Performance Research
A Call for Definitions

Extracts from a letter of invitation sent in December 2007

The thirteenth volume of Performance Research will include a special edition inspired by, arising from and responding to the Performance and Beyond conference at the Größwalski Centre in December 2006. On Performance will collect the impact and efficacy of this term in Poland, today and for the future, and will offer a critical historical perspective together with speculation on its potential currency beyond.

I would like to invite you to contribute a short entry to our forthcoming issue of Performance Research. In addition to articles, artist pages, dialogues and interviews arising from the conference, we will incline and distribute throughout the issue short entries from practitioners, theorists and activists currently working in the field of contemporary performance arts and research that reflect upon or respond to the term Performance. The entries may include polemics and manifestos as well as analyses and reflection. They may take the form of dictionary-style entries, letters to readers, images or sets of instructions. I would be delighted if you would contribute a short piece of between 150 and 500 words (no more than a page) on a working definition for or a provocation about Performance.

As Ric Allsopp wrote in the invitation to entries for the Performance Research issue 11.2, "Lexicon: the Journal has been putting forward forms as provocations for debate and conversation since 1996. We are interested in discussions of the ways, words, vocabularies and discourses are changing, through attending to terms that are contested or in flux, and that in their current usage signify some of the preoccupations of the artistic, political and intellectual cultures of which they are a key part.” I very much hope that you will help us to consider this term Performance, its potential, efficacy and limitations and more generally the current state of ideas and practices in the field of contemporary performance research.

Performatives: Making a noun out of an adjective

Performatives: implies ‘the science of performance’, or knowledge about performance. So far, so good. But there’s a sense of distancing, of mediating layers, of the word that’s worrying. Feels like the informatics of performance.

Performativity, or the rhetoric of performance, insists already on the connection between the performed/performance and the body in its long life of contexts, in its duration.

Performatives: the science of making through form(s), or knowledge about making through form(s). Fine, but forms, shapes, are nothing without material, so the emphasis has to be on ‘through’ rather than ‘form’, so it’s the science of making through if it’s a science at all, ‘peractics’? not only a science but a production, sliding into operatics, with its hyperbole and excess.

Performatives: hysterical performance analysis, over the top, exaggerated, schizophrenic, traumatic. The wounded study of performance: wounding, gaps, unclosed rips in the fabric, like looking into the sky at night and seeing the impossible distance in denial.

Performatives: performance that is like itself like dramatics or cinematic are like drama and like cinema but not quite the thing itself, liking or perhaps not liking it performance becomes performatives.

Performatives: performance that has become its own extension into the axiomatic, the dark sub-roof attic area of Greek suffixes and prefixes and fixes on culture that make it all fit, the automatic, dogmatic, this is how we know, this is how you know, this is how everyone should know.

Performatives: the temple of performance, fanatical structures precluding ecstasy, stuck in the ecstatic/static, emblematic process, symptomatic of the stasis but not the presence of stillness.

Performatives: to seek always for the charisma, the enigma, the stigma and soma, the demons under cratic rule always eluding the descriptive, the script that guts it of the body.

Performatives in English is tied to the machine, but in other languages it’s more fluid, and why should English exercise a phatic imperialism.

But it’s still making a noun out of an adjective, displacing the description of the thing into the thing itself.

Will it breathe there?
Will I breathe there?

LYNETTE HUNTER
Call for Definitions

Excuse from a letter of invitation sent in December 2007

In the tenth volume of Performance Research, we include a special thematic section, ‘Featured Articles’, and open calls for the Performance Indicators and Beyond conference at the Theatre of Performance Research. In December 2007, the conference was held in the UK, and it will showcase a comprehensive critical perspective on the topic of performance, including articles on its potential and currency.

This call for definitions will include a selection of academics, practitioners, and activists currently working in the field of contemporary performance art and research that reflect on the aesthetics and coherence of the term ‘Performance’. The articles may include new ideas and manifestos as well as analyses and reflections. They may take the form of critical essays, poetic and detective investigations on the phenomenon. They may be evidence-based, and they may be hypothetical, or they may be a short piece of text about the term ‘Performance Art’. The authors are invited to contribute to the emergence of a new terminology that is reflective of the current state of the field of contemporary performance research.

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Performatives: in English is tied to the world, but in other languages it’s more fluid, and why should English exercise a phatic imperialism?

But it’s still making a noun out of an adjective, displacing the description of the thing into the thing itself.

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LYNETTE HUNTER
This issue of Performance Research arises from a major collaboration between the Centre for Performance Research and the Grotowski Institute, which will see co-curated research programmes, performance presentations in both Wales and Poland and a series of key Polish theatre scholarship translated into English (2008-12). We would like to thank all members of staff from both organizations who have worked on this journal issue both directly and indirectly, but most especially we should like to thank Cathy Piquemal (Research and Publications Officer at CPR) for her industrious and unfailing efforts to oversee the translation and production of all the material.