

PERFORMANCE AND MEDIA

The Use of Image

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(Translated by Ron Birmingham*)

FROM ITS EARLIEST APPEARANCE in the 1950's around the time of Cage and Kaprow, to its most recent manifestations in the work of Laurie Anderson, Michel Lemieux, Monty Cantsin, and Rachel Rosenthal, the genre "performance" has undergone a significant evolution.² Originally a *mise en scène* of vulnerability in which the performer courted and submitted to the uncertainties of chance, today performance has increasingly come to rely upon the mastery of numerous and sophisticated technologies.³

Initially oriented towards the theatre and the public, performance branched out in the direction of the "show business" musical spectacle, thus attempting to define its own artistic territory and to establish itself as an independent art with its own laws, principles, tools, and techniques. During this initial phase, performance questioned the very process of creation. In a gesture of undisciplined self justification, performance turned in upon itself, scoffing at all rigorous attempts at self analysis. Today it has redirected its questions, experimenting in areas of form and material while searching for answers to the questions it has raised.⁴ Such has been the evolution in performance recorded during the course of the past few years by artists such as Laurie Anderson and Michel Lemieux whose popularity bears witness to a concomitant evolution of the public's artistic temperament.

Our analysis will focus upon this evolution as it moves to embrace new and ever more numerous techniques. We shall question the reasons, the means, and the objectives of performance, showing how it can be understood as a theory of perception, and identifying perceptive strategies for both the performer and spectator.

Performance and Video

MONTY CANTSIN

Monty Cantsin and a girl friend are settled at a table in a fast-food restaurant located on a busy street in Montreal. Outside on the street, a camera looks in

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through the large store front window of the restaurant, filming the scene. The image is blurred. Cantsin gets up and leaves the restaurant. The camera follows him, losing him briefly. He reappears in an apartment where the performance is to take place. In the room there are two television screens and a video camera set on a tripod; the camera will be used at the beginning of the performance. Monty Cantsin crosses the room, takes off his shoes. Facing the camera, he straps himself tightly to the wall, lifting his legs off the floor and folding them in front of him like a bonze. He appears to be levitating. A nurse approaches and takes enough blood from his arm to fill two test tubes. Drinking the blood, Cantsin drains one of the tubes, smashing the other across his temple. He begins to sing in a husky and chafing voice, decrying the violence and ugliness of the world. Violence against violence, he ignites the wall to which he is attached. Then, extinguishing the fire, he unties himself, crosses the room. There is a large round loaf of bread on a television just to his left. Hundreds of coins spew from the screen. Cantsin takes the loaf of bread and breaks it. Cathode screens light up. The colours and images are a blur. Slowly, he puts on his shoes, crosses the room, and leaves. He disappears for a few minutes, but reappears on the screens where the public sees him crossing the street and entering the very same restaurant where the sequence had begun a few minutes earlier. Thus ends both the performance and the video.

ELIZABETH CHITTY, *Demo Model*:

The camera pans on a close-up of photos that appear to be of restaurant or cafeteria. Then moving back to widen its view, it captures two persons, one seated on a chair and the other lying on the ground. The former is reading the newspaper aloud, announcing a list of atrocities in a cutting monotone: violent death, murder, assassination. . . . The latter, unperturbed, is exercising, running through the daily workout amidst various screens that project images of violence, blurred images whose lines are nearly imperceptible and whose colours wash into one another.

The room is filled with equipment: film and video screens, motion picture and still cameras, and photocopying machines. The performer sits facing the public. She reads a book that she holds in her left hand. Her right hand operates a photocopying machine that spits out multiple copies of the text she is reading. The blue-tinged and violent flashes coming from the machine bounce off her with each successive copy, lighting and amplifying the sharp contours of her face. She stops, then closes the book.

A performer who has put on a black raincoat and glasses, places herself against a white wall, assuming the poses of mannequin in what now appears to be a high fashion photography studio. A series of rapid flashes freezes her in different poses . . . flash . . . flash . . . flash, then black-out.

These are not recent examples, for each took place in the 1970's during the golden age of performance. However, they all share a certain number of characteristics, particularly the use of media (video screens, televisions, cameras) as an integral part of performance.⁵

Recourse to image and visual technology has increased over the years, and regardless of the form it takes (video screen, television, photographs, photocopiers . . .), has become an integral part of contemporary performance. Reproduction techniques have been given such an important role to play in performance that in many cases they have completely usurped performance space, giving birth to spectacle that has been conceived above all as image and has been realized exclusively for viewing on video. In such cases, artists have broken direct contact with the public, a contact which, in the early days, had been one of the fundamental requirements of performance.⁶ This type of performance might best be referred to as "video performance" realized by "video artists" such as Elizabeth Chitty, Teri Chmilar, and Ken Feingold or, in a somewhat larger sense, by "media artists" such as the Levines, Tomiko Sasaki, and Tom Sherman.

These are somewhat radical manifestations of performance that for the purposes of the present study, we shall have to set aside as a distant class. However, most performance today has incorporated a certain amount of technology, with the result that technology has become an indispensable component of creative procedure. The omnipresence of technology in performance is perhaps the artist's response to what has become an image-oriented civilization, to society's indoctrination by the media, to a technological machine-dominated environment. It is assuredly the proof of performance's entrance into the realm of technology and of its sensitization to the times. It is also a confirmation that performance has joined the "era of technical reproduction," at the same time posing a certain number of conceptual problems as it brings back into question one of its founding principles: the refusal of "re-presentation."⁷

Performance Beyond Genre

DEFINITION

To attempt to define performance is a difficult enterprise.⁸ Without any doubt, the very nature of performance defies definition. It is the artists that have individually established the precepts used to define the genre; it is the artists that continue to reinvent it within the context of each new performance. From the rituals of Hermann Nitsch to the installations of Christo, from the concerts of Laurie Anderson to those of Meredith Monk, from the experiences of Chris Burden to those of Jochen Gerz, from the interventions of Terry Fox to those of Rachel Rosenthal, the distance is so great that any attempt to establish bridges or to identify constants would be utterly pretentious. However, over and above such diversity, a certain number of processes can be identified, methods and devices which govern the deployment of the various materials that performance uses and which give it its own particular dynamic properties. These processes, which we shall outline here, have been part of performance from its very inception; it is the theoretical descrip-

tion of them that has arrived late. Thus, they are not new to actual practice. Although the art of performance is alive and flourishing today, its tendency towards innovation has, on the other hand, diminished considerably. Nevertheless it remains that for those who are interested in the theatre, the art of performance is a very privileged vantage point from which to view the relationship between the performer and the theatrical environment, between the performer and technology.

Performance breaks the boundaries between genres and introduces a continuum between zones formerly judged to be irrevocably exclusive: art and life, greater and lesser art forms, between the sophisticated and more common genres. In the same way, it no longer makes a clear distinction between music and noise, poetry and prose, reality and image, movement and dance. Refusing both rupture and confinement, performance takes for granted that which the twentieth century affirms in its totality: that progression from one level to another within the same discipline is continuous, levels being analogically rather than digitally related. For example, performance affirms that walking and dancing belong to the same continuum of movement, there being only an imperceptible distinction between them (*e.g.*, the work of Pina Bausch), that the sound of the voice and the hammering of metal share fundamental musical components (*e.g.*, the work of Meredith Monk).

Thus, the very concept of the work of art is brought into question. By its transient nature, its structure, by the means that it deploys and the objectives it aims to attain, performance refutes the very notions of “masterpiece” and “work of art” in the traditional sense, substituting for them the concept of a transitory and fleeting work.

Although these concepts are not new, it seems useful to recall them here, for they constitute the foundation upon which performance was built at its inception. Nevertheless, their innovative value has dimmed due to the fact that they have today spread to all the arts, proving that certain initially radical reforms have now become an accepted part of cultural mores.

THE STAKES

Even more interesting, the stakes of the enterprise no longer reside in the aesthetic value of the finished product but in the immediate effect it has upon the public and upon the performer himself. In other words, the stakes reside essentially in the way in which the work becomes an integral part of the reality in which it takes place. As opposed to the museum piece, performance engages the public, inviting confrontation. Thus artists describe performance with concepts such as “new communication,” “direct confrontation,” and “theatre of life.”⁹

The very *conditions of enunciation* take on an importance far greater than that of the work itself. As Jerome Rothenberg notes:

There follows a new sense of function in art, in which the value of a work isn't inherent in its formal or aesthetic characteristics . . . its shape or its complexity or

simplicity as an object . . . but in what it does, or what the artist or his surrogate does with it, how he performs it in a given context.¹⁰

This principle governs all performance; it is this principle that performance puts into action.

In performance, it is internal movement that counts, the energy that is released during the performance and that is elicited in the confrontation with the public. Thus, Michel Benamou notes that post-modern performance "is an energetic theatre, *i.e.*, a succession of intensities rather than symbolic actions based on the presence/absence syndrome."¹¹

THE MANIPULATION OF BODY AND SPACE

A second characteristic of performance concerns the manipulation of the performer's body and the usage of the space which the body occupies, both fundamental principles indispensable to every act of performance. Body and space are the primary materials which the performing mind evacuates, segments, and then reoccupies according to parameters and perceptions known only to the performer.

The performer works with his body as the painter works with his canvas. As a primary material on which he experiments, the performer moulds his body, inscribing it in space, withdrawing it from space; he tenses it, relaxes it, isolates it, twists it, folds it, pushes it to the limits of endurance, of suffering, and even of repugnance. His body becomes both a tool with which to experience space, and an object upon which spatial experiments are conducted. During such experiments, the performer is both subject and object; moving between two extremes of a single process, he is both producer and product.

But if the artist works his body in performance, the performance itself also works the body in turn, transforming it, enveloping it, modelling it, moulding, projecting, breaking, absorbing, and reforming the body as it moves. Thus, the principal characteristic of performance is that it manipulates space, time, and the body of the performer. "It transforms," says Vito Acconci. Performance transforms; it is transformation in process.

Representation is not an essential element of performance. Rather, it is the mechanisms authorized and put into motion by performance that become the key aspects of the genre. In this sense, performance has no external referent outside the process that it generates and records. Performance is above all operation and mechanism, a process initiated by the subject in view of his own dissolution in the "otherness" of material, machine, sound, and image. When the experience succeeds, the boundaries that separate subject and medium become permeable, porous, permitting us to transgress the normal limits they would otherwise define.

Such dissolution is an integral part of the "death pulsion" of the subject. In performance, the subject is more often involved in an act of dissolution than in an act of confirmation and absolute mastery. But this dissolution is staged, pro-

grammed, controlled by a technological apparatus. Although this apparatus frees the performer and facilitates mastery, it nonetheless imposes its own limit, limits that are directly linked to the level of technical sophistication to which the performer must involuntarily submit.

Absolute mastery on the one hand, constraint on the other; it is between these two poles that the game of performance is played. Caught between them, the performer is mind and matter, producer and consumer, object and subject of his desire, trapped in a process that he alone has set in motion. The auditory, visual, and perceptive conditions that accompany his performance impose the limits within which he operates, define the limits that he will ultimately transgress as he as subject, is absorbed by the performing act.

LIVE EXPERIMENTATION: THE "MEDIUM" IS THE MESSAGE

Most certainly, "performance" implies the escape from representational theatre. Performance represents only itself; its content plane is bounded by its own processes. Situated within process itself, its "signifieds" must be decoded; they must be constructed. Thus, it is possible to say that performance has only the meaning it elicits. Refusing to become part of a metaphysics of representation, performance eliminates the sign as the bearer of meaning.

Far from registering that which is to be signified, performance calls forth flux, zones of desire, and imaginary spaces. Its interaction with reality is neither descriptive, pedagogical, didactic, nor even aesthetic, but rather interventional. Completely outside the representational mode that governs the actor on stage, the performer implicates himself in process; he takes human, political, and biological risks, placing himself inside the mechanisms that propel his performance. He is the process.¹² It is this sort of implication that Les Levine brought to light in *Space Walk* (1969):

The camera is on a dolly . . . [the dolly] holds the camera nice and steady but it also makes it mobile. So I'm walking around the room with the camera, with my eye to the camera, looking at everything that is in the room. . . . It takes about half an hour to do that. What I'm talking about in that situation is being lost in the space. About being completely lost in the space that I'm in. Not any psychological version of space, just that particular space. Of not understanding what it means to me that the wall and floor meet at that particular point. And what relationship to my mind and to my body has that got? That I could sense that space in any other way that I might understand what it means to me. . . . There is no way out of being lost.

I was interested in the idea too, of the difference between being in something and looking at it: like the difference between being in a movie in the space where the movie is being made and sitting in the audience watching the movie, you're seeing a picture and your experience is related to that two-dimensionality, of whether you think it's an interesting or boring picture.¹³

The media technology that the performer brings to the stage and the objects with which he surrounds himself favour a greater flexibility in performance strategy, thereby enhancing the performer's play. They become extensions of his body, hurling it into time and space, transforming it into a multi-dimensional object of ubiquitous nature, making it something quite different from that which it would normally be. They can multiply the performer or reduce him to infinity; they can cut him up into pieces or reassemble him according to plans known only to the imagination.

Yet, although these objects greatly diversify the usage to which the body of the artist may be put, they also impose restrictions of their own, restrictions determined by the nature of the object involved. It is a give and take situation in which total freedom is denied the artist who must finally submit to limits imposed by the technology he uses.

Thus, although essentially an instrument of liberation, the medium used limits the performer to that which can be achieved within the scope of its own possibilities. As the performer interacts with the medium, the medium reveals its limitations at the same time modifying both the performer and the vision he has of the world. Speaking about film in 1930, Benjamin noted the following: "That which characterizes film is not only the way in which man presents himself to the camera, but also the way in which he sees, thanks to the camera, the world that surrounds the camera"; and he added, "A look at the psychology of performance shows us that the camera can play a test role."¹⁴ Benjamin's observations may be applied integrally, for there is not one example of performance in which this double perspective is not in play.

Far from telling us about the world, media in performance tell us more about the subject's perception of the world. The technology used in performance conveys an occult message concerning the artist's vision of the reality which surrounds him. Performance is thus the vehicle for this message.

Performance as the Theorization of Perception

The third, and without doubt the most important, characteristic of performance is the relationship of the artist to his public. The performer alone set the conditions of this relationship, determining its form, and often, in so doing, instituting the perceptive strategies which constitute an essential if not fundamental part of performance art.

THE ORGANIZATION OF PERCEPTIVE STRATEGIES

The performer questions the perceptive mechanisms of *his public*, while at the same time trying to bring the spontaneity of these mechanisms into play (reactions of rejection, disgust, or boredom; interest in colour and movement; sensitivity to

heat and odours, etc.) and to organize new *perceptive strategies* that lie outside of the realm of ordinary perceptive experience. For the most part, it is a question eliciting perceptive rather than emotional reactions, the latter being better situated within the realm of the purely theatrical.

There are numerous means that can be used to institute perceptive strategies: repetition, multiplication, decomposition, parcelling out, atomization, immobilization, etc. However varied they may be, their action works on the “signifieds” of signs, on their content. The immediate corollary to the breaking up of a sign and to the accompanying dispersion of its meaning, is the modification of the spectator’s habitual ways of perceiving images that are placed before him.

The spectator is suddenly tormented, bombarded by images which outrage him and at the same time do violence to him both directly and indirectly. Images are multiplied to infinity by a camera that records and retransmits them in an almost obsessional manner. They appear either in a state of inertia where they eventually break up under the weight of their immobility, or in a state of perpetual repetition where they finally explode due to the effect of multiplicity. In all cases, it is not only the treatment of the image that is modified, but also — and especially — the perception that the public has of the image.¹⁵

As the performer addresses the spectator, he uses his body to speak, all the while preparing the ground for what is to be an experiment in perception. While the performer questions his own limits, he also questions those of the spectator’s faculties of attention, empathy, and rejection. One must recognize that reactions to performance are more violent than reactions to other forms of art; they elicit discontent, block communication, invite boredom and sometimes anguish, more rarely empathy, and very often a curiosity that is quickly exhausted often leaving the artist caught up in his own experimentation.

Chris Burden’s *Prelude to 220, or 110* (F-Space, Santa Ana, California, October 1971) is a case in point.

The gallery was flooded with 12 inches of water. Three other people and I waded through the water and climbed onto 14-foot ladders, one ladder per person. After everyone was positioned, I dropped a 220 electric line into the water. The piece lasted from midnight until dawn, about six hours. There was no audience except for the participants.

The piece was an experiment in what would happen. It was a kind of artificial “men in a life raft” situation. The thing I was attempting to set up was a hyped-up situation with high danger, which would keep them awake, confessing, and talking, but it didn’t, really. After about two and a half hours, everybody got really sleepy. They would kind of lean on their ladders by hooking their arms around, and go to sleep. It was surprising that anyone could sleep, but we all did intermittently. There was a circuit breaker outside the building and my wife came in at six in the morning and turned it off and opened the door. I think everyone enjoyed it in a weird sort of way. I think they had some of the feelings that I had, you know? They felt kind of elated, like they had really done something.¹⁶

THE MEDIA

Because visual and auditory media possess elements that frame, channel, and determine the spectator's perception, they are often the driving force that makes the manipulation of perception possible. They permit experimentation; they are *catalyzers* authorizing the changes in perception that are to take place.

Different media (telephotography, photography, film, video, television) act on the performer's body and the space which surrounds it like lenses designed to enlarge the infinitely small, to reduce the infinitely large, and to focus the spectator's attention on limited physical spaces arbitrarily selected by a performer who transforms them into imaginary spaces, passage zones in the ebb and flow of his own phantasms. Media highlight the body of the performer, fragmented and yet whole, a body perceived and portrayed as a *place of desire*, of displacement and fluctuation, a body that becomes, through performance, an integral part of the performance art in all its guises.

The performer draws these manifestations to the surface more or less violently, offering them as spectacle for "others" to view either live or in delay. They are mediated by different forms of technology so that they might be submitted to a collective verification in which image operates as memory, as a screen, and as a mirror of the stage.

The screen appears as a second stage capable of effecting transformations that would be impossible in reality: condensation, displacement, superposition. Such transformations are similar to those that occur in dreams, for they are motivated by a logic whose casual relations are not immediately grasped in the superficial glance of the unschooled observer. In order to understand them, it is necessary to study them closely, to analyse them, to single out certain aspects, to grasp their rhythms. Reading such a palimpsest is not everyone's cup of tea. Some may prefer to experience performance "at the surface" where visual and auditory impressions are programmed within the framework of the performance.

Thus, media play a fundamental role not only in selecting and synchronizing the spectator's zones of observation and listening, but in creating rhythms and raising them to a perceptible level. In so doing, the media operate both to liberate and to restrain the spectator. As an instrument of liberation, media allow the spectator to escape direct action (for example, beating in *Marat/Sade*, produced by Carbone 14); as an instrument of restriction, they limit the spectator's view, forcing him to observe exactly that which the performer wants. In this way, performance imposes the negative theology that Benjamin speaks about; it imposes distancing, guardian against the temptation of shamanism, metaphysics, and ritual.

Although removed from the performance itself, ritual sometimes reappears in the content of images (see the performances of Monty Cantsin today, or those practiced earlier by Hermann Nitsch). In cases where performance incorporates such

a process of ritualization, the use of cameras and video screens introduces a distancing effect, permitting the spectator to escape the charm and/or revulsion that would normally be experienced were the ritual taking place live on stage. Erecting a screen between spectator and performer and bringing mediated "representation" back into play, image empowers observation devoid of emotional involvement.

DECIPHERING

"Reproduction techniques allow us to analyse realities which heretofore were lost unawares in the ocean of perceived movement," said Benjamin.¹⁷ Performance helps in this analytical or "deciphering" task in which the participation of the spectator is a founding element.

By the very way in which it functions, performance image calls the spectator's attention to the mechanisms by which the image is reproduced (*reproductibility*), downplaying the actual content of the image itself. The image is never used to illustrate a "signified" as such. In this sense we can say that performance doesn't mean, but rather makes us feel. It not only precludes discourse, it also confounds the image's normal semantic charge, if indeed it had one to begin with. Often in counterpoint with respect to other visual and auditory elements of the performance (text, word, gesture), the image is caught in a network of processes initiated by the performance; it is in this network that meaning is lost. In short, image is no longer the vehicle of knowledge or of an ideology. On the contrary, by its very functioning, performance image attempts to eradicate all forms of knowledge and all conventions upon which such knowledge is based, particularly aesthetic conventions. In performance, image is purposely displaced; its usage is governed by neither genre nor school; performance image becomes an art in no man's land. In so doing, it provokes the spectator, renewing his perception of the ordinary, forcing him to react in extraordinary ways. Thus, in the final analysis, performance image is an integral part of the social dimension of art.¹⁸

Writing on the subject of film in 1935, Benjamin stated that "Tactile receptivity is less a function of attentiveness than it is of familiarization. . . . To a great extent, such familiarization also determines visual receptivity," and, he added, "visual image transforms each spectator into an expert, . . . whose attitude requires no effort."¹⁹ These comments are applicable to performance. By using media and image, the performer draws the spectator into a game of rapprochement and distancing, transforming him quite unawares into an expert.

Familiarization does not mean alienation. Provided that the performance offers the spectator both the image and its source, that is the representation and the object represented, and provided that such images are never completely intact but always fragmented, they can be read only in the content of that which takes place in the world outside the screen and the stage.²⁰

It seems evident that such images never stand for that which they represent, but for that which they say about the processes of representation, reproduction, and doubling. In fact, the screen tries to capture the evanescent nature of movement, of impulsion, of desire, of perception. That which is affirmed is the impulse of a performing subject who pursues an object that he can never catch, an object whose immutable characteristics escape his grasp, an object that he can at best capture only in movement.

This process can not rely solely upon the video screen. The screen points out its manipulator as well as the model it manipulates. Thus, it indicates distance and proximity, often putting both reality and its image simultaneously on stage, transforming reality into still life and image into dynamic reality in a movement where borders between reality and image intersect. Image no longer only represents, it is caught in the game of presence and absence, production and product, movement and fixedness, reproduction and authenticity, *i.e.*, in the domain of performance itself.

Conclusion

THE PARADOX OF PERFORMANCE: EVANESCENCE AND REPRODUCTIBILITY

Nevertheless, recourse to technological image in today's performance has uncovered a paradox: image and the various media that create it appear as a process that legitimates the reality of the stage. Performance both observes and is observed, and thus becomes inseparably linked to duration, to the "before" and the "after." Once more a linearly oriented spectacle, performance quite paradoxically returns to the very kind of representation that it had once sought to escape, the sole difference being that its mode of representation originates in the use of image.

Indeed, performance originates in a game of reproduction through image, a game in which image is used to baffle, multiplied to infinity, scattered to the point of disintegration, thus assuring the mobility of all the elements of the spectacle, becoming at once both object and subject, observer and observed, framer and framed.

The spectator is bombarded by these various elements in such a way that he finds it "impossible to fix the gaze." His attention moves from one image to the other, from one sound to the other, becoming decentred, often experiencing only an impression of synesthesia. In one glance, the spectator perceives both the work of art and his own mode of perceiving the work of art. Immediately, performance refers him back to himself and to his own mode of perception. In this process, performance is dissociated from its own origin; it succeeds by instituting perceptive strategies defined by the media through which it passes.²¹

Initially founded in an act of vulnerability, today performance asserts itself through an act of mastery in which theatricality is blurred. Performance has suc-

ceeded in distancing itself from theatre and has entered through the front door into the era of technology, revealing as it goes the mechanisms of the art of image.

NOTES

- ¹ The term "media" is here understood in its largest sense to include all technological processes mediating the representation of the subject to himself.
- ² Laurie Anderson is an American performer, Michel Lemieux from Quebec. Monty Cantsin, of Hungarian origin, resides now in Quebec.
- ³ In her interview for *The Art of Performance* (New York: Dutton, 1984), Laurie Anderson recalls that measuring the technological devices at her disposal has brought great pleasure "because tools will teach you things. I want to control the technology I use, and not just set them on automatic" (285).
- ⁴ Cf. the experiments of Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, Terry Fox, Marina Abramovic/Ulay, Denis Oppenheim, Gina Pane, Yvonne Rainer.
- ⁵ These performances share yet another common trait; they were all preserved on video cassette in order to be rented out by the agents of the artists involved. Ironically, the video tapes function as a kind of historical memory. As records of the performance, they date it with the sort of past with which performance had attempted to sever all ties.
- ⁶ In these particular cases, the experience of the audience is essentially visual, mediated by audio-visual equipment and experienced in the two dimensional reality of the screen.
- ⁷ The allusion is to Walter Benjamin's "L'oeuvre d'art à l'ère de sa reproductibilité technique," in *Essais 2* (1935-1940).
- ⁸ The first theoretical reflection on performance came from M. Benamou and C. Caramello who addressed the problem of definition in 1976 at a conference organized by the Center for 20th Century Studies at Madison, Wisconsin (Cf. *Performance in Post-Modern Culture*, Coda Press, 1977). Roselee Goldberg has written a very serious and detailed history of performance, tracing its roots back to early surrealist examples (Cf. *Performance: Live Art, 1909 to the Present*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1979). More recently, G. Battcock and R. Nickas have compiled an anthology that includes several theoretical articles written by performers, as well as interviews with various practitioners (Cf. *The Art of Performance*, New York: Dutton, 1984). Outside these few serious and well-documented publications, efforts to define the theory of performance are rare and scattered, appearing here and there in various testimonies of artists and in the innumerable pamphlets that circulate describing the performances of specific artists. A theoretical work offering a global view of performance and of performance related questions is still very much in need.
- ⁹ Terry Fox refutes those who pretend that performance is an integral part of the history of art, insisting instead upon the notions: "tentative new communication," "direct confrontation," and "the theatre of life." Cf. *The Art of Performance*, p. 205.
- ¹⁰ J. Rothenberg, "New Models, New Visions: Some Notes Toward a Poetics of Performance," *Performance in Post-Modern Culture*, p. 14.
- ¹¹ "Presence and Play" in *Performance in Post-Modern Culture*, p. 6.
- ¹² However, as Vito Acconci reminds us, in becoming an integral part of the piece, the artist must offer more to the spectator than simply himself. (Cf. *The Art of Performance*, p. 195). He must act, use, and manipulate objects. The presence on stage

of various objects and technical apparati is incumbent upon the purely practical characteristics necessitated by the form's specular character.

¹³ Lee Levine, "Artistic," in *The Art of Performance*, pp. 245, 248.

¹⁴ Benjamin, p. 115.

¹⁵ I am thinking here of that which a certain theatrical practice, inspired by Foreman and by contemporary art in general, affirms about the spectator, *i.e.*, that the spectator observes in two distinct modes: in the first mode he follows the spectacle and its unfolding, while in the second and more removed mode, he watches himself in the act of observing. This double mode is made possible by the use of media which can show one (the art form) and the other (the spectator), successively and simultaneously, and in so doing, disturbing the spectator, compensating for any insufficiencies he might have, and forcing him to a new awareness.

¹⁶ Chris Burden and Jan Butterfield, "Through the Night Softly," in *The Art of Performance*, p. 229.

¹⁷ Benjamin, *Poésie et révolution*, p. 199.

¹⁸ Cf. Rachel Rosenthal and Françoise Sullivan.

¹⁹ Benjamin, *Poésie et révolution*, pp. 122-23.

²⁰ Nonetheless, as a result of the frequent use of media with its concomitant repetition of images, the spectator is bombarded with meanings to such an extent that he is dumbfounded by the very question of meaning. In this state he can not possibly react to a degree of semantic stimulation greater than that with which he can normally deal. In a similar way, slowing down the image often to the point of freezing it, creates a hypnotic effect, numbing the spectator, thereby displacing all ordinary reaction.

²¹ Benjamin, *Poésie et révolution*, pp. 122-23.

DIVORCE

Deborah Eibel

What went wrong
With the children?

In lovely houses
All over Brooklyn
The children
Broke up marriages.

"What is it like," they asked
To be an anonymous virtuoso
In the New York Philharmonic?"