Ele Jansen, UNSW
@elejansen

// PERFORMANCE – PERFORMATISM – POSTMODERNISM

// Contents

*The thing about performance, even if it's only an illusion, is that
it is a celebration of the fact that we do contain within ourselves
infinite possibilities.*
Sydney Smith 1771-1845

It seems as if Sydney Smith had already looked at performance from a postmodernist and performatist perspective long before both had been conceptualized. I can only speculate if ‚the infinite possibilities within ourselves' refers to the interpretative volatility of postmodernism or the author-centered transcendence of performatism. Both explanations make sense, although postmodernism is said to contradict performatism. In this article, I will try to assess ‚performance' within theoretic classifications, starting with classical concepts that link theatrical and everyday behaviour. As such, performative behaviour is discussed as language/discourse/text, as interaction/role, as an achievement, or as a combination of two or more of these. Most of these concepts delimit ‚performance' within structuralist or poststructuralist/postmodern thought. However, with the rise of new media technologies and thus changes in the way we interact, scholars call for theoretical adjustments. Thus, I will introduce a theoretic approach that claims to acknowledge changes in this epoch's paradigm. Raoul Eshelman calls this new period ‚performatism', which he poses as antithetic to postmodernism. However, there might be reason to argue for an integration of both concepts, which can be exemplified by Judith Butler's notion of agency within postmodern prerequisites of discoursive conventions.

// Performance And Performativity

Studies on performance have been conducted in various disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, linguistics, theater studies, philosophy, and history. Each discipline has approached the complex meaning of performance from a specific angle, thereby creating one view at a time, which was then contested or enhanced by other theorists. Generally, performance is divided into two understandings, one as a theatrical performance, the other as everyday behaviour. The first understanding refers to performance as a display of expressive competence addressed to an audience. Bourdieu, Schechner, Schieffelin as well as Turner, Burke and Baumann theorized performance from a cultural (anthropological) stance, looking at performance as theatrical or staged rituals (Bourdieu 1990, Schechner 2006, Turner 1982, Burke 1945, Baumann 1986, Schieffelin 1995). The other understanding refers to performance as fundamental practices and performativity of everyday life (Goffman, Blumer/Mead, partly Bourdieu, Butler, Derrida). In the following, I will approach performance from a structuralist's (Austin), a poststructuralist's (Derrida, Butler), and a performatist's (Eshelman) point of view.

// Austin-critique, Iterability, Authority, And Contextuality

John Austin contextualized performance as framed by the underlying structures of language, dicourse, and text (Austin 1962). For Austin, a performative utterance is a felicitous speech act, for example a sentence that does more than reporting, stating or describing. Such sentences perform the action they name. Austin argues that saying ,things can make these so' when uttered before the proper authorities, with sincere intentions, and followed by a corresponding act (Austin 1962). Common

examples are the christening of ship or exchanging wedding vows, which give the speech act a symbolic function (Bell 2008: 187/188, Carlson 2004: 61).1 Austin's linguistic approach to language as a performative had great influence on following works. Searle was one of the first to remark Austin's notion that a performative speech act has a precondition of being ‚felicitous' and ‚sincere'. He argues that both conditions collide with a comical and theatrical understanding of performance, for example if somebody is ‚just performing', mocking, or not to be taken seriously. If a fictional performance is carried out in everyday behaviour, that is what Dell Hymes call 'breakthrough of performance'. It is the connection of both kinds of performance – the theatrical and the interactional – in which behavioural and linguistic cues convey the meta-message 'I am performing' (Hymes 1975, see also Bateson 1955, Schieffelin 1995: 61, Carlson 2004). Searle's critique in this direction addresses the very problem that lies at the heart of distinuishing theatrical and behavioural performance. He explains both the serious and non-serious use of illocutionary acts by means of 'fictionality'. What makes it a fiction or a joke is the illocutionary stance that the author takes towards it. Still, Searle acknowledges the importance of seriousness and convention for interpretation and effect of a performative speech act (Searle 1979).

Jacques Derrida was the first to introduce the importance of repetition as a response to Austin's speech act theory. His critique indicates a paradigm shift from seeing performance as text or discourse to seeing it more contextual. Mostly on grounds of his poststructuralist view, he denies that language constrains reality by its structure, and assumes on the contrary that all positions are shifting, relative and negotiable. It is in this

---

[1] Other influential linguistic approaches were formulated by Dell Hymes, Mikhail Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, John R. Searle, and Noam Chomsky.

theoretical surrounding that Derrida looks at the underlying preconditions for speech acts and states that a performative can only function through its iterability. He opposes Austin, who excludes 'citation' as non-serious performance, by stressing that citation is the very virtue that enables performative utterances (Derrida 1988: 3, 9, 18; Carlson 2004, 75). As a result, from Derrida's poststructuralist perspective neither meaning nor context of a text can be defined in its entirety (cf. Carlson 2004: 57). Schieffelin goes as far as to say that a performance can never be a text for its unique strategic properties are destroyed when it is reduced to a text. Unlike texts, he says, performances are ephemeral and they are necessarily expressed holistically (Schieffelin 1998: 198-199). ,Carried to the extreme it would not be too much to say that without living human bodily expressivity, conversation and social presence, there would be no culture and no society.' (Schieffelin 1998: 195) Austin's concern if a performative is 'serious' is therefore secondary (or deconstructed) and leads to thinking in terms of context. As a consequence, ,sincerity' became a somewhat neglectable condition in later studies. Instead, iterability, context and interpretation were stressed as determining factors to make a performance meaningful. Contextual approaches began in the 1970s and dominated research on performance throughout the 1980s and 1990s (cf. Schieffelin 1998: 194).

Approaching performance contextually resulted in partly departing Austin's and Searle's structuralist view that language determines action, in favor of a poststructuralist tendency that concedes the deconstruction of linguistic determination. Bourdieu criticized both for dwelling too much on the linguistic substance and effect of words. For Bourdieu, language is merely a representation and manifestation of the authority that an actor

gains through his social position (Bourdieu 1990: 75). Individuals are the product of their surrounding social structure (‚habitus'), which accords great influence to established social structures that are outside the individual yet creating the individual at the same time (cf. Schieffelin 1995: 61). Whereas Austin saw the efficacy of speech in discourse, Bourdieu adds that ‚authority comes to language from outside' (institutions) (cf. Carlson 2004: 76). In this sense, successful performance is delegated power (Bourdieu 1990: 73), hence a performative utterance cannot succeed if it is not carried out by an officially authorised person (Bourdieu 1990: 76). He argues moreover that the authorised actor can only influence a group because he/she represents the group's shared symbolic capital, plus he/she is empowered by the group institutionalized authority, i.e. a church or a state (Bourdieu 1990: 75). Thus, theoretically Bourdieu acknowledges the power of the audience/recipient, however, he refers only to power within hegemonic mechanisms of acceptance on an institutional level (Bourdieu 1990: 79). It is on this systemic level that Judith Butler partly contests Bourdieu's notion of authority. She criticizes the belief in the performative force of institutions without recognizing societal change starting on a personal level. She claims that Bourdieu does not consider the performative force resulting from breaking repetitive conventions (iterability), thereby creating new contexts and create non-conventional forms (Butler 1997: 207/208).[2] In other words, by repetition and imitation we develop habits, which we can break and change our actions that then turn into new habits (e.g. if we encounter obstacles or find ways to improve/innovate).[3] This stance is frequent in

---

[2] Butler agrees to a large extent with Derrida, although she sees the breaking with contexts as a possible but not as an inherent condition of performance (Butler 1997: 213).

[3] Performance is mimesis (imitation), poiesis (making) and kinesis (breaking) (Bell 2008: 180).

anthropological works on performance, where it is seen as a tool to either undermine or challenge traditions, as a reenforcement of existing traditions, or to explore new patterns of behaviour (Carlson 2004: 12/13). In this context, Turner focused on ‚social drama' in rituals that embody change. His work was based on Arnold van Gennep's rites de passages, in which he observed organisation of ritual of transition from one situation into the other (say communion) (Carlson 2004: 16). Much in congruence with the idea of iterability, and Turner's ‚social drama', also Goffman describes how the flow of interaction is disrupted, which leads to a ‚corrective interchange' of challenge and acceptance until the equilibrium is re-established (Carlson 2004: 34). He isolates sequences of interaction, which he calls ‚strips of experience'. The ‚strip' gets coherence and meaning from context and is altered through ‚fabrication' and ‚keying'. The concept of ‚keying' means the process in which a strip of experience is placed in a new context which gives it a different meaning (Carlson 2004: 220). Goffman understands keying as a function for social *analysis*, whereas Schechner uses a similar idea to explain *mechanisms* of behaviour. Schechner defines everyday performance as 'restored behaviour', which is an 'activity consciously separated from the person doing it, most commonly a strip of experience offered as if it is being quoted from elsewhere, as in ritual, theatre or other role-playing.' (Carlson 2004: 222) Schechner, like Butler, underscores the symbolic cultural act and the process of repetition. (Schechner 2006: 38, Schechner 1982: 63, Schieffner 1998: 200, Carlson 2004: 38 and 47, Butler 1997, Derrida 1977, 1988). Although turning towards poststructuralism, these authors acknowledge a structuralist force of linguistic and social convention. In doing so, they integrate text and context, thereby opening a second dimension, namely that of interaction with an audience.

// Interaction: Roles And Audience

In his influential work on performance, Erving Goffman emphasizes the link between social life and theatrical performance in everyday acts. He believes that people alter their behaviour by taking on roles according to their surrounding. For example, a schoolboy adapts to his environment when he works as a part-time waiter in a restaurant. In this surrounding, the boy takes on the role of a waiter by ‚acting' like a waiter (cf. Carlson 2004: 39). William James suggests a positive view on social performance and self creation by dividing the self into material, social and spiritual constituents. He observes that a person ‚has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and have an image of him in their mind.' In total, one has a self that comprises all the other selves; a self that selects, adjusts and disowns the other selves by choice and circumstance (Carlson 2004: 41). Herbert Blumer (in an interpretation of George Herbert Mead) comes to similar conclusions from a communication studies' point of view. Among other things[4], he suggests that we anticipate the audience's while we are communicating, thereby taking on a role that reflects the reaction of our interaction partner. In doing so, we adjust our behaviour according to how we interpret the signals we receive from the other/the audience (Blumer 1969). Reading Goffman in this sense, namely the constant interpreting and feeding of ‚small behaviours', such as glance, gestures, positionings and verbal statements' (cf. Goffman 1967: 1), explains the understanding of roles as not being theatrical or staged, but adopted quite naturally, even though mimesis might be involved. And

---

[4] Blumer makes out three major characteristics in what he coined as 'symbolic interactionism'. 1. Humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to them. 2. Meaning arises from social interaction. 3. Meanings undergo an interpretative process by the recipient. (Blumer 1969)

as Goffman does indeed allow for much improvisation and chance in interaction, he does acknowledge the volatility of character roles (Goffman 1967).

There has been much acclaim for Goffman's approach, however, it has also been criticised for lacking an explanation of what makes a performance a performance and not behaviour (Carlson 2004: 34). Goffman, however, does suggest that the audience or the recipient makes an other's behaviour a performance. Lending particular attention to the dynamics of reception (Carlson 2004: 15), he descibes performance as ,all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers.' (Goffman 1959: 22)
Dell Hymes agrees with respect to the audience and defines performance as a ,cultural behaviour for which a person resumes responsibility to an audience' (Hymes 1975: 18). As Schieffelin points out, to make a performance work, a performer has to establish credibility with his audience by establishing a basis of trust. If the performer is too incompetent or the audience too uninterested, the performance fails and cannot proceed (Schieffelin 1995: 61-62). To not fail, the performer needs to create and maintain a credible persona and activity and carry it off acceptably (Schieffelin 1995: 66-67). Goffman supports this by saying that both sides need to 'create a credible social identity and maintain the definition of the situation sufficient to allow the others to manage their behaviour in relation to him her' (Goffman 1967:) As such, 'Interactive credibility is fundamental to aesthetic and symbolic performance because it ratifies the bond between the performer and the other participants [...]' (Schieffelin 1995: 62). Success in performance is thus dependent on the

‚felicitous' empathic interaction between performer and audience (Schieffelin 1995: 78, Austin 1962).

Although credibility and trust can be factors that create a successful performance, they are not necessary conditions. Umberto Eco makes a case for the existence of performance whether or not there is a bond with the audience. He approaches performative acts from a semiotic point of view (Eco 1977), and uses a fictional example (refers to Charles Peirce) of a drunkard, who is exposed by the Salvation Army as an example for the bad influence of alcohol. The drunkard isn't aware of his ‚performance', which is why Eco (and Charles Morris) argues that performance is indeed a matter of reception. The performative sign must be interpreted/received to make a behaviour a performance (Charles Morris, Carlson 2004: 36). This is comparable to Goffman's idea of framing and contextualisation, both of which can serve as an explanation why the interpretation happens. However, since the audience just observes, there is no conscious interaction, role-taking or interpretative reaction between the drunkard and the audience, at least not by the drunkard. Thus, Eco suggest ‚ostentation' as an alternate term for a situation when a performer is put in a performative context without knowing of it (Carlson 2004: 37/38).

Apart from Eco's semiotic perspective of ostentation, performance has by now been rendered as a sincere or fictional text, based on linguistic constraints with the ability to break with conventions (iterability); and it has been explained in terms of discourse and context. Lastly, the copnnection between performative roles, interaction and audience have introduced a possibility of agency in performance.

// Social Construction And Agency

Although largely focussing on the reception of performance, Goffman believes in the agency of people when they interact (1959: 208). This appears to be an obvious enough statement to endorse and is agreed upon by many theorists (cf. Schieffelin 1998: 205, Carlson 2004: 38, Sartre 1943, Wilshire 1990, James 1925). However, within a poststructuralist frame that renders people's actions as being constructed by language, discourse and shifting context (cf. Foucault 1974, Carlson 2004: 44), agency becomes a somewhat contested or paradoxical quest. In order to explore different opinions on the possibility of agency within social constructionist thinking, I will briefly mention the academic surrounding that created this paradox. Performance theory in the 1990s saw a paradigm shift that is known as the ‚performative turn' in cultural studies. Within Foucaults tradition of seeing discourse as social construction of reality, performative was now seen as a combination of a statement and an action that impact the perception of reality (cf. Foucault 1974, Carlson 2004: 61). Instead of looking at social institutions (Bourdieu) or texts (Austin, Searle), individual behaviour became the centre of interest (Butler, Derrida, Schieffelin). The understanding of performance widened into seeing all culture as performance that can be found in ritual, theatrical entertainment and the social act (Schieffelin 1995: 60). All of these are fundamental parts of the social construction of the human world (Schieffelin 1998: 205) and create meaning through social values, identity, and critique that results in cultural change (cf. Butler 1997). The very ‚creation' of values or identity lies at the heart of problematizing political agency in a performance.

Indebted to the work of Foucault, and drawing on Goffman's model of self presentation, Butler[5] offers a political interpretation of the concept of performative utterance. With reference to Bourdieu[6] (1990), power is seen as central to every discourse and actors are subject to their context, therefore their reality is constructed by convention and circumstance. Butler goes beyond the mere ‚construction' of reality or identity. 'There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; identity is discursively constituted [...] the actor is done by those acts, so that, to return to Nietzsche, 'the doing itself is everything' (Salih 2004: no pagination). Butler appropriates Friedrich Nietzsche's insight that "there is no 'being behind doing, acting, becoming; the 'doer' is merely a fiction imposed on the doing- the doing itself is everything." (Nietzsche 1956: 29, Salih 2004: no pagination) In other words, the repetition of indentity performances ‚make' gender, ethnicity, or class as an actualisation of personal knowledge (Bell: 188).[7] This ‚materialization' of characters through performance (= statement and act in discourse) mirrors the physical embodiment (presence) and discourse (language) (Butler 1988, Bell 2008: 179). Notwithstanding the alleged restraints of ‚unchanging social determination' (Carlson 2004: 77; Stern 2000:109), Butler stresses the possibility of agency and shifting dynamics in performance through 'the quality of being created and sustained by repeated performance' (Carlson 2004: 222). She calls this ‚performativity' (Butler 1990: 199).

---

[5] Judith Butler has in her works on performance and performativity not only addressed, connected, and enhanced the ideas of Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva, Austin, Searle, Althusser, Foucault and Bourdieu, but also integrated approaches to performance from language, body, and context. (Butler 1977, 1997, 1990, 1993; cf. Carlson 2004, 79)

[6] Bourdieu refers to both the speaker and the recipient taking part in creating authority in a performative discourse. The speaker is on the one hand ‚percipi' (accepted) and on the other ‚percipere' (assertive) (Bourdieu 1990: 72).

[7] This repretitiveness and ongoing manifestation of historical conventions is what non-representational theory deals with. As opposed to representational theory, here human interaction is based on linguistics and action, not so much on symbols.

> ‚Performance is subsumed within and must always be connected to
> performativity – that is, to the citational practices which produce and subvert
> discourse and knowledge, and which at the same time enable and discipline
> subjects and their performances.' (Gregson/Rose 2000: 433)

This is where, according to Butler, speech overcomes its constriction
(Butler 1990: 199). ‚Signification' refers to the meaning we give to a ‚sign',
and it is the key term to understand how Butler includes agency in a
socially constructed situation.

> ‚Indeed to understand identity as a [...] signifying practice, is to understand
> culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a of a rule-bound
> discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of
> everyday life.' (Butler 1990: 198)

This is where a return to language is useful to understand Butler's
argument for agency and performativity. Assuming that language is the
communicative basis in which the significance of words is mutually
understood, and which imposes on us a social construction of reality
including its definitions and associations. Butler sees a political force in
language, which offers a way to change the way things are (Butler 1990,
Vasterling 1999: 27). It is the changing context of an utterance that makes
it political and what Derrida calls a breaking force (Derrida 1988).
Following this logic, performativity is the political aspect of performance
and as such capable of excercising power. Performativity contains that
social actors alter and reinforce discourse, thus perform agency (cf. Bell
2008).
Seeing agency in performance allows for judgement of the same. Hence,
performance is something that that can be assessed and labelled. Given
that the interaction partner or an audience has an expectation, even a

personal performance can be measured in terms like ‚success' and ‚failure'; it can be agreed upon, it can be accepted as authoritative, or it can be dismissed. In this case, performance can be seen as a potential achievement that is capable of winning, maintaining, or loosing power, authority, belief, or trust.

// Achievement

In humanities little research has been done on the role that achievement plays in performative interaction.[8] Austin referred to ‚felicitous' and failed performances (Austin 1962). And Schieffelin pointed out that a lack or wrong judgement of the audience's mood, an awkward timing, mediocre performative abilities and a narrow range of responses to audience leads to failure in engaging the audience and thus delivering a ‚good' performance (Schieffelin 1995: 78). Performance in this sense can be understood as something like the German ‚Leistung', which can partly be translated with achievement and effort, but goes beyond. An athlete's performance, an organisation's performance refers to a measurement, which cannot solely be measured by the performer's maximum capacity. An extraordinary performance can also be compared to benchmarks that lie outside the performer's capacity. The measurement happens in the judges mind. The ‚judges' biography creates his opinion about what is a mediocre, an excellent or a bad performance. Thus, a performer is always judged on basis of the recipient's expectations (beliefs) and, in a stronger sense, the audience's trust in what the result/outcome of the performance would be. This being said, there lies a power within the ‚delivery' of a performance, or an assertion of authority. As Schieffelin points out, performance is always risky. 'Successful mastery of the risks of performing

---

[8] There have been some studies in business and legal studies.

is a necessary condition for the creation of performative authority.' (Schieffelin 1995: 80) With respect to belief and trust, a good performance can create authority on a personal level (with Butler and opposed to Bourdieu), however, a bad performance can lead to loss of trust and authority. Within the realms of belief, trust, authority, and power lies agency, which leads back to Butler's approach of integrating *agency in performativity*, which in turn bears an analogy to integrating *authorship in postmodernism*. As I think that this is the best way to interprete Raoul Eshelman's concept of ‚performatism', I will discuss his approach.

// Performatism

In the following, I would like to assess some aspects of performative interaction through a performatist lense. Raoul Eshelman[9] coined the term ‚performatism' as an alternative to postmodern paradigm. He suggests that performatism is an epochal development opposed to postmodernism, that started to show in literature, film and art from the mid-to-late 1990s onwards, and continues to replace postmodernism gradually[10] (Eshelman 2008: no pagination). Whereas postmodernism incorporates metaphysical pessimism, constructivism, the ‚death of the author', and interpretative volatility, performatist works of art are more author-oriented, allow for more optimism, and foster transcendence

---

[9] PD Dr Raoul Eshelman is a German-American Slavist presently teaching in the Department of Comparative Literature at the Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich. His book 'Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism' was published with Aurora: The Davies Group in 2008. Although Eshelman introduced his ‚performatism' about ten years ago, his ideas are neither widely published nor cited by numerous other scholars. His main articles on performatism are published in ‚Anthropoetics, a Journal for Generative Anthropology', edited by Eric Gans, whose approach is the theoretic basis of Eshelman's hypotheses. Among Alan Kirby, Mikhail Epstein, Gilles Lipovetski, Nicolas Bourriaud, and Eric Gans, Eshelman is belongs to a group contemporary post-postmodern thinkers, who sees a decline of postmodernism.

[10] Eshelman states that 'The changes described as Performatism 'must be treated as epochal in nature, and not simply as incremental innovations or yet another new proof of postmodernism's sheer endless mutability.' (Eshelman 2008)

towards a more unifying perception of realities (Eshelman 2001, 2004, 2007: no pagination).

Postmodernism	Performatism
Discourse	Act
Deconstructive/dissecting	Holistic/transcendent
Segmentation	Comprehensive observation
Complex	Opaque
Subject depends on context	Subject is self-sufficient unity
Temporal deferral	Joins opposites (paradox)
Cynical/skeptical	Rather naive
Gender socialisation	Gender merge/mix
Semiotic ‚blunder'	Interactive belief
Metaphysical pessimism	Metaphysical optimism
‚Death of the author'	Authorial power

Figure 1: Characteristics of performatism & postmodernism

Instead of addressing all differences, I will focus on two interwoven aspects that are most relevant in order to contextualize interactional performance within performatism: Authorial framing and the use of a sign as an (involuntary) act of belief.

To begin with, in performatism it is the author – not discursive contraints, citation and interpretative volatility – who is central to how we make meaning. Eshelman gives examples for works of fiction, art and architecture that display an authorial double framing, in which the auhor interlock the ostensive sign (inner frame) with his/her intention and context (outer frame). By this, the author creates an entity that preserves its authorial efficacy. According to Eshelman, this framing binds the audience to recognize the unity of the work, accepting the holistic

impression, although being aware of its artificiality and manylayered complexity that could deconstruct ist unity. Performatist works therefore ‚break with the endless irony of discourse' peculiar to postmodernism (Eshelman 2008: no pagination).

Trying to put the effects of double framing into an everyday interactional context is quite challenging. However, I would like to make an hypothetical experiment. The argument is that the artefact is constructed by the author/artist. As such it comprises diversity and paradox within an opaque surface that simplifies matters. If we transfer this to communicative interaction, the author would be the 'self' who takes agency in constructing roles within constraints of language and context. The surface of the 'role' that is shown to the audience is an opaque, simplified version of the diverse and paradox interior reality of the 'self'. Trust in human interaction would thus mean to believe in the holistic, but opaque 'role' that is presented. Now, Eshelman suggests that in performatism, the audience accepts the author's frame; we simply do not use our individual concept to dissect the work. Instead of declaring the death of the author, Eshelman declares the death of critical thinking. The 'suspicion' so evident in postmodernism is now

> 'nothing more than *belief* [because it lacks individual critique. Anm. EJ], and it is precisely that effect that the picture achieves: it converts skeptics into believers whether they like it or not' (Eshelman 2008: no pagination).

Although, imputing Eshelman an 'author-bound constructivist' might stand to reason, he makes sure not to be understood as such by stressing the (lack of) agency in the recipient's interpretation. In his view, the interpreter does not *try* to overcome diversity or the paradox, but acknowledges both as integrated idiosyncratic truths (Eshelman 2001).

The result is that we believe in the performance, despite our better knowledge of the contradiction within – and the constructedness of it (Eshelman 2008: no pagination). This form of naivete may pay tribute to an age where an overload of information increases the need to reduce complexity.[11]

In the way, Eshelman sees authorial power and its superiority to signification, belief is an inevitable result of any semiotic act. The act of performing has authority that creates a ‚belief that cannot be made the object of a metaphysical critique or deconstruction' (Eshelman 2001). A performance leaves no other option for the recipient than transcending his or her own disbelief and accepting what is featured. This rather involuntary act of belief is a break with postmodern insights, where the observer questions the performance due to personal interpretation, a shifting context, paradoxical citations and cross-references. In performatism, author and recipient both ‚sacralize' metaphysical optimism instead of metaphysical pessimism (Eshelman 2001). As a consequence, the subject is prerogative to the sign and as such seen as an ostensive force.[12] These arguments are placed within Eshelman's view of

---

[11] Indeed, from a different angle, Eshelman's ‚naivete' can be exchanged with Luhmann's conception of trust as a ‚Mechanismus zur Reduktion sozialer Komplexität' (reduction of social complexity), which claims that trust is a ‚riskante Vorleistung' based on experience and intuition that helps individuals to make decisions in the face of unforeseeable ramifications (Luhmann 1968).

[12] Schieffelin's observations in Kaluli spirit seances are a good example for ‚belief in the ostensive'. He states that the Kaluli audience criticizes the performance for the quality of the emotions that were evoked. ‚In this way poetic evocation (an act of aesthetic performance) is held to be morally consequential and the performers are held accountable.' (Schieffelin 1998: 204-205) Assuming that in a postmodern west, an audience would judge a performance for the quality of the act as opposed to the quality of the personal reaction, the Kaluli way seems to match Eshelman's idea of a performatist paradigm. However, this analogy might indicate a similarity when it comes to theatrical performances and the perception of it, yet it gives no clue about a performatist view of performance as an everyday act. Therefore, it would be useful to apply Derrida's (1977), Goffman's (1974) and Bateson's (1972) thoughts on framing to further investigate performatism in human interaction.

art and performance, which he renders as ‚new monism'[13], and which is manifested in authorial framing. It is through this framing that performatism facitlitates the 'becoming-conscious of the ostensive', which Eshelman claims, existed up to now as an underlying but unrecognized force in all culture (Eshelman 2008). Here, Eshelman uses Eric Gans' theory of generative anthropology as a basis for performatism.

> 'In the hypothetical originary scene as described by Eric Gans (cf. 1993, 1-27), there are three basic positions that may be taken in regard to the ostensive sign, which arises in intuitive mutual agreement between two or more heretofore speechless protohumans and as yet has no signified or meaning. If the thing is perceived as blocking access to the transcendent, reconciliatory power of the sign, the result is the sacral, or religion. Alternately, if the sign is perceived resentfully, as blocking access to or obscuring the material thing, the result is the political, or a grab for power that nonetheless still has to "go through" the sign to get what it wants [...]. Finally, when attention oscillates between the closed unity of sign and thing, this creates a sense of distance that allows us to experience the sign-thing relation as beautiful. (Eshelman 2008)

Gans' generative anthropology defines humans as being capable of distinguishing between the real as mediated by the sign and the sign itself. He renders the ostensive sign as containing an element of paradox, for it pretends to be something that it cannot be (a usable thing). This paradox has consequences for the subject's search of identity. ‚Instead of continually failing to find itself in a tangle of semiotic traces, the subject consitutes itself through a dialectic of ‚love and resentment' rooted in the holistic, object-bound sign; this dialectic continually asserts itself anew in

---

[13] It appears as if Eshelman's approach refers back to Nietzsche and Heraklitos. Richardson points out Nietzsches opposition to Cartesian duality. On the contrary, he suggests to call Nietzsche's view a ‚being monism' that says ‚everything is of the same sort'. Heraklitos, too, denied the duality of a totally diverse world and did no longer distinguish the physical world from the metaphysical world (Richardson 2010).

cultural life.' (Eshelman 2001) Although Eshelman puts the semiotic in Gans' theory at the core of performatism, he stresses that ‚in the world of performatism the symbolic order of language and the chain of signifiers with its distracting puns play little or no role' (Eshelman 2001). Instead, the sign/language acts in service of the subject; the holistic, object-oriented force of the utterance resists dispersal in surrounding contexts. Eshelman goes even further, saying that ‚performative language is not dependent on semantics or even on a common code to function: decisive is the frame which has been placed around addressant and addressee (or which addressant and addressee have submitted) and which serves to bridge their differences' (Eshelman 2001).

Concluding, Gans and Eshelman suggest that ostentation and dichotomy have more symbolic power than language and context. At first glance, a contrast to postmodernism could not be stronger. However, analogous to the way Butler put agency into postmodernist performance, might open a view as how to integrate the authorial framing and ostentation so central to performatism into a postmodernist context. Performatism might hold true for a wishful, complexity-reducing way of escaping the precarious uncertainty of diversity, but does not necessarily account for actual discoursive, contextual and interpretative shifting that occurs in the construction of individual reality. As a result, performatism does not break with postmodernism, however, it can be seen as a development that stresses agency, the author, and the authorial power to make meaning within a postmodernist frame.

// Conclusion

In summary, performance has been explored from different perspectives, each of which can be related to one another. Investigating performance

from a linguistic point of view explains how human conventions in language and signification help deciphering the meaning of speech acts. Repetitive elements in language and convention facilitate and determine discourse. From this perspective, the actor is rendered relatively powerless facing the constraints of social and linguistic conventions. Using this basis as an outset, poststructuralist/modernist approaches introduce context as a second dimension, in which breaking with repetitive conventions creates new meaning (iterability). As there are necessarily at least two parties involved in a discourse, an additional focus of performance studies has been put on the recipient/audience. Performance is thus seen as an interaction, in which the performer takes on roles. These roles are partly seen as mimesis, although a certain degree of agency is acknowledged within the boundaries of discoursive constructionism. Agency concedes power to the performer, which can be interpreted as a turn towards a performatist view. This authority can only be manifested, if the performer gains credibility with the audience, hence performing succesfully by measure of achievement. The evaluation of an achievement is largely dependent on the favorable opinion of the audience, however can be influenced by appearance of the performer. Therefore, it can be said that authoritative performance is a combination of adept behaviour and benevolent external assessment. In this example, a performatist would emphasise authorial power over linguistic and social constraints, and over external assessment. Structuralists and postmodernists, however, would concede less authority to the author, favoring social constraints or the force of volatile external interpretation, respectively. Performance as based on communicative acts is not about to change completely but gradually within human and technological evolution. Thus, postmodern explanations may evolve/shift into a new

paradigm which incorporates much of the old paradigm. Performatism may not be a break with postmodernism, but an integration in the sense of Butler's way to include (postmodernist) agency into (structuralist) predetermined language patterns.

All in all, the given concepts of performance, performativity, and performatism refer to cause and effects that occur in the conscious or subconscious mind, and are both seen as imposed by conventional practices (and ways of thinking) as well as they leave room for agency in order to break with conventions and bring about innovative development (social change). An attempt to integrate the seemingly dichtomous aspects reveals a holistic picture that fits Eshelman's thoughts on performatist holism and transcendence. This multimodal view can easily be transcribed to today's multimodal media landscape, in which separate media formats are integrated within other media. Therefore, in a next step, I would like to investigate performance as it occurs in human interaction on the internet. Performance in an online environment does not comply with what Goffman calls ‚co-presence' (Goffman 1967: 1). There can be mediated face-to-face interaction, however, we can never interpret the other's actions with all our senses when communicating online. Moreover, our ways to express ourselves are limited, so are our ways to create credibility with an audience, which is, according to Schieffelin, ‚fundamental to understanding how the performance itself works and can have its effects.' (Schieffelin 1995: 62) These specific conditions must have implications for a contemporary understanding of performance with respect to the creation of meaning, trust, and authority.

// Literature

Austin, J.L. (1962): How to do things with words. Cambridge, Mass.

Baumann, Richard (1986): Story, Performance and Event. New York, Cambridge UP

Bell, Elizabeth (2008): 'Performing Identity' (excerpts) 'Performativity Project 1'; 'From Philosophy to Speech Act Laws'; 'Performativity Project 3', Theories of Performance (Thousand Oaks:
Sage): 179-80, 187-89, 192-94.

Bishop, Claire. 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', Artforum 44.6 (2006):178-184.

Blumer, Herbert (1969): Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method. Berkeley: University of California Press

Bourdieu, Pierre (1990): Was heißt sprechen? Die Ökonomie des sprachlichen Tausches. Hg. von Georg Kremnitz. Wien 1990 (franz. 1987)

Butler, Judith (1997a): Excitable speech, a politics of the performative. New York.

Butler (1997b): The psychic life of power. Theories in subjection. Stanford UP.

Butler, Judith (1990): Gender Trouble. ed. 2., Routledge, New York.

Burke, Kenneth (1945): A Grammar of Motives. Cleveland. Meridian.

Carlson, Marvin (2004): Performance: A critical introduction. New York, Routledge.

Derrida, Jacques (1988): 'Signature Event Context' in: Limited inc, 1-23

Dewsbury, J.D. (2003): Witnessing space: `knowledge without contemplation'. In: Environment and Planning A 2003, volume 35, pp. 1907-1932

Eshelman, Raoul (2001): Performatism in Architecture. On Framing and the Spatial Realization of Ostensivity. In: Anthropoetics Vol 7, No 2.
http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0702/arch2.htm

Eshelman, Raoul (2001): Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism. In: Anthropoetics Vol 6, No 2. http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0602/perform.htm

Eshelman, Raoul (2007): Performatism in Art. In: Anthropoetics Vol 13, No 3.
http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap1303/1303eshelman.htm

Etymonline. Last retrieved 101012:
http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=performance&searchmode=none

Foucault, Michel (1974): The Archaeology of Knowledge. Travistock

// Literature

Goffman, Erving (1967): Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior. Anchor Books

Goffman, Erving (1959): The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre

Lane, Jill (2003): 'Digital Zapatistas', TDR47.2:129-144.

Hymes, Dell (1975): Breakthrough into Performance. In: Ben-Amos, Goldstein, Folklore

Ian Hacking (2004), "Between Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman: Between Discourse in the Abstract and Face-to-Face Interaction," in Economy and Society, Vol 33, No 3, 277-302

James, William (1925): The Philosophy of William Jamses. New York. Random House, 128ff.

Kirby, Alan (2010):The Death of Postmodernism And Beyond. In: Philosophy Now, Sept 2010. Last retrieved 101101: http://www.philosophynow.org/issue58/58kirby.htm

Knoblauch, Hubert (2010): Von der Kompetenz zur Performanz. Wissenssoziologische Aspekte der Kompetenz. In: Kurtz, Thomas, Pfadenhauer, Michaela: Soziologie der Kompetenz.

Luhmann, Niklas (1968): Vertrauen: Ein Mechanismus der Reduktion sozialer Komplexität, Stuttgart: Enke

Nicky Gregson and Gillian Rose (2000), "Taking Butler Elsewhere: Performativities, Spatialities, and Subjectivities" In: Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, Vol 18, No 4, 433-452.

Nietzsche, Fredrich (1994): On the Genealogy of Morality.Trans. Carol Diethe. Ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson. NY, NY.Cambridge Uiversity Press

Nietzsche, F. (1956): The birth of tragedy and the genealogy of morals: 29

Richardson, John (2010): Nietzsche's Value Monism - Saying Yes to Everything. Lecture on Nietzsche's attack on Value Dualism. Oxford University
Podcast retrieved on: 101015

Salih, Sara; Butler, Judith (2004): The Judith Butler Reader. Blackwell

Schechner, Richard, Performance Studies. An Introduction (New York 2006).
Smith, G.H. (2006): Enacted Others: Specifying Goffman's phenomenological Omissions and sociological accomplishments. In: Springer

Schechner, Richard (2006): Performance Studies, an Introduction. New York

Schieffelin, Edward L. (1998): Problematizing Performance. In: Felicia Hughes-Freeland: Ritual, performance, media. Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth. Conference, (1996 : University College of Swansea), London; New York: Routledge

Schieffelin, E.L. (1995): "On Failure and Performance." In The Performance of Healing. Ed. by Carol Laderman and Marina Roseman. London: Routledge. pp. 59-90.

Schieffelin, E.L. (1998): "Problematizing Performance." In Ritual, Performance, Media. Association of Social Anthro-pologists, 35. Ed. by Felicia Hughes-Freeland. London: Routledge. pp. 194-207.

Schieffelin, E.L. (1985): Performance and the cultural construction of reality. In: American Ethnologist, Vol. 12, Issue 4, Blackwell Publishing Ltd

Searle, John R. (1979) Expression and Meaning, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge

Searle, John R. (1983): Intentionality, an essay in the philosophy of mind, Cambridge

Searle, John R. (1974): Speech Acts, an essay in the philosophy of language, Cambridge

Stern, David (2000): The return of the Subject?: Power, Reflexivity and Agency.
Philosophy Social Criticism2000; 26; 109.
Retrieved 101023 http://psc.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/26/5/109

Thrift, N. (2000): "Non-representational theory". In Johnston/Gregory/Pratt/Watts (eds): The Dictionary of Human Geography (Blackwell, Oxford)

Thrift, N. (2007): "Non-representational theory: Space, Politics, Affect". London, Routledge

Turner, Victor (1982):From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play, PAJ Publications

Vasterling, Veronica (1999): Butler's Sophisticated Constructivism: A Critical Assessment.Hypatia, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Summer, 1999), pp. 17-38. Published by: Indiana University Press Stable.
Retrieved 101023 http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810484

Wilshire, Bruce (1982): Role Playing and Identity. Bloomington, Indiana UP, p. 280ff.

Wilshire, Bruce (1990): The Concept of the Paratheatrical. In: The Drama Review, Vol. 34, p. 177ff.