where no such exit is possible. To put it differently, plasticity renders

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[298] Ibid., 66.

possible the appearance or formation of alterity where the other is absent.

Plasticity is the form of alterity without transcendence.[299]

It is because of its openness to alterity that, Malabou argues, plasticity can intervene in twentieth-century philosophy's discussions of Otherness and the outside. However, whereas in Levinas' ethics, the encounter with the Other consists of a movement toward the exterior, in Malabou's philosophy, this possibility of alterity/exteriority is found within. Because of her plasticity, the subject can transform herself. To exemplify her theory, Malabou once again takes recourse to literature. This time, she cites one of the most famous instances of transformation in classical poetry: that of Daphne in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In the epic poem *Apollo and Daphne*, we will recall, the nymph escapes Apollo by praying to her Father, the river god Peneus, to transform herself into a laurel tree. Malabou recounts the philosophical significance of this event in the following way:

> This moment of transformation is also a moment of destruction: the giving of
>
> form goes hand and hand with its suppression. All that remains of the former
>
> body is a heart that beats for a while under the bark. Or some tears which
>
> quickly dry. The formation of a new individual is indeed this explosion of form,
>
> an explosion that clears the way and allows the pursuer at the same time to
>
> suddenly recognize irreducible otherness.[300]

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[299] Ibid., 66.
[300] Ibid., 68.

For Malabou, then, Daphne's transformation exemplifies the plasticity of the subject. What it also demonstrates is the way in which plasticity enables the perception of alterity and otherness. In addition—and Malabou does not stress this point—it suggests that plasticity, like performativity, is relational. In Ovid's poem, Daphne's transformation is made possible by an other (her father), and (as Malbou remarks) her own transformation makes her perceptible as an other for Apollo.

Another famous example of this trope, this time in modern literature, is to be found in Franz Kafka's 1915 novella *The Metamorphosis*. This work was originally published under the German title *Die Vervandlung* which, again, is one of three recurring Heideggerian terms on which Malabou focuses in *The Heidegger Change: On the Fantastic in Philosophy* (the others being "Wandel" and "Wandlung"). For Malabou, Kafka's dark, existential tale of the traveling salesman Gregor Samsa who is transformed into a giant insect exemplifies the impossibility of transcendence post-metamorphosis. Locked in his room and rejected by his own family, Samsa is forced to endure his lonely existence until he eventually dies. The French poet and theorist Maurice Blanchot reads the fate of Kafka's protagonist in the following terms, paralleling Samsa's state with the state of Dasein:

> Gregor's state is the very state of being that cannot withdraw from existence,
> and for which existing means being forever condemned to descend into
> existence. Turned into vermin, he carried on living in the mode of "the fall," he
> sinks into animal solitude, and he gets closer, as near as possible, to the

absurdity and the impossibility of living. But what happens? He continues,

precisely, to live.[301]

Malabou reminds us that Freud, too, turned to examples from art when developing his ideas

about the impossibility of fleeing. In the essay "The Moses of Michelangelo" (originally

published anonymously in 1914 in *Imago*, a journal about art and psychoanalysis, under the title

"Der Moses des Michelangelo"), Freud provides his interpretation of this classical sculpture

from the high Italian Renaissance. Commissioned by Pope Julius II for his own tomb in 1505

and completed by Michelangelo in 1515, the work was inspired by a description of Exodus in the

Vulgate (the Latin translation of the Old Testament). Freud bases his interpretation of

Michelangelo's work on the subject's psychological state. He writes:

> The Moses we have reconstructed will never leap up nor cast the Tables from
>
> him. What we see before us is not the inception of a violent action but the
>
> remains of a movement that has already taken place. In his first transport of fury,
>
> Moses desired to act, to spring up and take vengeance and forget the Tables, but
>
> he has overcome the temptation, and he will now remain seated and still, in his
>
> subdued rage and in his pain mingled with contempt.[302]

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[301] Ibid., 71-2. This is Malabou's free translation of Maurice Blanchot in *De Kafka à Kafka*, (Paris: Galliard, 1981), 73.

[302] Sigmund Freud, "The Moses of Michelangelo", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis. 1st Edition, 1955), 13:229.

[302] Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 73.

Freud's reading applauds what he sees as Moses' self-restraint. His article positions control over

one's passions as the highest possible mental achievement. To this willful act, Malabou gives the

name "ethical plasticity". Such an ethical plasticity, however, would be configured very

differently from a Levinasian or Derridean ethics. Because Levinas' and Derrida's concepts of

hospitality and messianity are modeled on the logic of the trace, Malabou believes that they

operate according to a kind of *counter-plasticity*.[303] What she wishes to accomplish in the wake

of deconstruction is to reconfigure the trace as convertible to form.

Within this new materialist reformulation of the relationship of trace to form, Malabou locates

the foundation for a new conception of ontological difference. While she does not elaborate this

theory in the concise volume, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* (the book is only eighty-two

pages long), she does conclude with some remarks about its implications for the thinking of

identity. One result of the conceptual substitution of plasticity for grammatology is, according to

Malabou, the recasting of identity as "something mobile, whose many frontiers, psychic as well

as political, are constantly being drawn, erased, redrawn, and negotiated." [304] A few pages later,

she continues with this train of thought:

> At this moment of technologically conditioned sexual, biological, and political
>
> self-fashioning, at the moment of the plasticity of all identity, these questions
>
> find their fantastic actuality. An entirely new vision of difference can thus take

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[303] Ibid., 73.
[304] Ibid., 71, 77.

form, as long as philosophy faces up to the growing pains of its current mutation.[305]

In the last paragraphs of *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, Malabou becomes self-reflexive, giving her readers a window into the "identity" of the work's author. There, she shares her reasoning for structuring her book as an autobiography. Anticipating charges of narcissism, she asserts that "the book must be read as a narrative, written by a fictitious subject, whose reality is of no importance." Switching into the first person, she explains this need with the following words:

> I am just trying to show how a being, in its fragile and finite mutability, can experience the materiality of existence and transform ontological meaning. The impossibility of fleeing means first of all the impossibility of fleeing oneself. It is within the very frame of this impossibility that I propose a philosophical change of perspective that focuses on closure as its principal object. Neural organization reveals the constant richness of possibilities that animate the finite and auto-organized nervous system. *The Brain That Changes Itself*: this recent book's title expresses metaphorically, according to me, via neural plasticity, the very situation of the philosopher today. A brain that changes itself. That is exactly what "I" am.[306]

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305 Ibid., 78.
306 Ibid., 81-82.

I argue, then, that in *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, the author-function Catherine Malabou performatively enacts her mutable identity for her readers. As I have demonstrated, Malabou's main goal in this book is to delocalize the concept of plasticity from the fields of art and literature, and to instate it as a motor schema within the field of philosophy. In Malabou's own words, her work details "the moment when the motif of metamorphosis stops designating a merely mythological or fictitious reality in order to take on an ontological sense, explicitly in the history of philosophy."[307] It is thus through an act of performative deixis that Malabou instates plasticity as motor schema; she both describes the current philosophical landscape and ushers in a hermeneutic tool with which to apprehend it. Paradoxically, however, she accomplishes this only by drawing on examples from the plastic and literary arts. She needs to create a fictitious character to move plasticity out of the realm of fiction. She requires metaphor to escape metaphor. From this we may conclude that ontology depends upon literature and art; we cannot speak of essences without examples of expressions of existence. These expressions, it is essential to add, are performatively enacted through language and through the body.

"Sujet: Femme"

I don't receive many letters anymore. Email has, of course, taken over. But this is not the place for analogue nostalgia or romantic narratives about the decline of communication technologies.

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[307] Ibid., 68.

It is the place for illuminating and evaluating conceptual shifts in contemporary philosophy and for inventing new tools with which to apprehend these metamorphic structures—a place for teasing out the intricate ties between performativity and plasticity.

When I finally open Malabou's letter and read her article, I am surprised at how little mention she makes of performativity (or of plasticity, for that matter). In fact, the article is only peripherally concerned with the subject. As its title makes clear, Malabou's subject is, rather, woman. That is to say, it both *is* and *is not* woman, just as woman both is and is not the subject of Derrida's text, *Eperons, Les Styles de Nietzsche*—the other subject of Malabou's article. In her opening paragraph, Malabou cites the two proclamations around which Derrida structures his reading of Nietzsche: "It is woman who will be my subject" / "Woman, then, will not have been my subject" ("La femme sera mon subject" / "La femme n'aura donc pas été mon sujet").[308] Playing on the double sense of the word "subject" as both subjectivity and the content/matter of a statement, Derrida suggests that woman can only be defined as a negative subjectivity; her indeterminacy as coherent subject implies that she cannot be ontologized. However, this fact also enables her to disrupt the phallogocentric economy of truth.

In "Sujet: femme", Malabou stresses the commonality between this non-essentialist conception of woman and the anti-essentialism of contemporary "postfeminism" and gender studies (by which she intends a movement that began with Simone de Beauvoir and culminated in Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity). While Malabou acknowledges that both the Nietzschean-Derridean lineage and the De Beauvoirian-Butlerian lineage seek to emancipate

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[308] Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

women, she believes that in both cases the efforts backfire. Her argument is that the deprivation of essence constitutes a form of ontological violence.[309]

In order to institute woman-as-subject, Malabou adds the following third component to Derrida's dyad ("woman will be my subject" and "woman will thus not have been my subject"): "woman negates this negation herself" (la femme nie cette négation elle-même).[310] In doing so, she posits woman not as a passive non-subject, but as an active *negative subject*. Anticipating her reader's reluctance to accept this proposed return to dialectics post-deconstruction, she specifies that her goal is not to revive essentialism, but rather to develop a non-essentialist theory of the essence of woman. By the end of her introduction, the subjects of Malabou's article emerge as: 1) the dialectical essence of woman, and 2) the dialectical plasticity of essence.[311]

At this point, Malabou reminds her reader that the concept of an identity or idea defined negatively is by no means new. Among the most memorable instantiations of this mechanism within the history of Continental philosophy is Sartre's essay "Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate". This piece was written in 1944 shortly after the liberation of Paris from German occupation. An excerpt appeared in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1945 and the full text was published in French 1946 and translated into English in 1948.[312] In it, Sartre writes that: "The Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew." In other words, "it is the anti-Semite who makes the Jew." The Jew emerges out of the ontological violence perpetrated on him, but he

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[309] Catherine Malabou, "Sujet: Femme", *de(s)générations des féminismes*, numéro 21, (2014): 29.
[310] Ibid., 29. All translations of this article are my own.
[311] Ibid., 30.
[312] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Essay on the Etiology of Hate*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books), 1948.

forms his own essence in response to it: "the authentic Jew makes himself a Jew, in the face of all..."[313]

Returning to *Eperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche*, Malabou explains that in this this text, Derrida links the question of woman to the question of style, and asks himself whether these questions are not one and the same. Within Nietzsche's corpus, he identifies a double discourse on both questions—one essentialist and one anti-essentialist—which corresponds to a double discourse on the Jew. Derrida's text revolves around two of Nietzsche's statements about women. The first is the opening line of *Beyond Good and Evil*, in which Nietzsche asks whether truth is a woman: "Supposing truth to be a woman—what?" The second is the suggestion in *Twilight of the Idols* that the idea "becomes a woman" (die Idee wird Weib).[314] Both are interpreted in two, contradictory manners by Nietzsche himself—one essentialist and misogynist, and the other anti-essentialist and potentially feminist.

With regard to the first interpretation, to say that truth is a woman is to suggest that the essence of truth is comparable to the nature of woman. And for Nietzsche, the history of truth amounts to a history of lies, and the essence of woman to falsity, illusion, seduction, lies, dissimulation, and appearance. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche extends this chain of associations and equates woman (as error and illusion) with Christianity (as the Occident's symbol of truth). Lastly, because the violence enacted by the idea, by Christianity, and by truth is a form of castration,

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[313] Ibid., 49, 99.

[314] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 31, and Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 20.

woman, too, is configured as castrating. It is thus through the above logic that Nietzsche's

misogyny takes the predicable form of acting as an apparent palliative to castration anxiety.[315]

The second interpretation of the above statements reveals an entirely different Nietzsche. Here,

woman is still associated with lies, seduction, and dissimulation; however, these traits are not

considered negative, violent, or castrating. Instead, they are viewed as generative. Woman is

aligned with artistic mimesis because she is said to enact a form of creation based on the model

of a copy without an original. In Nietzsche's words "woman is so artistic" ("das Weib ist so

artistisch").[316]

For Derrida, this reading offers a conception of woman as non-subject, yet as affirmative power.

Through acts of dissimulation, woman denies her essence as liar. In so doing, she both refuses to

be defined negatively by man and affirms her own (non)identity. What emerges from this second

reading is a figure of the woman-artist or woman-as-style. For Nietzsche, woman is "the name

given to the style of truth." However, "there is no such thing then as a Being or an essence of the

woman" since woman is simulation (copy without original). It is in this way that everything

comes full circle and Derrida may state that woman both is and is not his subject ("It is woman

who will be my subject" / "Woman, then, will not have been my subject."[317]

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[315] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 21, 23.
[316] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Book V, Aphorism 361: The Problem of the Actor (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).
[317] Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 121, 34.

For Malabou, Derrida's analysis falls short in that it lacks a third movement to complete the dialectical sublation.[318] Woman-as-subject and woman-as-non-subject coexist, but there is no place in this logic for woman-as-negative-subject. Malabou argues that the link Nietzsche establishes between woman and artistry based on the shared property of simulation—a link that Derrida accepts and follows—"is the expression of a highly repressive and normative ontology." This ontology (which is in fact an anti-ontology in that it is anti-essentialist) is violent in that, by associating woman with dissimulation, it robs her of an essence or a referent.[319]

It is here that Malabou finally refers explicitly, albeit briefly, to performativity. She recalls that, in *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler theorized gender parody according to a comparable model of imitation without original. Malabou quotes Butler's famous discussion of the practice of drag: "The notion of gender parody defended here does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is of the very definition of an original."[320] Malabou's problem with this thinking is that it purports to deconstruct the model-copy schema, yet it refers to it as contra-structure. In her opinion, art after Nietzsche has become "the paradigmatic expression of all non-essentialist conceptions of gender identity." Her opinion of this "artistic" understanding of the absence of essence is unambiguous: It is, in her words, "catastrophic" for women, for gender identity, and for artists.[321] In order to defend her statement,

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[318] In Hegel's speculative philosophy, dialectical reasoning is composed of three steps or movements. The first consists of a moment of understanding, in which concepts appear to have a stable definition. The second consists of the dialectical or "negatively rational" moment, which is marked by instability. Here, a thesis and antithesis interact in what Hegel describes as a process of "sublation" —the English translation of the German verb "aufheben", which holds the double meaning of both negating/canceling and preserving. The third moment consists of a "speculative" or "positively rational" moment which negates the contradiction and results in a "determinate nothingness" in which a new content arises. For the most extensive account of Hegel's dialectical method, see Part I of his *The Encyclopaedia Logic* (namely EL §79, 80, 81, 82).
[319] Malabou, "Sujet: Femme", 34, 35.
[320] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (Routledge: New York, 1990), 188.
[321] Malabou, "Sujet: Femme", 135.

she recalls that in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche also drew a parallel between the Jew and the artist, thereby associating the former with women. For her, it is just as dangerous to associate women with actresses as is it to associate Jews with actors.[322]

In Malabou's opinion, Nietzsche, Derrida, and Butler are all guilty of an ontological error. In short, they conflate Being (*to on, Sein*) and essence (*ousia, Wesen*). It was Hegel, Malabou reminds us, who stressed the difference between these two terms. In (Malabou's reading of) Hegel's philosophy, a subject's essence is defined by its capacity to transform/be transformed. In her words, "essence is the past of Being, its originary power of transformation." Said differently, it is "the plasticity of being, being as plasticity."[323] (This is why, as she argues elsewhere, while plasticity may manifest in art, it is first and foremost an ontological principle. Again, for Malabou, metaphysics is the primary and most fundamental discourse.)

These arguments made, Malabou may add a third moment to the Derridean dyad "la femme sera mon subject" / "la femme n'aura pas été mon sujet" and complete the dialectic by proclaiming that: "woman negates this negation herself" ("la femme nie cette négation elle-même"). It is because of her plasticity that the (female) subject can negate the negation of her being and instate herself as negative subject. Returning momentarily to Sartre's discussion of Jewishness, Malabou speculates that the Sartrean definition of plasticity would be "être en situation" (being in a situation). In her logic, to make oneself by negating a negation is the ultimate feminist act. For just as Sartre argues that the anti-Semite makes the Jew but the Jew makes himself a subject,

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[322] It is notable to mention that Nietzsche's discussion of Jews and women is contained within the chapter of *The Gay Science* dedicated to the problem of the actor. See: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Book V, Aphorism 361: The Problem of the Actor, (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).
[323] Malabou, "Sujet: Femme", 36, 37.

Malabou suggests that although the chauvinist makes the woman, "after that, it is woman who makes herself subject, who becomes her own subject."[324] The voluntarism implied in this existentialist conception of agency clearly implies a return to a humanist philosophy rooted in the notion of free will. (Here, it is notable to recall that one of Sartre's key books, *Existentialism and Humanism*, was first presented as a public lecture at the Club Maintenant in Paris in 1945 under the more declarative title "L'Existentialisme est un humanisme" ("Existentialism is a Humanism").[325] This modernist conception of agency and subjectivity in which one can actively control one's choices was radically deconstructed by postmodernist theorists. Indeed, as my previous chapters have detailed, in the Derridean-Butlerian lineage, performativity is recast as a non-subjectivist theory of agency. In this respect, Malabou's theory of the plasticity of gender is incompatible with a poststructuralist theory of gender performativity.

With just one mention of the word "performativity", Malabou communicates her rejection of the concept/theory. To expose her point of view, she takes us down a rabbit hole (one so typical of deconstruction) and invites us to read her reading Derrida reading Heidegger reading Nietzsche, with Hegel and Sartre in the background, and Butler in the contrechamp. But what is the precise nature of the relationship between performativity and plasticity? It is clear that, for Malabou, plasticity exceeds the simulation of performativity, and provides refuge from what she considers the violence of self-artistry. There is, then, something radically progressive and novel in Malabou's thought, and at the same time something very reactionary in that it returns to previous modes of understanding.

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[324] Ibid., 38.
[325] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* (London: Methuen Publishing, 1948/1973).

With plasticity, Malabou seeks to usher in a new philosophical conception of identity as mutable, changeable, transformable. As my previous chapters have argued, however, theories of performativity posit identity in similar terms. For this reason, I argue, against Malabou, that plasticity does not negate or supersede performativity (a double negation, I know). Like all concepts (and here I agree with Malabou), performativity is plastic. As my first three chapters on the history of the concept demonstrated, it has transformed multiple times through its interdisciplinary travels. From its inception in Austin's Anglo-American philosophy of language to its deconstructive reconfiguration in the continental thought of Jacques Derrida, to its transposition to the field of gender studies where Judith Butler mobilizes it to account for the way in which iterative performances of stylized actions come to signify gender, performativity has been formed, unformed, and reformed.

Conclusion: Sticks and Stones, Words and Bones

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

When, in 1862, *The Christian Recorder*—the official newspaper of the African Methodist Episcopal Church—printed the above adage, the message it wished to communicate to its readership was clear: If children could cultivate an internal sense of strength and integrity, they would not be hurt by name-calling and other taunts. As noble as this pacifist message is and was, however, the saying only exists because of the potential for violence it aims to abate. Words can and do hurt us; they are tools, but they are also weapons.

It was precisely language's power to wield extra-linguistic effects that Austin pointed to when he introduced his notion of the performative utterance in the 1950s. Conceptualizing speech as a form of action, he replaced the prevailing belief that all utterances must be evaluated by their truth conditions with the idea that they could be comprehended according to the success or failure of the action they perform. Pain and humiliation are, in Austin's parlance, some of the possible perlocutionary effects of the illocutionary speech acts of racial slurs, misgendering, hate speech, and other forms of verbal abuse.

The above adage is somewhat contradictory, however. While it seeks to empower children by denying the power of their aggressors' speech acts, it implies that this can only be achieved by uttering another speech act: by *repeating* the adage, the child may engender a world in which he or she is immune to verbal abuse. In this way, the adage becomes an incantation. It was the citational, iterative nature of all linguistic enunciations that Derrida highlighted in his critical reading of Austinian speech act theory, which, in 1971, put the concept of performativity onto the

map of French philosophy. In Austin's relegation of fictional discourse to the margins of thought due to its parasitic status in relation to non-fictional discourse, Derrida identified a form of theoretical violence. And, as Butler's work on gender performativity demonstrated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, theoretical violence is never far removed from material violence. Building on Derrida's theory of the iterability of the semiotic signifier to propound a theory of the iterability of the embodied gesture, Butler's theory contested dimorphic models that construed gender as the cultural expression of an interior and metaphysically prior essence. In so doing, it denaturalized the relationship between sex and gender, thereby positing the latter as contingent and malleable, and the former as the sedimented effect of ritual processes. Thus, while words may not make or break our bones, per se, discourse does act on the materiality of our bodies, and through iterative discursive and embodied acts, the body's sex is performatively constituted. It was this ritual aspect of performativity that Richard Schechner highlighted in his theorization of aesthetic and social drama. Scripted and twice-behaved, performance was said to be about doing and redoing—about repetition and reproduction.

My initial interest in performativity's intellectual history was born out of what I perceived as a lack of clarity in contemporary understandings of the concept, and a discrepancy among its uses in different disciplines. On many occasions, I heard my colleagues in the art world describe a given work as performative, only to respond—when I asked them to elaborate on their use of the term—with a tautology: the work was performative because it was "like a performance". Seeking to illuminate the precise ways in which the performative functions of language relate to the performativity of gender identity and the performative quality of performance art, I set out to retrace performativity's transdisciplinary travels from the philosophy of language to

deconstruction, to gender and queer theory, to performance studies, and finally to performance philosophy. Rehearsing this history, I began to understand that—in specific and unique ways— each of the major theorists of the performative enacted their theories in a performative manner. In other words, their philosophies constituted modes of performative praxes. In framing their texts as rhetorical performances, I began to appreciate performativity's potential to relax the strict, ontological borders between philosophy and performance art, and to suggest the possibility of a reciprocity of influence between the two practices.

My interest in the cross-pollination between philosophy and performance turned out to be very timely. The Performance Philosophy network was established in the year that I began my doctoral studies, and it will celebrate its fifth anniversary in the year that I defend my dissertation. In my introduction, I framed my research methodologically within this emerging, interdisciplinary field, and argued that, as philosophy becomes self-conscious of its own performativity, and begins to acknowledge its debt to the arts, it is crucial that we develop a more refined understanding of the concept.

In my first chapter, I framed Austin's research within his self-described philosophy of linguistic phenomenology, and established links among his concept of performativity, the scenes of its production, and the means of its dissemination. I demonstrated that the dialogical, intersubjective nature of the contexts in which Austin developed his theory of the performative utterance are reflected in the dramaturgy of *How to Do Things with Words*. Written in the temporality of the now, the book restages Austin's thought processes for his readers. In the process, we become spectators to the dramatization of his ideas.

In my second chapter, I argued that it is by virtue of the interdependency of the oral and written disseminations of "Signature Event Context" that Derrida was able to performatively enact his contestation of logocentrism. I demonstrated that that "SEC"'s performativity is materialized in its experimental mise en page, and suggested that this fact invites us to locate in this key, early Derridean work on semiotics and linguistics the foundations for a theory of materiality and—by extension—embodiment.

My third and fourth chapters explored the subjects of materiality and embodiment in relation to debates about performativity in feminist philosophy and gender theory. There, I focused on the work of two women philosophers—one American and one French, one who is famous for popularizing performativity, and one whose reputation is growing for contesting it—who spoke at Performance Philosophy's 2014 symposium, "Theatre, Performance, Philosophy: Crossings and Transfers in Contemporary Anglo-American Thought".

In my third chapter, I questioned how Butler's reflections on the performativity of our embodied gestures might be applied to a reading of the somatic dimensions of her own rhetorical performances. Taking as my object of study her 2014 lecture, "When Gesture Becomes Event", I considered the relationship between performativity and theatricality by tending to the spectator's role in the intersubjective exchange, while comparing the perceptual experience of a live and mediated lecture.

In my fourth chapter, I returned to France, so to speak, to question the implications of Catherine Malabou's concept of plasticity in relation to theories of performativity. Through a textual analysis of Malabou's texts on the Derridean notion of writing, I demonstrated that, despite her claim that plasticity has come to supplant performativity, she relies on performative strategies to usher in plasticity as motor schema. Reading her work on writing in dialogue with her critique of gender theory's anti-essentialism, I suggested that performativity and plasticity overlap in their mutual configuration of identity as transformable and mutable.

Engaged in performative praxes that *do* things with words, each of the four philosophers discussed in this dissertation produced rhetorical performances that may be said to turn philosophy into an action, an art. While my first two chapters focused on performativity's potential for discursive resistance, my second two chapters demonstrated that it also offers possibilities for embodied transgression. Indeed, for feminist philosophers, the question of gender becomes intimately linked to the question of style, which opens avenues for further research into how an author's body (*corps*) may be said to be inscribed in the body of her text (*corpus*), and how her *gender* relates to her use of the performative *genre*. To further this research, we might, for example, put conceptions of the feminine in philosophy into dialogue with theories of gender performativity to ask what a contemporary form of "écriture feminine performative" would resemble—a project I will undertake in my postdoctoral research.

Performativity accounts for the processes through which language comes to consummate the action that it describes, and through which meaning is produced and identities are enacted. These performances occur on and off stage, in representation, and in everyday life. My study of Austin's,

Derrida's, Butler's, and Malabou's permutations of the performative has demonstrated the iterability, malleability, and—in the words of Malabou—the plasticity of the concept. It has also demonstrated that, when Judith Butler and Cindy Sherman "meet" at the latter's *Retrospective*, their respective conceptions of performativity—although articulated with different languages—are not as estranged as they might seem. Language—like gender and like art—is a relational affair. Performativity, then, speaks as much about how selves or bodies perform as how they are read, received, perceived, and interpreted, by others.

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Figure 1.

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 87*, 1981.
Chromogenic colour print. 24/48 inches.

Figure 2.

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 93*, 1981.
Chromogenic colour print. 24/48 inches.

Figure 3.

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 90*, 1981.
Chromogenic colour print. 24/48 inches.

Figure 4.

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 92*, 1981.
Chromogenic colour print. 24/48 inches.

Figure 5.

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 86*, 1981.
Chromogenic colour print. 24/48 inches.

Figure 6.

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 88*, 1981.
Chromogenic colour print. 24/48 inches.

Figure 7.

But this will have been understood, as a matter of course, especially in a philosophical colloquium: a disseminating operation *removed* from the presence (of being) according to all its modifications; writing, if there is any, perhaps communicates, but certainly does not exist. Or barely, hereby, in the form of the most improbable signature.

(Remark: the—written—text of this—oral—communication was to be delivered to the *Association des sociétés de philosophie de langue française* before the meeting. That dispatch should thus have been signed. Which I do, and counterfeit, here. Where? There. J.D.)

J. DERRIDA.

Facsimile of Jacques Derrida's "Signature Event Context," as published in *Limited Inc.*, translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 21. Permission to reproduce pending.

Figure 8.

Limited Inc a b c . . .

d

I COULD HAVE pretended to begin with a "false" beginning, my penchant for falsity [pour le faux] no longer requiring special demonstration. I could have simulated what in French is called a "faux départ" (I ask that the translator retain the quotation marks, the parentheses, the italics, and the French). And I shall place in the margin (I ask the publishers to follow this recommendation) the following question. I address it to Searle. But where is he? Do I know him? He may never even read this question. If he does, it will be after many others, myself included, and perhaps without understanding it. Perhaps he will understand it only in part and without judging it to be *quite* serious. Others will probably read it after him. How is all that possible? What does it imply? That is precisely what interests me.

When I say that I do not know John R. Searle, that is not "literally" "true." For that would seem to mean that I have never met him "in person," "physically," and yet I am not sure of that, with all these colloquia; moreover, although I have read some of his work (more, in any case, than he seems to have read of mine—my first compliment), what I read in *Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida*," strikes me as being very familiar. It is as if I had known him forever. I will have occasion to return to this strange, uncanny familiarity.

Thus, I place in the margin (but why must I already repeat it? I "mets à gauche"—placing it on the left, but also putting it aside, in reserve) the question that begins with "What is the nature of the debate . . .:"

What is the nature of the debate that seems to begin here? Where, here? Here? Is it a debate? Does it take place? Has it begun already? When? Ever since Plato, whispers the prompter promptly from the wings, and the actor repeats, ever since Plato. Is it still going on? Is it finished? Does it pertain to philosophy; to serious philosophy? Does it pertain to literature? The theater? Morals? Politics? Psychoanalysis? Fiction? If it takes

And I repeat (but why must I repeat again?) that I could have pretended to begin with a false start [faux-départ] with whatever seemed to me the "first" or "primary" utterance

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place, what is its place? And these utterances—are they "serious" or not? "Literal" or not? "Fictional" or not? "Citational" or not? "Used" or "mentioned"? "Standard" or not? "Void" or not? All these words are, I assure you and you can verify it yourselves, "citations" of Searle.

used or mentioned—I don't know which—in the *Reply*, as I read it, "originally," in manuscript.

On top, at the left, above the title, I then read the following:

"Copyright © 1977 by John R. Searle"

And handwritten above the ©, the date: 1977. I received the manuscript shortly before Christmas, 1976. The use of this mention (which I rediscovered in the text published by *Glyph*, this time in its proper place *at the bottom* of the first page) would have lost all value in 1976 (no one abused it then) or in another place, or between quotation marks, as is *here* the case, in the middle of a page that no normal person (except, perhaps, myself) would dream of attributing to the hand of John R. Searle.

I had, first of all, to resist the temptation of contenting myself with a commentary (in the American sense) on the thing. I say thing because I don't know how to name it. What kind of a performance is it, if it is one? The whole debate might boil down to the question: does John R. Searle "sign" his reply? Does he make use of his right to reply? Of his rights as author? But what makes him think that these rights might be questioned, that someone might try to steal them from him, or that there could be any mistake concerning the attribution of his original production? How would this be possible? Can the thing be expropriated, alienated? Would anyone dream of countersigning or counterfeiting his signature? Why would anyone repeat this gesture and what would such repetition signify? Why should or would it remain outside of the text, above the title or below the "normal" boundary of the page? What of all the relations involved in the legal and political context of the "copyright," including the complexity of its system and of its history? Why are copyright utterances making a serious claim at truth? Had I asserted a copyright, "for saying things that are obviously false," there could have been no doubt as to its appropriateness. But that John R. Searle should be so concerned with his copyright, for saying things that are obviously true, gives one pause to reflect upon the truth of the copyright and the copyright of the truth.

Might it not be sufficient to repeat *this*

" "Copyright © 1977 by John R. Searle" "

in order to reconstitute, slowly but ineluctably, all the pieces of this "improbable" debate?

What is the infelicity of this—I mean, of Searle's seal? It resides in the fact that if Searle speaks the truth when he claims to be speaking the truth, the obviously true, then the copyright is irrelevant and devoid of interest: everyone will be able, will in advance *have been able*, to reproduce what he says. Searle's seal is

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Facsimile of Jacques Derrida's "Limited Inc. a b c," as published in *Limited Inc*., translated by Samuel Weber (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p.29-30. Permission to reproduce pending.

Figure 9.

what, after all, of the remain(s), today, for us, here, now, of a Hegel?

For us, here, now: from now on that is what one will not have been able to think without him.

For us, here, now: these words are citations, already, always, we will have learned that from him.

Who, him?

His name is so strange. From the eagle it draws imperial or historic power. Those who still pronounce his name like the French (there are some) are ludicrous only up to a certain point: the restitution (semantically infallible for those who have read him a little—but only a little) of magisterial coldness and imperturbable seriousness, the eagle caught in ice and frost, glass and gel.

Let the emblanched [emblémé] philosopher be so congealed.

Who, him? The lead or gold, white or black eagle has not signed the text of *savoir absolu*, absolute knowledge. Even less has the red eagle. Besides, whether *Sa* is a text, has given rise to a text, whether it has been written or has written, caused writing, let writing come about is not yet known.

So from now on will be the siglum of savoir absolu. And IC, let's note this already since the two staffs represent each other, the Immaculate Conception. A properly singular tachygraphy: it is not first going to dislocate, as could be thought, a code, i.e., what we depend [table] on too much. But perhaps, much later and more slowly this time, to exhibit its borders

Whether it lets itself be assigned [enseigner], signed, ensigned is not yet known. Perhaps there is an incompatibility (rather than a dialectical contradiction) between the teaching and the signature, a schoolmaster and a signer. Perhaps, in any case, even when they let themselves be thought and signed, these two operations cannot overlap each other [se recouper].

Its/His [Sa] signature, as thought of the remain(s), will envelop this corpus, but no doubt will not be contained therein.

remain(s) to be thought: it (ça) does not accentuate itself here now but will already have been put to the test on the other side. Sense must conform, more or less, to the calculi of what the engraver terms a counterproof

This is—a legend.

Not a fable: a legend. Not a novel, not a family romance since that concerns Hegel's family, but a legend.

The legend does not pretend to afford a reading of Hegel's whole corpus, texts, and plans [desseins], just of two figures. More precisely, of two figures in the act of effacing themselves: two passages.

"*what remained of a Rembrandt torn into small, very regular squares and rammed down the shithole*" is divided in two.

As the remain(s) [*reste*].

Two unequal columns, they say distyle [*disent-ils*], each of which — envelop(e)(s) or sheath(es), incalculably reverses, turns inside out, replaces, remarks, overlaps [*recoupe*] the other.

The incalculable of *what remained* calculates itself, elaborates all the *coups* [strokes, blows, etc.], twists or scaffolds them in silence, you would wear yourself out even faster by counting them. Each little square is delimited, each column rises with an impassive self-sufficiency, and yet the element of contagion, the infinite circulation of general equivalence relates each sentence, each stump of writing (for example, "*Je m'éc . . .*") to each other, within each column and from one column to the other of *what remained* infinitely calculable.

Almost.

Of the remain(s), after all, there are, always, overlapping each other, two functions.

The first assures, guards, assimilates, interiorizes, idealizes, relieves the fall [*chute*] into the monument. There the fall maintains, embalms, and mummifies itself, monumemorizes and names itself—falls (to the tomb(stone)) [*tombe*]. Therefore, but as a fall, it erects itself there.

1

Facsimile of: Jacques Derrida's *Glas*, translated by John P. Leavey and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p.1. Permission to reproduce pending.

Figure 10.

Facsimile of Jacques Derrida and Geoffrey Bennington's *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.128. Permission to reproduce pending.

Figure 11.

Facsimile of: Jacques Derrida and Catherine Malabou's *La Contre-Allée: Voyager avec Jacques Derrida* (Paris: La Quinzaine, 1999), p.128-129. Permission to reproduce pending.

Figure 12.

TRANSCRIPT TWO
JACQUES DERRIDA, PETER EISENMAN, ALAIN PELISSI
PARIS, NOVEMBER 8, 1985

PE We now have the transcript of our first meeting as well as a rough translation of t
think we should sit down and design things together any more than we should sit c
What I suggest we do is write an architectural text, then bring it together with a p
Romeo and Juliet project. In this project we had three texts: the Dapporto, the B;
have done the project without their differences and st/c es, but the scaling —
pendent of the structure of texts. In this case we have three texts: Bern
Eisenman's, which is not yet . Interestingly, each of these is a text on a text:
Venice; mine will be a text on Jacques Derrida's; his is a text on Plato's *Timaeus*. V
circle. Derrida opens the circle, changing it to a spiral. But the process will be a:
Derrida's. Let's see. Tschumi is to Eisenman as Eisenman is to Tschumi, plus Eise
Plato plus Derrida. Then a third which connects the two. Something like that. t
is that I feel that I was actually making chora before I knew about it. The Romeo ;
something there, a level of correspondence, perhaps a misr g. What we may v
connects Derrida's Plato with Tschumi's Eisenman. As I un and it, chora is ;
nature, can only be the imprint ng, between being and becoming. I theref
being. It will become a receptac both the chora and Tschumi texts — Tsc
imprinted on our site or sites. I feel one site would create too much of an "object." I
them, showing a writing that appears in one site erased in another, and so on, f
pearance that is so much a part of my misreading of your work. I therefore propo
La Villette, through a registering of Tschumi's text on the archaeology of that text –
ond reading is Derrida's text, which is what I would like us to discuss more fully tod
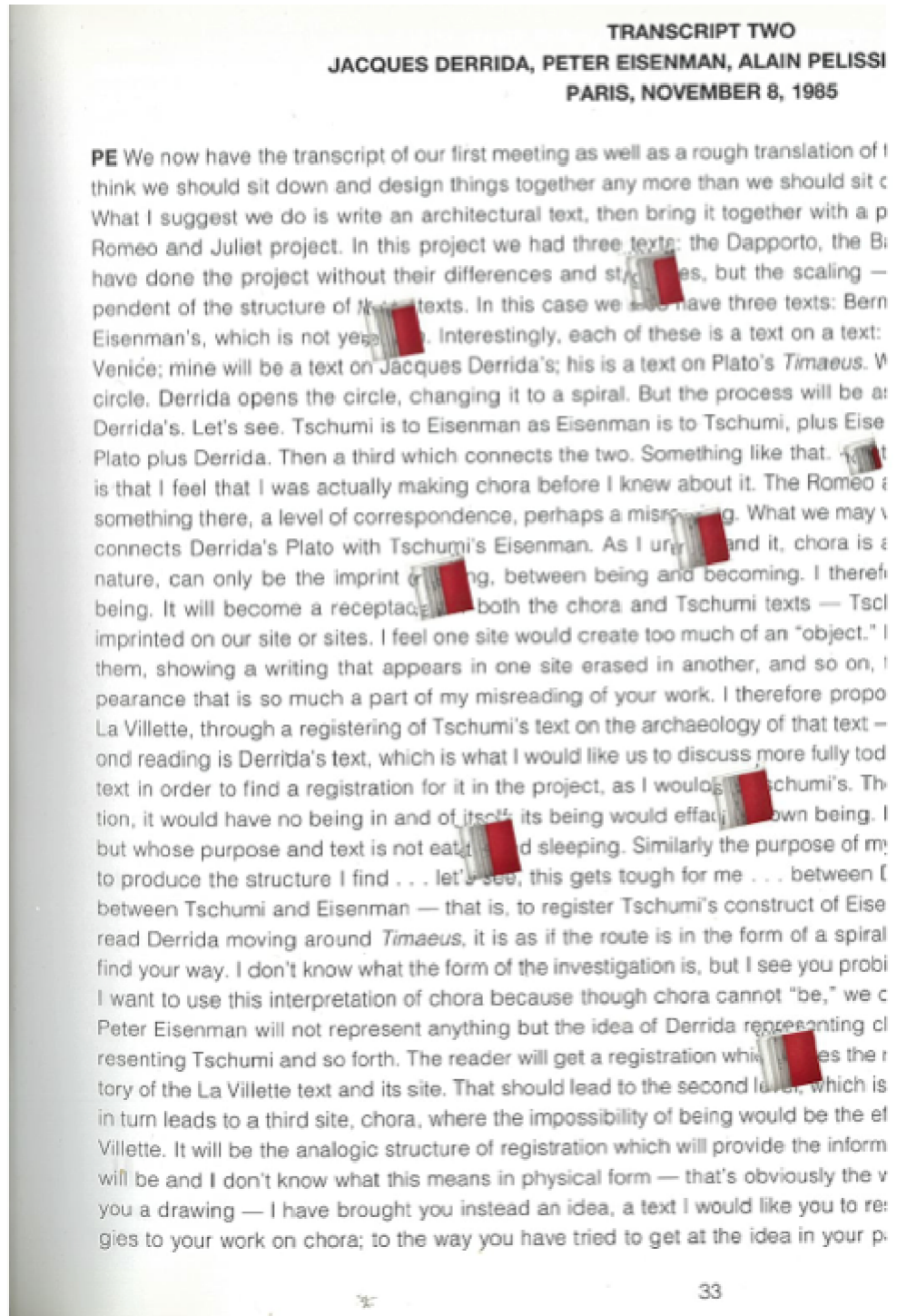text in order to find a registration for it in the project, as I woulo chumi's. Th
tion, it would have no being in and of itself its being would effac wn being. I
but whose purpose and text is not eat d sleeping. Similarly the purpose of my
to produce the structure I find . . . let's see, this gets tough for me . . . between [
between Tschumi and Eisenman — that is, to register Tschumi's construct of Eise
read Derrida moving around *Timaeus*, it is as if the route is in the form of a spiral
find your way. I don't know what the form of the investigation is, but I see you probi
I want to use this interpretation of chora because though chora cannot "be," we c
Peter Eisenman will not represent anything but the idea of Derrida representing cl
resenting Tschumi and so forth. The reader will get a registration whi es the r
tory of the La Villette text and its site. That should lead to the second l which is
in turn leads to a third site, chora, where the impossibility of being would be the ef
Villette. It will be the analogic structure of registration which will provide the inform
will be and I don't know what this means in physical form — that's obviously the v
you a drawing — I have brought you instead an idea, a text I would like you to re:
gies to your work on chora; to the way you have tried to get at the idea in your p.

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Facsimile of: Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman's *Chora L Works*, edited by Jeffery Kipnis
and Thomas Leeser (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1997), p.33. Permission to reproduce
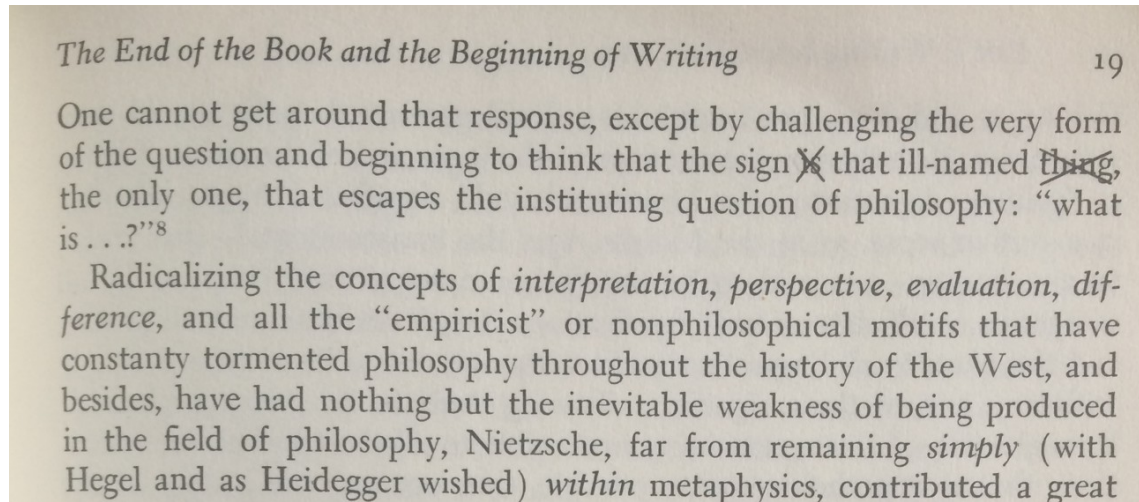pending.

Figure 13.

> As a move toward this transformation, Heidegger crosses out the word "Being," and lets both deletion and word stand. It is inaccurate to use the word "Being" here, for the differentiation of a "concept" of Being has already slipped away from that precomprehended question of Being. Yet it is necessary to use the word, since language cannot do more:
>
> A thoughtful glance ahead into this realm of "Being" can only write it as ~~Being~~. The drawing of these crossed lines at first only wards off [*abwehrt*], especially the habit of conceiving "Being" as something standing by itself. . . . The sign of crossing through [*Zeichen der Durchkreuzung*] can, to be sure, . . . not be a merely negative sign of crossing out [*Zeichen der Durchstreichung*]. . . . Man in his essence is the memory [or "memorial," *Gedächtnis*] of Being, but of ~~Being~~. This means that the essence of man is a part of that which in the crossed intersected lines of ~~Being~~ puts thinking under the claim of a more originary command [*anfänglichere Geheiss*]. (QB 80–81, 82–83)

Facsimile of: Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), p.xv. Permission to reproduce pending.

Figure 14.

The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing   19

One cannot get around that response, except by challenging the very form
of the question and beginning to think that the sign ✗ that ill-named ~~thing~~,
the only one, that escapes the instituting question of philosophy: "what
is . . .?"8
    Radicalizing the concepts of *interpretation, perspective, evaluation, dif-*
ference, and all the "empiricist" or nonphilosophical motifs that have
constanty tormented philosophy throughout the history of the West, and
besides, have had nothing but the inevitable weakness of being produced
in the field of philosophy, Nietzsche, far from remaining *simply* (with
Hegel and as Heidegger wished) *within* metaphysics, contributed a great

Facsimile of: Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak
(Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), p.19. Permission to reproduce pending.