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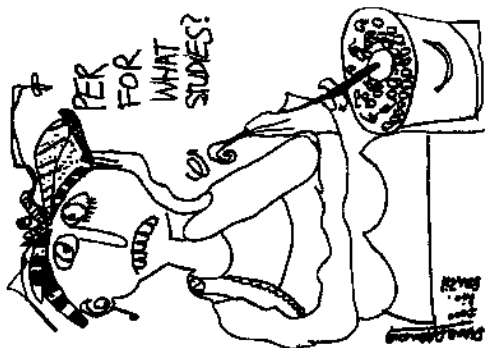
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Schechner has called "twice-behaved" behavior (36). Performance, on one level, is the object of analysis in performance studies, that is, the many practices and events—dance, theater, ritual, political rallies, funerals—that involve theatrical, rehearsed, or conventional or event-appropriate behaviors. These practices are usually bracketed from those around them to constitute discrete objects of analysis. Sometimes, that framing is part of the nature of the event itself—a particular dance or a rally has a beginning and an end. It does not run continuously or seamlessly into other forms of cultural expression. To say that something is a performance amounts to an ontological affirmation.

On another level, performance also functions as the methodological lens that enables scholars to analyze events as performance.³ Civic obedience, resistance, citizenship, gender, ethnic identity, and sexual identity, for example, are rehearsed and performed daily in the public sphere. To understand these as performance suggests that performance also functions epistemologically. Embodied practice, along with and bound up with cultural discourses, offers a way of knowing. The is-as distinction underlines the understanding of performance as simultaneously real and constructed, as a practice that brings together what have historically been kept separate as discrete, supposedly free-standing, ontological and epistemological discourses.

The many uses of the word *performance* point to the complex, seemingly contradictory, and at times mutually sustaining layers of referentiality. Victor Turner bases his understanding on the French etymological root *performer*, to "furnish forth," "to complete," or "to carry out thoroughly" (13). For Turner, writing in the 1960s and 1970s, performances revealed culture's deepest, truest, and most individual character. Guided by a belief in their universality and relative transparency, he claimed that populations could grow to understand one another through their performances.⁴ For others performance means just the opposite: the constructedness of performance signals its artificiality—it is put on, antithetical to the real and true. While an emphasis on the constructedness of performance may sometimes reveal an antitheatrical prejudice, in more complex readings the constructed is recognized as coterminous with



Cartoon by Diana Raznovich.
Used courtesy of the artist

Translating Performance

DIANA TAYLOR

From 14 to 23 June 2001 the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics convened artists, activists, and scholars from the Americas in Monterrey, Mexico, for its Second Annual Encuentro to share the ways our work uses performance to intervene in the political scenarios we care about.¹ Everyone understood the politics; understanding performance was more difficult. For some artists, *performance* (as it is called in Latin America) referred to performance art. Others played with the term. Jesusa Rodríguez, Mexico's most outrageous and powerful cabaret-performance artist, referred to the three hundred participants as *performenzos* (*menczos* means "idiots"). "Performnuts" might be the best translation, and most of her spectators would agree you have to be crazy to do what she does, confronting the Mexican state and the Catholic Church head-on. Tiro Vasconcelos, one of the first out gay performers from the early 1980s in Mexico, came onstage as Marta Sahagún, then lover, now wife, of Mexico's president, Vicente Fox. In her white suit and matching pumps, she welcomed the audience to the conference of "performance." Smiling, she admitted she didn't understand what it was about and acknowledged that nobody gave a damn about what we did, but she welcomed us to do it anyway. "Per for what?" the confused woman in Diana Raznovich's cartoon asks. The jokes and puns, while good-humored, revealed both an anxiety of definition and the promise of a new arena for further interventions.

Performances function as vital acts of transfer;² transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated or what Richard

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the real. That a dance, a ritual, or a political demonstration requires bracketing or framing that differentiates it from other social practices surrounding it does not imply that the performance is not real or true. On the contrary, the idea that performance distills a truer truth than life itself runs from Aristotle, through Shakespeare and Calderón de la Barca, through Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski, and into the present. People in business fields seem to use the term *performance* more than anyone else, though usually they mean by it that a person, or more often a thing, acts to potential (see McKenzie). Supervisors evaluate workers' performance on the job; cars, computers, and markets vie to outperform their rivals. Political consultants understand that performance as style rather than as carrying through or accomplishing often determines a political outcome. Science too has begun exploration into reiterated human behavior and expressive culture through memes, which "are stories, songs, habits, skills, inventions, and ways of doing things that we copy from person to person by imitation" (Blackmore 65)—in short, the reiterative acts that I have been calling performance, though clearly performance does not necessarily involve mimetic behavior.

In performance studies, notions about the role and function of performance also vary widely. Some scholars accept the ephemerality of performance, given that no form of documentation or reproduction can capture the live.⁵ Others extend the scope of performance by making it coterminous with memory and history. As such, it participates in the transfer and continuity of knowledge.⁶

Scholars coming from philosophy and rhetoric (such as J. L. Austin, Jacques Derrida, and Judith Butler) have coined terms such as *performative* and *performativity*. A performative, for Austin, refers to cases in which "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action" (6). The reiteration and bracketing I associate above with performance are clear: it is within the conventional framework of a marriage ceremony that the words "I do" carry legal weight. Others have continued to develop Austin's notion of the performative in diverse ways. Derrida, for example, goes further in underlining the importance of the citationality and iterability in the "event of speech," questioning if "a performative statement [could] succeed if its formulation did not repeat a 'coded' or iterable statement" (326). However, the framing that sustains Butler's use of *performativity*—the process of socialization whereby gender and sexuality identities (for example) are produced through regulating and citational practices—is harder to identify, because normalization has rendered performativity invisible. While in Austin *performative* points to language that acts, in Butler it goes in the opposite direction, subsuming subjectivity and cultural agency into normative discursive practice. In this trajectory, the performative becomes less a qual-

ity (or adjective) of performance than of discourse. While it may be too late to reclaim *performative* for the nondiscursive realm of performance, I suggest that we borrow a word from the contemporary Spanish usage of performance—*performático*, or "performatic" in English—to denote it.

One of the problems in using *performance*, and its false cognates *performative* and *performativity*, comes from the extraordinarily broad range of behavior it covers—from the discrete dance to conventional cultural behavior. However, the world's multilayeredness indicates the deep interconnections of all these systems of intelligibility and the productive frictions among them. As its different uses—scholarly, political, scientific, business-related—rarely engage one another directly, *performance* also has a history of untranslatability. It has been locked ironically into the disciplinary and geographic boxes it defines, denied the universality and transparency that some claim it promises its objects of analysis. These many points of untranslatability are of course what make the term and the practices theoretically enabling and culturally revealing. While performances may not, as Turner has hoped, give us access and insight into another culture, they certainly tell us a great deal about our desire for efficacy and access, not to mention the politics of our interpretations.

In Latin America, where the term finds no satisfactory equivalent in either Spanish or Portuguese, *performance* has commonly referred to performance art. Translated simply but nonetheless ambiguously as "el performance" or "la performance," a linguistic cross-dressing that invites English speakers to think about the sex or gender of *performance*, the word is beginning to be used more broadly to talk about social dramas and embodied practices.⁷ People quite commonly refer now to "lo performático" as that which is related to performance in the broadest sense.⁸ Despite charges that *performance* is an Anglo word and that there is no way of making it sound comfortable in either Spanish or Portuguese, scholars and practitioners are beginning to appreciate its multivocal and strategic qualities. The word may be foreign and untranslatable, but the debates, decrees, and strategies arising from the many traditions of embodied practice and corporeal knowledge are deeply rooted and embroiled in the Americas. The language referring to that corporeal knowledge maintains a firm link to the visual arts (*arte-acción*, *arte efímero* ["art-action," "ephemeral art"]) and theatrical traditions. *Performance* includes but is not reducible to any of these words usually used to replace it: *teatralidad*, *espectáculo*, *acción*, *representación*.

Teatralidad and *espectáculo*, like *theatricality* and *spectacle* in English, capture the constructed, all-encompassing sense of *performance*. The many ways in which social life and human behavior can be viewed as performance come across in them, though with a particular valence. Theatricality, for me, sustains a scenario, a paradigmatic setup that relies on live

participants, is structured around a schematic plot, and has a foreseeable (though adaptable) end. As opposed to narratives, scenarios force us to consider the embodied existence of all participants. Theatricality makes that scenario alive and compelling. Unlike a trope, which is a figure of speech, theatricality does not rely on language to transmit a set pattern of behavior or action. Theatrical scenarios are structured in a predictable, formulaic, and hence repeatable fashion. Theatricality, like theater, flaunts its artifice, its constructedness; it strives for efficaciousness, not authenticity. It connotes a conscious, controlled, and thus always political dimension that *performance* need not imply. It differs from spectacle in that theatricality highlights the mechanics of spectacle. A spectacle, I agree with Guy Debord, is not an image but a series of social relations mediated by images. It “ties individuals into an economy of looks and looking” that can appear more invisibly normalizing, that is, less theatrical (Taylor, *Disappearing Acts* 119). Both *teatralidad* and *espectáculo*, however, are nouns with no verb and so do not allow for individual cultural agency in the way that *perform* does. Much is lost when we give up the potential for direct and active intervention by adopting these words to replace *performance*.

Words such as *acción* and *representación* do allow for individual action and intervention. *Acción* can be defined as an “act,” an avant-garde “happening” (*arte-acción*), a “rally,” or political “intervention.” The Spanish word brings together both the aesthetic and political dimensions of *perform*. But the economic and social mandates pressuring people to perform in certain normative ways are not included—the way we perform our gender or ethnicity, for example. *Acción* seems more directed and intentional and thus less socially and politically embroiled than *perform*, which evokes both the prohibition against and the potential for transgression. We may be performing multiple socially constructed roles at once, even while engaged in one clearly defined antimilitary *acción*, for example. Representation, even with its verb *representar*, conjures up notions of mimesis, of a break between the real and its representation, that *performance* and *perform* have so productively complicated. While these terms have been proposed instead of the foreign-sounding *performance*, they too derive from Western languages, cultural histories, and ideologies.

Why then not use a term from one of the non-European languages, from Nahuatl, Maya, Quechua, Aymara, or any of the hundreds of indigenous languages still spoken in the Americas: *Olim*, meaning “movement” in Nahuatl, might be a candidate. *Olim* is the motor behind everything that happens in life—the repeated movement of the sun, stars, earth, and elements. *Olim* is also a month in the Mexica calendar and therefore enables temporal and historical specificity. *Olim* is also a deity who intervenes in social matters. The term simultaneously captures the broad, all-encompassing

nature of performance as reiterative process and carrying through as well as the potential of performance for historical specificity and individual cultural agency. Or maybe adopt *areito*, the term for “song-dance”? *Areitos*, described by the conquerors in the Caribbean of the sixteenth century, were a collective act involving singing, dancing, celebration, and worship that claimed aesthetic as well as sociopolitical and religious legitimacy. This term is attractive, because it blurs all Aristotelian notions of discretely developed genres, publics, and ends. It clearly reflects the idea that cultural manifestations exceed compartmentalization either by genre (song-dance), by participants-actors, or by intended effect (religious, sociopolitical, aesthetic), a compartmentalization that grounds Western cultural thought. It calls into question our taxonomies, even as it points to new interpretive possibilities.

But replacing a word that has a recognizable albeit problematic history—such as *performance*—with another that has developed in a different context and that signals a profoundly different worldview would only be an act of wishful thinking, an attempt to forget our shared history of power relations and cultural domination, a history that would not disappear even if we changed our language. *Performance*, as a theoretical term rather than as an object or a practice, is a newcomer to the field. While it emerged in the United States at a time of disciplinary shifts to engage objects of analysis that previously exceeded academic boundaries (i.e., the aesthetics of everyday life), it is not, like theater, weighed down by centuries of colonial evangelical or normalizing activity. I find its very undefinability and complexity reassuring. *Performance* carries the possibility of challenge, even self-challenge, within it. As a term simultaneously denoting a process, a praxis, an episteme, a mode of transmission, an accomplishment, and a means of intervening in the world, it far exceeds the possibilities of these other words offered in its place. The problem of untranslatability, as I see it, is actually a positive one, a necessary stumbling block that reminds us that we—in our various disciplines, languages, or geographic locations throughout the Americas—do not simply or unproblematically understand one another. I propose that we proceed from the premise that we do not understand one another. Let us recognize that every effort toward understanding needs to work against notions of easy access, decipherability, and translatability. This stumbling block stymies not only Spanish and Portuguese speakers faced with a foreign word but also English speakers who thought they knew what *performance* meant.

NOTES

¹The Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics is a consortium of institutions, scholars, artists, and activists in the Americas who explore the intersections of

performance and politics (both broadly construed) in the Americas since the sixteenth century. For more information, see hemi.ps.tsoa.nyu.edu.

²I am indebted to Paul Connor for this term, which he uses in his excellent book *How Societies Remember* (39).

³The is-as distinction (an event is performance; an event as performance) is Schechner's. "We will know one another better by entering one another's performances and learning their grammars and vocabularies" (qtd. in Schechner and Appel 1).

⁴Coming from a Lacanian position, Peggy Phelan limits the life of performance to the present: "Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representation. [...] Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance" (146).

⁵Performance genealogies draw on the idea of expressive movements as mnemonic reserves, including patterned movements made and remembered by bodies, residual movements retained implicitly in images or words (or in the silences between them), and imaginary movements dreamed in minds not prior to language but constitutive of it" (Roach 26). See also Connor's *How Societies Remember* and my forthcoming *The Archive and the Repertoire*.

⁶"El performance" usually refers to events coming out of business or politics, while the feminine "la performance" usually denotes events that come from the arts. I am indebted to Marcela Fuentes for this observation.

⁸Common usage of performance in Latin America now draws from the anthropological and sociological (e.g., the journal *Performance. Cultura e Espectacularidade* from Brazil) as well as from performance art (as in Mexico's Ex-Teresa Arte Actual's 47882 *Minutos de Performance*) to highlight the productive entanglement of the various meanings.

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Literature, Difference, and the Land of Witness

JEFFREY GRAY

Yo soy el hombre, he sufrido, estaba allí.

—Walt Whitman

My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people.

—Rigoberta Menchú Turm

For a graduate course at the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City, where I was teaching on a Fulbright in 2000, I designed a syllabus on North American and Latin American literary confluences in the "long" twentieth century, starting from Whitman, Emerson, Martí, and Darío. Since I wanted to talk not only about influences back and forth but also about what the South and the North have represented to each other, I thought I would present at the outset some more or less stereotypical depictions, ironic or not, of Latin America in English, and North American writing. I had three at hand: the first two pages of Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*, which describe a small-town *parque central* with its statuary, palms, and sleeping peasants (9-10); John Ashbery's "The Instruction Manual," an ironic tourist's view of a festival in Guadalupe; and William Carlos Williams's "Adam" (which refers to the "sounds and glancing looks / that Latins know belong / to boredom and long torrid hours"), not much anthologized in the United States but included in my tiny book of Williams's poems in Spanish.¹ I had already shown the Greene passage

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