Chapter 1

From Poetry to Performance

DRAMATIC: *Having the quality of drama, that is, presented by means of characters in action and marked by the tension of conflict. Does* not *mean* surprising, unusual, shocking, striking, coincidental, *or* melodramatic. *See* theatrical.

THEATRICAL: *Literally, characteristic of the theatre. Although it might appear to be synonymous with* dramatic, *which is often mistakenly used for it (and indeed "good theatre" is always dramatic),* theatrical *has come to mean artificially contrived effects, implausible situations introduced merely because they are "striking" or spectacular, contrasts and clashes which exist for their own sake rather than as the logical products of theme and character. The theatrical situation is melodramatic rather than dramatic; it is external and showy, and often coincidental; it is "sensational" – for instance, breaking up the wedding ceremony before a church full of guests. Theatrical speech is characterized by inappropriate elevation, excessive emphasis, clichés, pompousness instead of inherent seriousness, rant instead of emotional force, the highfalutin instead of the truly poetic. Hence, a "theatrical manner" suggests exaggeration, self-consciousness, posturing. A person of perception will dismiss as "theatrical" what a naïve observer is likely to consider "so dramatic."*

Cleanth Brooks and Robert B. Heilman, from the Glossary to Understanding Drama *(500, 504)*

The dramatist not only charts out a plan of procedure, he conceives and realizes a work of art which is already complete—except for technical reproduction—in his head …

Eric Bentley, The Playwright as Thinker *(241)*

How to read drama? We can certainly read dramatic writing, though perhaps that's the answer to a different question. Drama has been read, of course, and the critical history of the past century witnesses the challenges of reading drama between poetry and performance, as dramatic writing has not only been the target for a range of interpretive strategies (feminist, Marxist, psychoanalytic, New Historical readings of Shakespeare, for instance), but has marked the interface between disciplines and the critical practices distinguishing them. If at mid-century the externality of dramatic writing, its reliance on theatrical means for its realization off the page, seemed to require a properly "literary" attention to the properties of "the text" to the exclusion of the stage, by the 1980s and 1990s the emerging field of performance studies worked to reverse this polarity, finding the scripted character of dramatic performance to violate the essentially unruly, resistant nature of performance itself. Since Aristotle, the dialectic between language and spectacle, writing and performing, has sustained inquiry into the drama, animating the strictures of neoclassical decorum, informing the iconoclasm of Nietzsche and Artaud, and marking the exploration of theatrical practice from Stanislavski to Grotowski, Bogart, and beyond. The prosecution of disciplinary inquiry a means to institutionalize the humanities in the modern university provides a sustaining framework for the narrower question of the drama's challenge to poetry and performance.

In *Professing Performance*, for example, Shannon Jackson provides a "genealogy" of the conception of "performance" in the modern academy that necessarily tracks the interlocking literary, theatrical, and performance studies engagements with "performance" – often with dramatic performance – across a wide horizon of institutional, critical, and disciplinary history. For Jackson, "drama" is rightly only part of the story of how academic disciplines and the institutions sustaining them have incorporated "performance." Taking the emergence of performance studies in the 1970s and 1980s to epitomize a more sweeping "transition from literary to cultural studies" (98), Jackson segregates the literary from the cultural or performative elements of the drama as part of "a drama-to-culture genealogy" (94). Nevertheless, while this genealogy accounts for the invention and elaboration of "performance" as an object and means of study, it also frames the challenges of reading drama as largely surpassed. Tracking the "stops and starts" of this genealogy, Jackson notices that drama studies of the mid-twentieth

century legitimated the study of drama by incorporating it to the methods of the emerging canons of literary New Criticism (see 88), and at the same time proposes suggestive avatars (Francis Fergusson's invocation of "ritual," Raymond Williams's "structures of feeling") of the later achievement of cultural studies. And yet, while a more energetic and theoretically informed investment in the material work and cultural poetics of performance has enlarged and redirected performance critique (including the critique of dramatic performance), the "insights, defenses, illuminations, and confusions of mid-century drama criticism" (94) continue to haunt us, most visibly in the ways we read or misread the drama.

The modern disciplines of drama are predicated on a dichotomy between poetry and performance; reading the potential *agency* of drama in the double *scenes* of page and stage traces a slippery interface between these legitimating notions of value. In the immediate postwar period, the desire to incorporate drama, particularly modern drama, to the canons of literary study was beset by two related anxieties: how to define the purely literary character of the drama, and reciprocally how to distinguish the literary drama from theatre. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Heilman's *Understanding Drama* (1945), capitalizing on the success of Brooks's controversial *Understanding Poetry* of 1938, prescribed a means of reading plays through the practices of the New Criticism, promoting an ideological and critical practice that, however ostensibly disowned in literary studies today, however apparently displaced by "the transition from literary to cultural studies," continues to inform attitudes toward dramatic writing and performance. Moreover, in defining the literary character of drama, Brooks and Heilman necessarily conceive its potential use, its appropriate *agency*, modeling stage performance as a derivative "interpretation" of the dramatic text. This "interpretive" strategy for rehabilitating the drama was echoed by other, more theatrically oriented writers of the period: by Eric Bentley, prominent theatre critic, Brander Matthews Professor of Drama at Columbia, and indefatigable promoter of Bertolt Brecht's work in America, in *The Playwright as Thinker* (1946; 2nd ed. 1955); by Francis Fergusson's *Idea of a Theater* (1949), which deployed a blend of "ritual" theory derived from the Cambridge School with the critical strategies of the Moscow Art Theatre to open a specifically "histrionic" approach to understanding drama; and by *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* (1952), which launched Raymond Williams's effort to

track the conventional "structures of feeling" in literary and cultural work.[1] For all their sometimes vexed enthusiasm for theatre, these studies advanced a "literary" understanding of the *agency* of drama by tactically foreclosing the drama's scene of performance.

Performance, however, refused to be forsaken, even within literary studies, giving rise to a dynamic engagement with performance-oriented critique of Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Chekhov, Beckett, among others. But the reinvention of "performance," as an object, means, and mode of dissemination of critical study, owes itself largely to the energetic emergence of the "antidiscipline" of performance studies in the 1970s. While performance studies rightly eschews a sense of "dramatic performance" as definitive of performance itself, in many ways its representation of drama prolongs the critical inertia of the New Criticism. As the critics of the 1940s and 1950s had projected a "literary" sense of drama against the tawdry stage, performance studies urged a sense of the sedative authority of the text (sometimes called "text-based theatre" or "text theatre") to distinguish dramatic performance from the transformative mobility of authentic performance. And yet while performance studies has tended to marginalize dramatic theatre as an overtly authoritarian form of performance, an alternative trajectory of critique has worked to situate the practice of dramatic performance as a more provocative field of engagement. Opening out from a subtle debate between Richard Schechner and Michael Goldman in the early 1970s, the second phase of this chapter examines the consequences of this "interpretive" paradigm, how it has been both prolonged and contested in the contemporary critique of dramatic performance. Here we will consider how some of the critical notions framing performance in contemporary performance studies – *archive* and *repertoire*, *restored behavior*, *surrogation*, *disappearance*, *liminality*, *efficacy* – have been redeployed in the critique of dramatic performance.[2] Again placing four prominent studies – Herbert Blau, *The Audience* (1990), Stanton B. Garner, Jr., *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (1994), Benjamin Bennett, *All Theater Is Revolutionary Theater* (2005), and Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (1999; English translation 2006) – in dialogue with performance studies, we can track the question of the *agency* of dramatic writing and its (interpretive) implications for embodied action, the two issues that seem to set dramatic studies across this not-so-permeable disciplinary frontier.

i. Dramatic Performance and its Discontents: The New Criticism

> *Whoever wishes to share the less exhilarating sensations of an Egyptologist rifling a tomb should read the drama books of forty, thirty, even twenty years ago. It is a chastening thought for the writer on drama today.*
>
> *Eric Bentley, Foreword (1946),* The Playwright as Thinker *(xix)*

The teaching of drama, including Shakespeare, as part of modern literatures in English-speaking universities dates to the nineteenth century, marked in the United States by the appointment of Brander Matthews as the first Professor of Drama at Columbia University in 1900, and in the United Kingdom of A. C. Bradley as Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1901. Nonetheless, it's fair to say that the disciplinary and critical tensions sustaining the study of drama took their current shape in the immediate aftermath of World War II, with the efforts to formalize principles for the reading and teaching of literature, developed in the 1930s in I. A. Richards's *Practical Criticism* (1929), disseminated in somewhat more schematic form in the US as the New Criticism, and apotheosized in a sense in Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). The New Criticism strove, as John Crowe Ransom pointed out in 1941, to develop an "ontological account of poetry," a critical practice capable of defining and of responding objectively to the distinctive forms of poetic language (*New* 281). How did the New Criticism assimilate drama to the quintessentially literary conception of the poem?

Drama, poetry, and "interpretation"

New Criticism found drama particularly challenging to its paradigmatic critical practice, the "close reading" of the poem's verbal order, and its programmatic rejection of an appeal to social, cultural, or biographical history as a means to understanding poetry. The appearance of dramatic writing in print – all those prefixes and parentheses, exits, entrances, and stage directions – plainly gestured to a stagey life elsewhere, a life in the theatre traced on the page of the dramatic poem.

There had been shrewd efforts to integrate a sense of the stage to the practices of reading drama, in Harley Granville-Barker's brilliant *Prefaces to Shakespeare* (written by the pre-eminent British stage director of both Shakespeare and new drama, published in several volumes from the late 1920s through the 1940s), or more intermittently in G. Wilson Knight's pursuit of a spatialized "interpretation" of Shakespearean drama (again, many of his most celebrated books were published in the 1930s). This reciprocal understanding of drama and theatre was also pursued by the major poets of the era, who searchingly experimented with the ways poetry might reshape both the conventions of performance and the experience of performed drama: W. B. Yeats's plays for dancers; W. H. Auden's *Paid on Both Sides* and *The Dance of Death*, as well as the verse dramas he wrote in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood; the brilliant, pawky plays of Wallace Stevens, inspired more by Dada than by any visible mode of theatricality; the theoretically ambitious (though perhaps theatrically illegible) plays of Gertrude Stein, arguably the foundational dramatic writing of the American theatrical avant-garde in the last half of the twentieth century.[3]

"There is no official decree or supernatural intervention which graciously dispenses the theater from the demands of theoretical reflection": Roland Barthes's pronouncement of 1956 falls athwart the attitudes of Anglo-American critics of that decade, working to locate the drama as the theatre's reflective center ("Tasks" 73). The major literary critics of drama of the late 1940s and 1950s all express a characteristic concern, less about the critical impoverishment of theatre than about the challenges of assimilating drama to the values of literature and literary studies. As Bentley puts it, "The most revolutionary tenet to be advanced in this book is this: the drama can be taken seriously" (*Thinker* xx). Raymond Williams's introductory essay to *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* makes the point more directly: "My criticism is, or is intended to be, literary criticism, […] a working experiment in the application of practical criticism methods to modern dramatic literature" (*Ibsen to Eliot* 12). By the second revision of this book, now under the title *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, Williams refined the question of "whether literary criticism of the drama is appropriate" (*Ibsen to Eliot* 13), reframing the notion of "convention" as a "structure of feeling" that enables the individual work to be understood within "authentic communities of works of art," and communities of response as well

(*Ibsen to Brecht* 17). Even assuming the importance of "literature," drama could only provoke anxiety: Brooks and Heilman open the critical introduction of *Understanding Drama* by pointing to the peculiar "Problems of the Drama" (*Understanding Drama* iii).

Barthes had the example of the Berliner Ensemble performing in Paris; as we have seen, Burke offered a quasi-Brechtian alternative, a reading practice that situated poetry as a means of action, a tactical gambit in our larger *equipment for living*. Yet even the most sympathetic of the New Critics found Burke's approach too extrinsic, turning outside the poem to the "lively" sciences of psychoanalysis and sociology to find what "had better not have been there" (Ransom, "Address" 143). Imagining the theatrical function of dramatic writing in the Anglo-American tradition emerges at mid-century from a surprising quarter: the utopian attractions of "poetic drama." To the critics of the 1940s, "poetic drama" promised a more effective, thoroughgoing *agency* for language in the theatre, and a more critical theatricality as well. Williams captured the significance of this project in his title, suggestively substituting *Brecht* for *Eliot* in the second edition, and it's Eliot (rather than Brecht, Artaud, or the still-unknown Beckett) who stood as the critical paradigm for a renovated dramatic performance.

From the earliest of his dramatic monologues through the "many voices" of *The Waste Land*, Eliot's poetry had been scrupulously involved with drama, and his invocation of the plays of Webster and others, in conjunction with his own critical work on Elizabethan playwrights, inspired academic study in that field much as his interest in the "metaphysical poets" spurred widespread interest in John Donne and George Herbert. But in both popular (his 1922 obituary of the music-hall singer Marie Lloyd) and more erudite ("Poetry and Drama," 1951) essays from the 1920s on, Eliot attended to the potential for dramatic performance to restore the theatre's role as a socially engaged and engaging ritual, however etiolated ritual had become in popular culture – "O O O O that Shakespeherian rag" (*The Waste Land*). In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) Eliot defined tradition – the "existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves" (38) – in ways that underwrote the New Critical isolation of poetic analysis from contextual explanation, and perhaps "helped to define the category of the literary in specifically anti-performative terms" (Walker, "Why?" 154). Yet this sense of poetry strained against Eliot's emerging program to use dramatic writing to orchestrate and revitalize the waning social

efficacy of performance.[4] Eliot's formal program is reminiscent of Burke's rhetorical one, and as Eliot became involved in writing plays, he recognized the variety of ways writing articulates with and in embodiment. In *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), the Chorus' rhythmic chanting, Thomas's sermon, and the Knights' Shavian apology afford different ways of producing, attending to, and attending within dramatic performance.

As Eliot suggested in 1944, "a poet, trying to write something for the theatre, discovers first of all that it is not only a question of labouring to acquire the technique of the theatre: it is a question of a different kind of poetry, a different kind of verse, than the kind for which his previous experience has qualified him." For Eliot, poetic drama should be driven by a particular kind of action, to "remove the surface of things, expose the underneath, or the inside, of the natural surface appearance." Like other modern avant-garde revolutions – Dada, surrealism, expressionism, epic theatre, theatre of the absurd – poetic drama impelled both a rejection of naturalist theatre and a consequent refiguration of the relationship between stage and audience through the means of drama. Regardless of its spiritual thematics, this drama made specific demands as performance: "So the poet with ambitions of the theatre, must discover the laws, both of another kind of verse and of another kind of drama. The difficulty of the author is also the difficulty of the audience. Both have to be trained […]" ("Introduction" n.p. [8–9]). Eliot's means – the adaptation of Greek drama, the Chorus in *The Family Reunion*, the festive "ritual" of *The Cocktail Party* – may now seem clumsy (though this strategy has been revived many times since, notably in Charles Mee's brilliant *Orestes* and *Big Love*), but they articulate a commitment to drama within a transformational sense of theatrical purpose, the pressure of living theatre that had, perhaps, not quite expired with Marie Lloyd: "The working man who went to the music-hall and saw Marie Lloyd and joined in the chorus was himself performing part of the act; he was engaged in that collaboration of the audience with the artist which is necessary in all art and most obviously in dramatic art" ("Marie Lloyd" 174). In "Poetry and Drama," Eliot confessed that he may merely have been chasing a mirage, the "mirage of the perfection of verse drama, which would be a design of human action and of words, such as to present at once the two aspects of dramatic and of musical order" (146). Perhaps Eliot was merely looking in the wrong direction: the mirage

of a play renovating the design of action and words, the dramatic and musical order materialized the following season, on the stage of a tiny Parisian theatre, under the prosaic title *En Attendant Godot*.

Many of the most verbally innovative plays since Beckett – Sam Shepard's *Tooth of Crime*, Peter Barnes's *The Bewitched*, Suzan-Lori Parks's *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*, Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*, to say nothing of the reinvention of Stein – have used writing to demand different forms of theatrical embodiment, to reorchestrate the possibilities of performance. Indeed, we shouldn't dismiss the provocative theatricality of poetic drama too readily. In the decade or so before its landmark 1963 production of Kenneth H. Brown's *The Brig*, the Living Theatre staged productions of Paul Goodman's plays, Stein's *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*, Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes*, John Ashbery's *The Heroes*, Auden's *The Age of Anxiety*, William Carlos Williams's *Many Loves*, and Jackson Mac Low's *The Marrying Maiden*: perhaps poetic drama was avant-garde after all.

Poetic drama imagines a recalibration of the *agency* of writing in the process of theatre. To critics in the 1950s, Eliot provided a point of repair for rethinking the practices of writing, staging, and reading drama. Raymond Williams parallels the premiere of Ibsen's *Catilina* in 1850, written when "the drama, in most European countries other than France, was at perhaps its lowest ebb in six centuries" (*Ibsen to Eliot* 11), with the opening of Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* in London a century later: verse drama from *Peer Gynt* through Irish and English experiments to Eliot, provides a "necessary" element of the revolution of modern drama, in which "the whole art of the theatre was radically reconsidered and revised" (11). Eliot's example also confirms that "performance is an essential condition of drama": "Mr. Eliot has pointed out that to consider plays as existing simply as literature, without reference to their function on the stage, is part of the same fallacy as to say that plays need not be literature at all. No separation of drama and literature is reasonable" (16). For Williams, Eliot's achievement, like Yeats's, was to imagine a "theatre in which language should not be subordinate, as throughout the Victorian theatre it had been, to spectacle or the visual elements of acting" (209). Poetic drama imagines a recalibration of the *agency* of writing in the process of theatre. Bentley, too, taking up "the old and vexed theme of the reading of plays as opposed to seeing them in the theater," notes that while there is certainly "such a thing as undramatic poetry, as the theatricalists always

remind us," there is also "*dramatic* poetry" – not to be confused with "Closet dramas, the dramas which supremely are offered to us as dramatic reading matter, are seldom good poems of any kind and therefore are seldom good reading" (*Thinker* 241–2). For Bentley, while Eliot was "provoked by the antipoetic William Archer into reaffirming that poetry is not necessarily undramatic," Bertolt Brecht "goes yet further in denying that lyric and narrative verse are necessarily out of place on the stage" (243).

Taking Eliot's dramatic writing as the inspiration for a renewed theatricality, Williams and Bentley stake out a complex position toward and against the tenets of the New Criticism: theatre should be transformed by its poetry, but the analysis of drama must be confined to the text itself. Fergusson opens *The Idea of a Theater* by invoking Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and expressing "a more particular debt to Eliot" as "one of very few contemporary writers in English who are directly concerned with drama as a serious art" (*Idea* 8). And while Eliot, "coming to the drama from lyric poetry, starts rather with the Idealist conception of art as formally prior to the theater itself," he has nonetheless "surveyed the terrain" and "raised the crucial questions." For although Fergusson notoriously points out that drama "is not primarily a composition in the verbal medium" (*Idea* 8), he finds the "close textual analysis" of the New Criticism (he mentions John Crowe Ransom, R. P. Blackmur, and William Empson, alongside Kenneth Burke) essential to assessing "the dramatic basis of poetry," an assessment obstructed only by the fact that we "lack a theater" capable of animating the findings of such analysis in stage practice. Fergusson's invocation of the dramatic theatre's "roots in myth and ritual, its implication in the whole culture of the time" (9) evidently extends Eliot's use of the Cambridge School, though its participation in a genealogy cognate with Antonin Artaud's visceral impact on experimental theatre, or with Victor Turner's foundational role in locating a liminal/liminoid "ritual process" as the site of performance studies, is considerably more gestural than actual.[5] For Fergusson's brilliant readings of plays from *Oedipus the King* to *Murder in the Cathedral* erect a disembodied theatre on the sturdy framework of the play's "analogies of action" (236–7), a principle of the organic thematic unity of the drama meant to guide the ritual realization of theatre. While Fergusson's sense of a theatre's renewed implication in "the whole culture of the time" recalls Eliot's ritualized music-hall and jibes

with Burke as well, what it most clearly anticipates is the shocking clarity with which the yet-unknown playwrights of the "theatre of the absurd" (the phrase coined by Martin Esslin in 1961) would rewrite the terms of dramatic representation, and so reimagine relations between writing, stage, audience, and world.

Eliot's poetic drama provides a chastening example of the challenges of reading the work of writing in the working of theatre. Of course, for Eliot, poetry had a value independent of the stage, never really surpassed since Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, with its "simplification to the language of natural speech, and this language of conversation again raised to great poetry, and to great poetry which is essentially dramatic: for the scene has a structure of which each line is an essential part" ("Poetry and Drama" 147). The value of "poetry," and so of drama written in verse, could be assumed, but the modern drama was rarely versified; indeed, the dominant playwrights in the European and American tradition wrote an aggressively realistic, prosaic dramatic prose. The problem engaged by Bentley, Fergusson, and Williams, and to a lesser degree by Brooks and Heilman, was to frame the "literariness" of a drama so fully dominated by the realistic theatre's emphasis on surface, on the superficial in all senses. And yet, while this critical effort seemed to require displacing the tawdry theatre from view, the absent stage continued to put pressure on the imagined *agency* of dramatic writing.[6]

"An arrangement of words"

How might dramatic writing provide the *agency* for a different kind of social ritual, reshaping the *scene* and *act* of theatrical performance? Although the example of Eliot's poetic drama implied a dynamic, instrumental relationship between writing and a revivified social technology of theatre, critics – particularly those concerned with an appropriately disciplined pedagogy – asked a slightly different question, erasing the drama as the vehicle of performance: How to restrict drama and the dramatic to the words on the page?

> Everyone knows that in drama there is little or no place for "description" or for other comment made directly by the author; that the work consists almost entirely of words spoken directly by the characters, that is, of dialogue; that the work can be read or that it can be seen in the form of

> stage-presentation; that plays are often written in verse-form. (Brooks and Heilman 3)

Artaud had already observed – in French if not yet in English translation – that dialogue belongs "to books, as is proved by the fact that in all handbooks of literary history a place is reserved for the theater as a subordinate branch of the history of spoken language" (37). For Brooks and Heilman, though, drama is principally an order of words, representing "dialogue" between "characters" in the "printed form" of the page (3); the (unmentionable) theatre's function is "stage-presentation," syntactically and conceptually parallel with reading. As words in "printed form," arranged in "dialogue" beneath prefixes identifying the character who speaks them, dramatic writing has an intrinsic purpose: to pursue "the strait and narrow path of character-delineation" (247). Ontology recapitulates page-design: as its problems with oral poetics and with drama suggest, the New Criticism was seduced by print, taking the form of the page to embody the essence of the genre.

Reducing drama to "dialogue" provides the excuse for Brooks and Heilman's vigorous suppression of the stage. The Glossary aside, the words *theatre* or *theatrical* appear a grand total of eight times in *Understanding Drama*, and with the exception of a terse sketch of the Athenian Theatre of Dionysus (see Appendix B, 28), the "Historical Sketch of the Drama" provides no information whatsoever on the design, location, social environment, or working conditions of *any* theatre, including, surprisingly enough, Shakespeare's Globe. Despite the assumed parallel between reading and "stage-presentation" as means of realizing plays, the theatre was apparently difficult to assimilate to a "literary" critique of the drama. Fergusson, too, dwells in a very general way on the civic and festival elements of the Theatre of Dionysus, remarking only in passing on the material (as opposed to the ideological) circumstances of Shakespeare's public amphitheatre or the modern theatre's illuminated box set. In the 1950s both the actor's process and the materiality of the stage lay outside the proper sphere of "literature," even for so "dramatistic" an essay as Burke's "Antony in Behalf of the Play." Brooks and Heilman (perhaps forgetting Agamemnon's blood-red carpet, Othello's handkerchief, Miss Prism's valise) observe, "In acted drama, of course, we have costumes, settings, and 'properties'; but drama as literature has no such appurtenances."

Repressing the material theatre – even the dramatic opportunities afforded by the empty platform of the early modern stage – finally warps Brooks and Heilman's sense of the drama's intrinsic potentiality: "the Elizabethan drama, in which the use of a great variety of scenes was common" was a "marked exception" to the intrinsic design of drama, in which the "presenting of a number of places is of more trouble than value," both in terms of "practical stage-craft or of literary technique" (25). Farewell embattled Parthia, adieu bear-drawn Bohemia, let fall the ranged empire of imagined space: Shakespeare's busy stage enabled writing that simply fails to conform to the efficient rules of dramatic composition.[7]

Brooks and Heilman protest too much, but this animus against the theatre deforms the "literary" definition of drama echoed by the more theatrically savvy critics of the era. Bentley, describing *The Playwright as Thinker* as "an endorsement of the Brooks and Heilman position" (*Thinker* 309), foregrounds the manipulative use of "histrionic method" in the "commercial, political, and educational spheres," tracking the "entertainment" apotheosized in the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* from the Broadway musical to the mass rallies of the Nazi propaganda machine (234). Drama, on the other hand, is a scripted activity ("*a drama not verbalized is a drama not dramatized*" 241), originating in the playwright's initiative: "The dramatist not only charts out a plan of procedure, he conceives and realizes a work of art which is already complete – except for technical reproduction – in his head, and which expresses by verbal image and concept a certain attitude to life" (241). Bentley's passionate defense of the literary drama depends on its distinction from the sense of theatre as mere spectacle promoted by "theatricalists," the anti-intellectual attitude that has forcibly distinguished the two essential arts of drama, "poetry and acting" (244), in the American vision of dramatic possibility. And yet, opposing "theatricalism" seems to deny dramatic performance the collaborative character implied by the drama's "uniting the two arts of poetry and acting," redirecting it instead to mere "technical reproduction." For Bentley, dramatic performance demands writing, and this writing must be conceived apart from – and be protected from – the spectacle of the stage: "Wagner of course showed that many dramatic elements can be embodied in orchestral music; silent movies showed how much can be done with the visual element alone; but if you add Wagner to Eisenstein and multiply by ten you still do not have a Shakespeare or an Ibsen" (241).

The function of writing in performance is never transparent: it emerges within the shaping social technology of the stage. But the modern theatre, distributing the playwright's presumed authority among the director and designers, making play in social and material technologies manifestly *using* the text, summons a nostalgic mirage as the essence of theatre, the fiction of a textually driven stage: "Drama, as a literary form, is an arrangement of words for spoken performance; language is the central medium of communication" (Williams, *Ibsen to Eliot* 28). Like Bentley, Williams recognizes that "there are in drama other means of communication which are capable of great richness of effect," including the individual actor's gesture, movement, and intonation; the directorial composition of bodies on stage; and the combined effects of costume, lighting, sound, and stage design. Yet Williams plots an inverse ratio between the verbal and the visual order of the stage: as the "richness of speech in drama has declined, so have the visual elements become more and more elaborated, and have even attempted individuation," tending "consistently towards autonomy" (28). Setting aside for the moment the question of whether writing implies *speech*, Williams traces a crucial recognition here, that the "visual elaboration of drama is related, in fact, not only to the impoverishment of language, but to changes in feeling." As means of materializing and resignifying social relations, dramatic performance delicately recodes our ways of imagining and inhabiting social life, including our ways of living in and through the words we use.

In 1952, Williams was still bound to the philological lineaments of a practical new criticism: "the most valuable drama is achieved when the technique of performance reserves to the dramatist primary control" (28–9). Despite the intervention of directors and designers, "when the centre of drama is language, the *form* of the play will be essentially literary; the dramatist will adopt certain conventions of language through which to work." Williams's brilliant sense of "convention" – and, later, in *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, its redefinition as the architecture of "structures of feeling" – proves a means to govern the stage from the page. For when the playwright succeeds in determining the form of the drama, then "the technique of performance – methods of speaking, movement, and design – is of such a kind that it will communicate completely the conventions of the dramatist, the full power of the drama is available to be deployed. This, indeed, should be the criterion of performance: that it communicates, fully and exactly, the

essential form of the play. The control, that is to say, is the dramatist's arrangement of words for speech, his text" (29). Neither Williams nor Bentley articulates how stage practices should work to vivify the play: even producing Ibsen and Chekhov requires actors and audiences to engage with now-distant "conventions" of writing and performing, and it might be recalled that both Ibsen's and Chekhov's plays were initially regarded as unactable, so removed was the writing from available technologies of performance. While both playwrights clearly felt and reframed the changing "structures of feeling" of late-nineteenth-century Europe, the theatre had to find and fashion the performance conventions that would enable actors to do significant things with their words.

Given Williams's subsequent promotion of a dynamic, culturally inflected sense of the uses of literature, it is indeed surprising that the urge to promote a "literary" critique of modern drama proscribes the theatre so emphatically.[8] Arresting, too, is a similar sense of the stage machined by dramatic writing pervading Francis Fergusson's notion of the "histrionic sensibility." For Fergusson, "a drama, as distinguished from a lyric, is not primarily a composition in the verbal medium; the words result, as one might put it, from the underlying structure of incident and character" (*Idea* 8). This "underlying structure" is what Fergusson calls "action," elaborating that term as a unifying principle of dramatic design. Dramatic action is best understood in the mode of *acting*, and Fergusson takes the Moscow Art Theatre's (MAT) practice of preparation as definitive:

> If action cannot be abstractly defined, of what use is the concept in the study of the dramatic arts? […] For this purpose practical rules may be devised, notably that of the Moscow Art Theater. They say that the action of a character or a play must be indicated by an infinitive phrase, e.g., in the play *Oedipus*, "to find the culprit." This device does not amount to a definition but it leads the performer to the particular action which the author intended. (230)

Fergusson had studied with the first protégé of the MAT to teach and direct in the United States, Richard Boleslavsky, and by 1949 the "Method" had transformed the social technology of American acting: the text could now afford a new range of theatrical opportunity, possibilities arising from new ways of using writing that were nonetheless seen as features of the script's dramatic identity, "the particular action

which the author intended."[9] In performance, Fergusson's "infinitive phrase" – the Method actor's "spine" – functions like Williams's "convention," as a means of discovering and reproducing the play's authentic form, the instrument for seizing the play's underlying thematic – actualized in the plot, characters or agents, and "words of the play" (36–7) – *as action*.

Fergusson makes no apology for deriving his basic analytic principle – the "analogy of action" – from theatre practice. Instead, he argues that it enables readers and performers to grasp the fully Aristotelian principle of the organic unity of the drama, the primacy of plot as the realization of action, and the coordinating effects of character, thought, language, music, and spectacle. While invoking the authority of actors must have seemed an oxymoron to his New Critical contemporaries, the "analogy of action" that satisfies the histrionic appetite might have seemed familiar enough. The "analogy of action" at once organizes every element of the text's organic unity around a single principle (a "figure in the carpet"), and provides a technique for reproducing it in both critical discourse and theatrical performance. Far from locating stage practice in the historical specificity of a given theatre, seizing the "analogy of action" enables the actor to "play accurately the roles which dramatists of all kinds have written" (238) by training "a primitive and direct awareness," the "histrionic sensibility" (239), and so provides a "direct access to the plays of other cultures" (11). The Method was widely touted as equally applicable to Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Shaw, and despite Fergusson's emphasis on the ritual implication of theatre in a specific cultural process, the extraordinary variety of the theatre's ways of using drama, much like the extraordinary variety of poetry's relation to the cultures of its production, can be seized through a single "primitive and direct" reading strategy, one that works (like the "direct awareness" method of "close reading") by engaging the essence of the art.

Acts of speech

In some respects, both Fergusson and Williams worked to align the productive activities of the stage with the mainspring of dramatic action. The more programmatic New Critics took a narrower view, seeing the organization of the words on the page as a mimesis and projection of characters speaking, and dramatic performance as the

delivery of "the text" and the characters it encodes by other means. As John Crowe Ransom put it, drama "has *characters*, who make *speeches*" (*New* 169). Understanding drama as characters-making-speeches is plainly wrong: characters speak, but they rarely – Brutus' and Antony's orations in *Julius Caesar* prove the rule – "make *speeches*." Dramatic language is "performative" in J. L. Austin's sense, a way of doing something with words (Austin's lectures were first published in 1962), but it at once uses texts and reconstitutes them in a new *scene*, "parrying" – as Burke put it – an evolving and unanticipatable theatrical "thrust" ("Words as Deeds" 152). Onstage, characters and the actors who play them cajole, wound, impress, persuade, reflect, romance, seduce; in Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, Vershinin may "philosophize," but in so doing he *performs* these acts, and more. Understanding the dramatic script as a direction to "make *speeches*" enabled the New Criticism to define theatre narrowly enough that its rich embodiment (how to account for the significance of any common gesture, a shrug, a grimace, a narrowing of the eyes, onstage or off?) could be construed as the compliant execution of the text's verbal meanings.

Performance-as-speech: the foresaken stage models the New Critics' prescription of the work of drama. To take dramatic language principally as "dialogue" between "characters" articulates an extraordinarily narrow understanding of dramatic and theatrical propriety. "Dialogue" implies conversation, dramatic language used to imitate or represent two or more individuals speaking together within a certain kind of dramatic fiction. And yet words are capable of being used in a variety of ways in performance, ways that have little to do either with "dialogue" in this sense or with "character." In the classical Greek theatre, the Chorus sang/spoke/danced in unison (not conversation, not in character); today, the lines are sometimes distributed among members of the Chorus (not conversation, perhaps barely in character). In many popular theatre forms, including the great medieval cycles and the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, the verbal text often (and intermittently) seems less to structure a dialogic relationship between represented "characters" than to enable an opportunity for a certain kind of byplay between the actor and the audience. One role, even a fully "characterized" role like Falstaff, might offer many opportunities of this kind for the actor's immediate, physical engagement with the public (the "catechism" on honor, for instance, *1 Henry IV*, 5.1.127–39). And a given play might well provide different kinds of

opportunities in different roles, as well as different means to recede into *character*: Prince Hal's soliloquies ("I know you all," *1 Henry IV* 1.2.172–95) also locate *character* between actor and audience, but imply a very different transaction than Falstaff's do.[10] Repressing the evident testimony of the stage, testimony visible enough even in the script at hand, New Criticism framed drama as the speech of characters-in-dialogue, and so articulated performance ("stage presentation") as a version of reading aloud.

What are the consequences of repressing the theatre as a means to understanding drama, and how does taking speech as "the province of the text" bear on our ways of reading plays (Gina Bloom 7)? Brooks and Heilman turn surprisingly to film to account for the role of language-as-dialogue in properly "dramatic" action. The opening moments of *The Great McGinty* have the advantage of reducing "action to the bare skeleton – indeed, to a sort of blueprint for action" (8): the drama's essentially "dialogic" character will be dramatized in contrast to action-without-speech.

> SHOOTING-SCRIPT FOR *THE GREAT McGINTY*
> The last title is imposed over a NIGHT shot of a drinking establishment. Now we HEAR some rumba music and we TRUCK FORWARD SLOWLY TOWARD THE CAFÉ …
>
> DISSOLVE TO:
>
> A PRETTY RUMBA DANCER PERFORMING IN FRONT OF A BAND
>
> We see a few customers IN THE FOREGROUND but they are not particularly interested. In other words, they give one look then turn away. Noticing the lack of interest she bends over and grabs her skirt.
>
> CUT TO:
>
> THE RUMBA DANCER FROM WAIST DOWN
>
> Slowly she starts to pull up her skirt. The CAMERA follows her
>
> CUT TO:
>
> LOW CAMERA SHOT UP AT THE TABLE OF MEN
>
> They are not paying any attention. One of them is lighting a pipe. As he turns his head away to escape the cloud of smoke his eye catches the legs on the floor. There is a slight double-take, then he gives the legs his undivided attention. A second later the other men at the table follow his gaze. Now the whole table looks on stonily. In the BACKGROUND we see McGinty working at the bar but he is OUT OF FOCUS.

CUT TO:

THE GIRL'S LEGS AS SHE DANCES

CUT TO:

THE GIRL'S UPPER HALF

She looks around and is amused at the effect her legs are having. (8–9)

Lacking dialogue, the scene for Brooks and Heilman is "pure action" but "not very dramatic […] as *action* it expresses very little; and even as acted out by a competent actress whose gesture and facial expression might conceivably add a good deal to the meaning of the scene, the 'meaning' of the scene is blurred and vague"; it is mere "*pantomime* – a very old art and for certain types of material highly expressive, but an art which, deprived as it is of the use of words, can get at the inner life of its characters only very indirectly" (9).

Even in the flat language of the shooting script, though, the scene seems dynamic, *expressive*, requiring us to imagine the kinds of embodiment it might compel, even from a merely "competent" cast. Shifting perspective, the scene begins and ends with the rumba dancer expressing herself in dance, by raising her skirt, and by the hint of satisfaction when she draws the attention of the barroom. As an establishing scene, we might well think that the densely gendered opening moments of *The Great McGinty* are as "expressive" as, say, the opening moments of *Rosmersholm*, in which Mrs. Helseth busily cleans the parlor, secretly watching with Rebecca to see whether Rosmer will finally cross the bridge on his way home, or of *Hamlet*, as Barnardo and Francisco feel their way confusedly around the Danish darkness of a sunny English afternoon.

Yet while for Brooks and Heilman the absence of dialogue distinguishes the scene from true drama, it nonetheless provides a paradigm of text and performance: "This is just what is seen in plays: the meaning of the spoken lines is constantly supplemented by physical action" (7). In drama, "costume, setting, and even acting itself are, finally, secondary. It is the word which is primary" (12). Insofar as dramatic language is conceived principally as *speech*, performance becomes a subordinate means of supplementing, illustrating the text on the page. Brooks and Heilman use *The Great McGinty* to stage performance as a parasite: "we ought to observe that *what the director will add here is a kind of*

commentary, a kind of interpretation which, even though it does not make use of words, still is an interpretation over and above the 'pure action' we have already considered," action coextensive with the words on the page (9). The camera, too, which we might think *creates* the scene for us, surgically dissecting the unnamed "girl" into a smile, torso, and legs, is responsible only for "sifting the material and arranging it for us in a meaningful pattern. It is making an interpretation of the scene" (10).

Understanding the director's work, the actor's work, even the camera's work as "interpretation," Brooks and Heilman take a now-familiar position: the performance is an "interpretation" of something else, the dramatic "work" that lives in the "printed form" of the text, which should be delivered to the audience by "*characters*, who make *speeches*" supplemented by action and gesture, scenography, costume and lighting. So common is this way of understanding plays on the stage (and films of stage-plays, such as Shakespeare films), that it is arresting to encounter it here about an artform – film drama – usually identified more completely with performance than with writing. The film may be called *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, but it is Baz Luhrmann's film (screenplay by Craig Pearce and Baz Luhrmann). Regarding the film as an "interpretation" of the screenplay, Brooks and Heilman reveal how the tactical significance of performance as "interpretation" frames a misleading paradigm of theatre and drama.

For while the camera work may be "interpretive" – and while it provides the material for our further interpretation – it does not "interpret" the screenplay, the *text*, in the way Brooks and Heilman suggest. The activity of interpretation is, of course, everywhere part of the production process: the director, designers, and cinematographer will have interpreted the scene (what elements are important? should we see McGinty clearly or not? how many customers are "a few," how are they dressed, how old are they? what's the condition of the bar? is it dangerous or just dilapidated? is it dilapidated at all?), and use the camera as one means to realize the work they want the scene to do. But the scene we see is *after* interpretation. The "interpretive" activity of the director is an ongoing process, but s/he is not "interpreting" the screenplay: the screenplay is one element to be interpreted, along with the camera work, the acting, costuming, designs, in the creation of the work of performance. What the film director most directly "interprets" is performance itself ("Let's do another take"), viewing the daily rushes

while shooting, and then reviewing all takes during the film's editing; so too, much of the stage director's "interpretive" work happens in rehearsal ("let's try that again"), and what is being interpreted is the developing process of the performance itself. Performance is the final cause of the director's work, and what the director and actors interpret is not the writing but the performance they are making, reading it not against the text but against what the performance might and should be, what kind of event this performance might use the text, actors, scenography to make.

We should be wary of constituting the identity of the artwork in ways that artificially disregard the range of its manifest and material instrumentalities, its use and use-value. The "interpretive" understanding of performance defines performance as "presentation" of something that already exists, a "*kind of commentary*" supplementing (or degrading) the written work of art, because it uses the work in ways that extend beyond the apparent warrant of its "printed form." To put it another way, the "interpretive" perspective arises from Brooks and Heilman's inability to read what's not there in the text, but which nonetheless makes plays legible as designs for action. Even plays that seem to put everything on the page – the misleading verbal density of Shakespeare comes to mind, as do Samuel Beckett's screenplays and mimes – dramatize the degree to which the meaning of these plays as drama will depend on unwritten, perhaps unwritable "performative" conventions, a sense of performance as a specific kind of doing that lives outside the text. As J. L. Austin argues, the linguistic, social, cultural, and theatrical systems beyond language allow us to imagine the performance of words as *illocutionary* (doing something) and *perlocutionary* (causing something to happen): the conventions of performance enable us to imagine dramatic writing as act, as deed, as doing. Burke's reading of Austin implies, though, that the *agency* of writing deployed in a new *scene* creates the possibility for new acts to take place. One of the great lessons of modern drama, and even of Shakespeare's fortunes in the modern theatre, is that plays which have seemed entirely undramatic and untheatrical – *The Seagull*, *The Master Builder*, *Ubu Roi*, *Waiting for Godot*, *The Birthday Party*, *Blasted*, but also *Troilus and Cressida*, *Measure for Measure*, *Titus Andronicus* – required a performative transformation, a recalibration of the Burkean "ratios" of *act*, *scene*, *agent*, *purpose*, and especially of the instrumental function of language as *agency*. Plays that did not seem to afford a

living theatricality gained a different potential with the application of new technologies of production, understood as the entire social practice of theatrical representation. The plays required and enabled a transformation in the ways of reading dramatic language, of practicing its *agency* as a means to rendering a purposeful theatrical *agent* (actor) and dramatic *agent* (character), and so accomplishing a palpable *act* of dramatic performance. As a result, these plays became not merely stageworthy, capable of being used to create meaningful action in the *scene* of the theatre, but their performance could become a significant, critical *act* in that larger *scene*, the changing scene of social life. The theatre's makers and audiences had to learn to read, to do, and to see differently for these plays to take, or retake, the stage.

Heresy, responsibility, and performance

At first glance, isolating "the text" from the practices of the theatre in order to assess its purely "poetic" integrity and unity may not seem problematic. The New Critics promise, after all, a purely literary understanding of the play arising from the "close reading" of the words. Poetic language may be "language as gesture," but the New Criticism so thoroughly disdains the gestures with which language becomes dramatic as to falsify its defining sense of the value of poetry.[11] For this reason, Brooks and Heilman urgently discriminate between what they take to be the truly dramatic elements of the text, and those assigned a merely theatrical function. Even the most elegant and intellectually demanding comedy – such as the plays of Wilde, Sheridan, and Congreve included in *Understanding Drama* – depends for its success on the physical grace of the comic actor. The body is the palpable means and medium of comedy. Can you think of Falstaff without seeing his girth in your mind's eye, or think "Restoration Comedy" without a slight alteration in posture? This bodily summons is especially engaged by those comedies, however rich in symbolic "meaning," that depend on the physical skills of a central performer to incarnate a crucial role: Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or Algy and Jack contesting muffins in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. To Brooks and Heilman, though, this element of comedy stands apart from its dramatic identity. Plautus' *The Twin Menaechmi*, already part of a degraded genre, farce, "deals entirely in *amusing situations*, is little concerned with character, and not at all with ideas" (137). More alarming, Plautus'

farce depends on the (undescribed) conventions of the Roman theatre and its performers:

> One must remember too, that the liveliness and the successfulness of farce depend also on the ability of the comic actor to develop the humor fully with his facial expression, mimicry, and gesture. By such devices, as we know, an able comedian can frequently make very funny a part which in itself may seem rather wooden and flat. […] But though the dramatist has a perfect right to depend upon the actor who has such devices at his command, it ought to be clear that his comedy, in so far as it does depend upon such devices, is moving away from drama proper and into the realm of pantomime, vaudeville, and musical comedy. It is with drama proper that this book is concerned. (140–1)

The "greater the allowance which we have to make for theatrical conventions, the greater is our sense of the author's limitations" (141). How to discriminate the theatrical convention from the dramatic? Shakespeare's soliloquies, Wilde's epigrams, Ibsen's indirections, Beckett's vaudevillian nonsequiturs all activate specific "conventions" of their stages, opportunities for acting and engagement with an audience given specificity and purpose through the script. Yet for Brooks and Heilman, the trained competence of the performer is merely a presentational "device." The design of the drama must be insulated from the conventionality of the stage, they suggest, for the play to be read in the properly literary way.

As a social technology, the performance conventions of a given theatre afford the successful use of dramatic writing; the changing conventions of the stage are dialectically entwined with the origin and ongoing vitality of any play. Insofar as the "form of a play is always a convention, which it is the business of performance to express" (*Ibsen to Eliot* 32), we can take Williams's sense of "convention" to approximate the New Critical sense of the organic unity and compelling poesis of the literary work. In a truly dramatic theatre, performance would be like playing a musical instrument, expression "*within certain defined limits*, open to interpretation" (30). In the absence of convention, contemporary dramatic writing is – much as Plautus' comedies are to Brooks and Heilman – a deliquescent stream of mere opportunity: the play becomes "a collection of events and character-parts which require performance for completion. Often, indeed, the play becomes a mere 'vehicle' for a particular actor" (32). For Brooks

and Heilman, the dramatic poem is split between the fully dramatic elements and those designed to appeal to the conventions of the stage. For Williams, the absence of informing dramatic conventions directs the entirety of the dramatic text toward the extrinsic disciplines of the actor, who takes "certain words into his own personality" (31). "This discipline commands a personal respect; but it is far from the essential discipline of drama. It is the sincere attempt at discipline of interpretative artists who have been denied adequate guidance; but it is no substitute for that guidance, it is no substitute, in fact, for a convention" (32). For Williams as much as for Brooks and Heilman, the appeal to the stage is a moment of failure in the design of literary drama, a moment that fissures the desirable integrity of the verbal order of the text. "Convention" arises in the drama – and in mid-century drama theory – as a means to integrate the text, and assert its control over the interpretive spectacle of the stage.[12]

Although "drama consists of uniting the two arts of poetry and acting" (Bentley, *Thinker* 244), performance-as-interpretation divides the poetic from the performative aspects of drama. Indeed, understanding performance as "interpretation" surprisingly falsifies the defining strength of the New Criticism: its tenacious account of the intrinsically "poetic" character of poetic language. We can see the full impact of this "interpretive" understanding of dramatic writing, and its deformation of the fundamental values of New Criticism itself, in Brooks and Heilman's astonishing reading of one of the masterpieces of the Western canon, a play whose only weakness is, specifically, that it was not written by Shakespeare, or at least by Marlowe: Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*.

Rosmersholm dramatizes the degree to which the play may well lie behind or beneath its spoken language, implicitly challenging the sense of drama as a form of articulate speech. Perhaps for this reason, the discussion of *Rosmersholm* is the only place where Brooks and Heilman discuss *acting* as a means to seize, to "present," an "interpretation" of dramatic meaning. While the play's texture is rich with explanation, its action mainly transpires in the subtextual zone of intention, of the terrible, joyous fascination that binds Rosmer and Rebecca, and binds them to "go the way Beata went." At key moments, the dialogue is, even for Ibsen, unusually spare, drawing on the physical delicacy and intellectual resourcefulness of the performer. In their meticulous discussion of the play, Brooks and Heilman note one of Ibsen's stage

directions, Rebecca's "As if startled" reaction when Rosmer wonders at the end of Act 2 whether Rebecca had any inkling of Beata's suspicions of their as-yet-unacknowledged mutual attraction: "Here we see an unusual responsibility placed upon the actress; her interpretation of the line would be very important in stimulating the imagination. The words alone do not convey much" (*Understanding* 286–7). "Responsibility" is intriguing: we might think the performer's "responsibility" to the play, to the other cast members, to the audience, would be more or less uniform throughout the play. The quality of the actress's interpretation will clearly be measured – but measured against what? As Brooks and Heilman point out, it can't be measured directly against the text, since the "words alone do not convey much."

The play hinges again on the actors' responsibility toward its close, in the oblique negotiation between Rosmer and Rebecca to execute justice on themselves. Since the dialogue is evasive, Brooks and Heilman go to some lengths – uniquely in *Understanding Drama* – to explicitate the "subtext" of the action (not, of course, a word they would use), the implication that the text alone cannot convey the full significance of the event of performance. Rosmer says: "Well, then, I stand firm in our emancipated view of life, Rebecca. There is no judge over us; and therefore we must do justice on ourselves." He "evidently means: even judged by the new morality of emancipation we – that is, the individual – must do what Beata did. What I am proposing is not a reversion to my old orthodoxy. I stand firm in the emancipated view – and it is from this viewpoint that I am executing judgment on myself." That's what Rosmer means. Brooks and Heilman continue, "But, again, this view of the action may claim too much for what is in the text. Ibsen certainly, most readers will agree, has put a heavy burden of interpretation upon the actor and actress who are to play this scene" (310–11). But this "heavy burden of interpretation" placed on the actors arises from one of the most powerful and characteristic assertions of Ibsen's drama: that words fail, that the deepest currents of self-perception, self-deception, aspiration, and abjection, can only be realized (if they can be realized at all) in deeds that resist digestion in language much as they resist captivity to the stage. We never see the mill-race, nor the climax of the drama, where love and death, desire and disgust, obedience and freedom are, perhaps, consummated. The actors must shoulder the burden of realizing "this view of the action" through their "interpretation," an "interpretation" that depends, like the precise

paraphrase that Brooks and Heilman develop here, on Ibsen's language, language that urgently refuses to say what it means. Indeed, like Brooks and Heilman, the actors' "interpretation" may in the end "claim too much" for Ibsen's obdurate words, more than "is in the text."

Although Brooks and Heilman fear that the actor may betray the poetic design of the text (perhaps, as Williams has it, by "taking over certain words into his own personality"), their sense of "interpretive" performance betrays something more important, the unique form and pressure of literary language itself. In *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947), Brooks maintains that the order of the poem transcends its representation in non-poetic forms, even in the language of the critical paraphrase. The "heresy of paraphrase" is to mistake the interpretive clarity of paraphrase for the experience of the poem.

> We can very properly use paraphrases as pointers and as short-hand references provided that we know what we are doing. But it is highly important that we know what we are doing and that we see plainly that the paraphrase is not the real core of meaning which constitutes the essence of the poem.
>
> For the imagery and the rhythm are not merely the instruments by which this fancied core-of-meaning-which-can-be-expressed-in-a-paraphrase is directly rendered. Even in the simplest poem their mediation is not positive and direct. Indeed, whatever statement we may seize upon as incorporating the "meaning" of the poem, immediately the imagery and the rhythm seem to set up tensions with it, warping and twisting it, qualifying and revising it. (*Urn* 180)

The "structure of a poem resembles that of a play" (186) in that it "arrives at its conclusion through conflict"; as an event, an experience, "*an action* rather than as a formula for action or as a statement about action," the poem and the performance of the poem always stand apart from its rewriting into the logic of prose (187). The play's the thing, but is its performance the experience or the paraphrased "interpretation?" "The poem, if it be a true poem is a simulacrum of reality – in this sense, at least, it is an 'imitation' – by *being* an experience rather than any mere statement about experience or any mere abstraction from experience" (194). Yet the performed drama – which surely seems *experiential* – is oddly removed from the experience of the real, of the real drama, the thing itself. Actors *should* feel the weighty burden, the

responsibility for seizing this "meaning" and conveying it to us. But to Brooks and Heilman, the burden of the responsible actor is precisely to frame the performance as a kind of "statement about action," to show what Rosmer really means, rather than enacting the harrowing effort to occupy meaning, to go where "meaning" takes him. The reasons that Ibsen's actors have an undue burden of responsibility for Brooks and Heilman, compared to, say, Shakespeare's, is because the text does not specify the content of that experience clearly enough that we can be confident in its unmediated "stage presentation."[13]

The *scene* of performance for Brooks and Heilman is, even in the theatre, not the stage, and the actors are barely its *agents*. On the one hand, Brooks and Heilman pay close attention to the verbal and ethical dimension of the plays; on the other hand, they are unable to see Ibsen's writing engaging the theatrical practices that afford its significance as performance. More to the point, they also reveal the inability of New Criticism to engage with the language of modern drama itself. In many respects the language of modern drama is specifically un-Shakespearean, impoverished in imagery, syntactically unambiguous and lexically unadventurous. Words like "gladly" in *Rosmersholm*, or "vine leaves" in *Hedda Gabler* or even properties like the wild duck and the potted forest in *The Wild Duck* stand out so sharply against the drab verbal and visual texture of Ibsen's worlds: Ibsen transformed the realistic conventions of the modern theatre, framing a world of implacable material deadness, in which the possibility of liberating action emerges only fitfully, through nuance not declaration. Setting acting outside the realm of critique – actors enact the paraphrase, not the poem – New Criticism sees the practice of acting, its precise ways of making meaning with the text as merely "interpretive," as a technology applied to the text, or more precisely, to its paraphrase, in order to "present" it onstage.

For Brooks and Heilman, Ibsen's unaccountable decision to leave the resolution of the play's most delicate meanings to the work of the performers marks his signal failure as a writer. He might, after all, have chosen a medium more adequate to the poetic design of the drama, what they call "poetic form."

> But at this point we may suggest that what Ibsen has to say would probably have come across more successfully in poetic form. Poetic language, with its suggestiveness and allusiveness, its taking full advantage of the

> richness of meanings, is almost essential to the expression of so complex a conception as that of *Rosmersholm*. Here we have several levels of activity in several characters – that which appears on the surface and those which, for whatever reason, are concealed. Poetic language could represent all the levels simultaneously; prose, which is relatively flat and one-dimensional, has to do them one at a time – as in the case of Rebecca, in whom we sense ambiguities almost to the end. We are left to effect our own synthesis, which can never be as satisfactory as the author's own. Ibsen, indeed, is working toward the method of poetry when he uses such a symbol as the foot-bridge and when he has Brendel say, "slice off her incomparably moulded left ear"; he might well have gone further. When we come to the plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare, for instance, we can see how fully the poetic language supports and intensifies the dramatic meaning. (312)

Bentley complains that "Brooks and Heilman think that Ibsen is trying, or ought to have been trying, to be Shakespeare, and that he is not doing well at it" (*Thinker* 309). What would Shakespeare do had he the motive and the cue that Ibsen had? Like Rosmer and Rebecca, Othello works out his suicide onstage, and in "poetic language" that surely intensifies the scene, articulating Othello as the forceful instrument of the state's brutal justice, even as he executes that justice on its faithless enemy, himself. What is the actor's responsibility to "I kissed thee ere I killed thee. No way but this: / Killing myself, to die upon a kiss," or even to "And smote him, thus" (5.2.368–9, 365)? Is the actor's job here to communicate a paraphraseable "meaning," an "interpretation," and if so, what signs would materialize that interpretation? Or to "present" the text by making "*speeches*," a disappearing act requiring a substantial veil of words (Shakespeare does provide more cover than Ibsen)? Does the meaning of the event lie in the words, is it clarified as language? Or is the point of acting to lend a theatrical *purpose* to the words, to seize them as *agency* toward another *act*, one transpiring not in the *scene* of the dramatic fiction, but in the *scene* of the performance? In other words, is the purpose of dramatic writing to enable the creation of an act, rather than "a formula for action or a statement about action?"

To speak in this way is not only to echo Burke but to verge on Constantin Stanislavski or even Lee Strasberg, pointing not to the universality of their methods but to the dependency of the stage on legible means of rendering language as behavior, as *doing* that includes and exceeds *speech*. As Judith Butler reminds us, even in speaking "the act

that the body is performing is never fully understood; the body is the blindspot of speech, that which acts in excess of what is said, but which also acts in and through what is said" (*Excitable* 11). The rhetorical formality of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century acting made sense, much as a production by Robert Wilson or Frank Castorf makes sense today by grounding the words in a specific way of doing. Gertrude aside, suicide in Shakespeare is a wordy affair, but perhaps it's Pyramus who gets to the bottom of the ratio between word and deed, his aria enforcing the recognition that the *performative* cannot be reduced to the *constative*, that words are used to *do* something not merely to *say* something. In the theatre, the order of language is unaccountably, unpredictably, necessarily transformed by the body's means, or had better be: "Now, die, die, die, die, die" (5.1.295).

Despite their responsiveness to ambiguity and irony as readers, Brooks and Heilman regard Ibsen's prose as incapable of resolving the ambiguities he puts into action. And yet actors do not rely on paraphrase nor on stratified "levels of activity." Acting demands a simultaneous interplay of movement and gesture, tone and expression, proximity and pace, to incarnate the "action" as experience, an *act* in the *scene* of theatre. In this sense, the summons to write in verse says less about Ibsen's failings (he had, of course, mastered the "poetic form" in the long series of plays including *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, before forsaking it) than about Brooks and Heilman's understanding of "dramatic meaning": it is a function of language finding an illustration in performance, rather than of language that is resignified, and resignifies, the materialities it engages on the stage. They map the technology of theatre to the technology of reading, rather than taking the text as a supple tool, given the right affordance by its use in various technologies of performance.

The drama criticism of mid-century, practiced by noted critics of poetry and drama, a brilliant theatre critic and translator, a practicing actor and Shakespeare scholar, and the founder of "cultural studies," was notably successful in promoting a "literary" drama and arguing for its aesthetic complexity. And yet, in its commitment to the drama as a design for reading, it failed to read the drama, or more precisely failed to activate the range of extra-textual reading practices – spatial, visual, visceral – that locate the *agency* of the text in the *scene* of theatre, that illuminate its affordance in the social technology of the stage. This is hardly to say that the "interpretive" perspective was not influential:

we hear its accents still every time we ask how a performance interprets the play. (How do Zeffirelli's and Luhrmann's films provide different interpretations of *Romeo and Juliet*? Discuss, using specific examples from the text.) Promoting the essential ambiguity of great poetry, this vision imagined the dramatic poem as multivalent in its signification, while at the same time urging the stage as a site for the reduction of meaning, the transformation of poetic ambiguity into a single, appropriate, "responsible," actorly paraphrase. After all, while the drama "can be read or seen in the form of stage-presentation," the stage is finally not the place where the richest *experience* of the drama takes shape, at least for the New Critics. This vision of dramatic performance, perhaps not surprisingly, persists in many literary accounts of the drama; it is more surprising to find it playing a central role in an arena in which we should expect a more complex account of the work of writing in performance: performance studies.

ii. Dramatic Writing and its Discontents: Performance Studies, Drama Studies

> *What changes over time is the value, relevance, or meaning of the archive, how the items it contains get interpreted, even embodied. Bones might remain the same, even though their story may change, depending on the paleontologist or forensic anthropologist who examines them.* Antigone *might be performed in multiple ways, whereas the unchanging text assures a stable signifier.*
>
> *Diana Taylor,* The Archive and the Repertoire *(19)*

> *One aim of this study must be to develop a way of talking about drama that is not contaminated by notions derived from literature.*
>
> *Michael Goldman,* The Actor's Freedom *(4)*

Antigone's bones

Diana Taylor's superb reading of contemporary Latin American and Latino/a performance stands on a familiar dichotomy, one that emerged in its present shape in the 1970s as part of the enabling discourse of

performance theory and performance studies. It is unexceptionable, now, much as it was unexceptionable to the New Criticism of the 1950s and 1960s, to regard dramatic performance as the representation and reiteration of writing, as "subordinated to the primacy of the text" (Lehmann 21). In this view, the mutable, resistant, nomadic, and carnivalesque character of textless performance stands apart from dramatic theatre, and is captured in Taylor's sense of the *repertoire*, "embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing – in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge" (20).[14]

Rethinking performance required displacing paradigms – including a range of (mis)conceptions of Western dramatic performance – and performance studies has replaced the falsely "interpretive" account of dramatic performance with a series of productive paradigms for grasping the work and effect of performance more broadly: performance as *restored behavior* or *surrogation* (not the reenactment of scripted activities, but reproduced behavior); performance as a process of *disappearance* rather than presentation; performance as a *liminal* activity, posing and transgressing social and cultural thresholds; performance as a socially *efficacious* activity rather than the mere offering of an aesthetic representation for consumption.[15] Although performance studies has generally sidestepped the material critique of textuality, a sense of the *archive* of written culture defined by the fixity and stability of writing, and opposed to a *repertoire* of performance explicitly excluding dramatic performance – "performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing," but not acting, theatre – should give us pause. For Taylor, theatre's use of writing associates it with the "centuries of colonial evangelical or normalizing activity" (15) characteristic of imperial expansion, and of the imperial I/eye of Western epistemology; dramatic performance is essentially assimilated to the *archive* as an instrument of oppression, one of the ways the state "sustains power" (19). As a result, "Even though the archive and the repertoire exist in a constant state of interaction, the tendency has been to banish the repertoire to the past" (21), and so the mission of *The Archive and the Repertoire* is at once to restore the repertoire's social agency to view, and to outline its ongoing political and epistemological resistance. For while the "archive and the repertoire have always been important sources of information, both exceeding the limitations of the other," and usually working "in tandem and […] alongside other systems of

transmission" (21), the *archive* is both the prison house and graveyard of active performance culture: much as bones "might remain the same, even though their story may change," so too "*Antigone* might be performed in multiple ways, whereas the unchanging text assures a stable signifier" (19).

As the limitations of the New Critics' "interpretive" understanding of theatre make clear, Taylor is surely right to urge us "to acknowledge the need to free ourselves from the dominance of the text – as the privileged or even sole object of [performance] analysis" (27), especially if we persist in regarding "the text" as determining theatrical meaning. Yet Taylor's retemporalization of *repertoire* and *archive* is cognate with a more pervasive representation of the succession of performance media and the consequent succession of licensed critical methodologies. Anticipating Taylor's dichotomy, for instance, Hans-Thies Lehmann's framing of dramatic performance as essentially "subordinated to the primacy of the text" leads to a similar temporality, the succession of a fully pre-scribed dramatic by an emerging *postdramatic* theatre. So, too, Shannon Jackson locates the emergence of performance studies in the 1970s as part of a broader "transition from literary to cultural studies" (*Professing* 98), in which the textual commitments and antitheatrical (and homophobic) resistances of a determinedly "literary" conception of theatre siderailed drama as a site of engaged critique with performance sometime in the 1950s. Despite a "humbling" (107) recognition of the possibility of alternative histories, the "drama-to-culture genealogy" (94) pursued in *Professing Performance* leaves the territory of dramatic theory and performance since then largely uncharted by simply leaving it behind.

And yet Jackson finds the "awareness of a longer, complicated disciplinary genealogy" to make "oppositions between old literary studies and new cultural studies and between old theatre studies and new performance studies less easy to maintain or to elide" (107–8); so too Taylor alludes to the "constant state of interaction" between *archive* and *repertoire*, and Lehmann takes the rupture between dramatic and postdramatic theatre as a prolonged process of negotiation, slowly and unevenly reversing the "dramatic" predominance of writing to performance: "it becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information" (Lehmann 85).[16] One way to take these gestures seriously, however,

would be to resist the principal dichotomies sustaining them: the sense that, as part of the *archive*, dramatic writing determines the uses of the theatrical *repertoire*; that dramatic critique and dramatic performance must privilege a literary or "interpretive" valuation of the text; and that dramatic performance legitimates the representation, communication, product, information digested in the written script, what we might call the theatre-as-interpretive-paraphrase-by-other-means vision of performance characteristic of the New Criticism.

How might our reading of drama work at the interface between writing and embodiment, poetry and performance, rather than polarizing them? We might begin by unpacking how the distinction between *archive* and *repertoire*, for all its generative force, prevents us from seizing dramatic writing as an *agency* of performance, and so from seizing dramatic performance as performance at all. "*Antigone* might be performed in multiple ways, whereas the unchanging text assures a stable signifier" (19): for Taylor, writing ensures the unchanging transmission of the dramatic data, *information* which might be produced on different platforms, but which is unchanged by the site, means, or process of its performance. And yet Taylor's example surprisingly points to the drama's troubling place in the history of writing, and so to its troubling effect on the paradigm of *archive* and *repertoire*. First, we might ask, "What *Antigone*?" The Greek text, itself the result of the critical labors of millennia of scholarship, a text which is always plural, each individual edition differently concatenating ancient texts and commentaries, and so differing in important ways from other editions? A translation? Which translation? In what language? What "unchanging text" is *Antigone*? Few plays in Western theatre have been staged so variously, in ways that simultaneously exploit and betray the *archive*'s "stable signifier" through the unanticipated, creative immediacy of the *repertoire* as a means to generate a specific *act* of embodied resistance. This gesture even extends to the rewriting of the *archive* itself, in John Kani, Winston Ntshona, and Athol Fugard's *The Island* (1973) and Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act* (1985), for example.[17] What is the "stable signifier" *Antigone* assures? And how does that "signifier" emerge as "stable" in the changeable discourse of performance?

For Taylor, the dramatic theatre is a bland platform for the transmission of scripted data, from the dead hand of the author through the scripted performances of the archivist actors to the deadened minds of the audience. Now while some theatre certainly does work in this way,

it seems fairer to say that it's precisely the technologies of the *repertoire* that intervene, that enact the process of transmission, embodied practices such as editing, reading, memorization, movement, gesture, acting that produce both a sense of what the text *is*, and what *we might be capable of saying with and through it in/as performance, what we want to make it signify*. When performance studies emerged in the 1970s, performance theory began to part from the critique of dramatic performance, recognizing the extraordinary range and vitality of performance forms that have little to do with Western theatre, or with theatre at all.[18] At much the same time, though, dramatic critique also parted with the largely New Critical program for assimilating the drama to literary studies: a program that took the function of the stage as the interpretation of the literary character of the drama largely by framing acting as a mode of reproducing the text in speech – "*characters*, who make *speeches*" as John Crowe Ransom put it (*New* 169). In a savvy reading of the critical scene, Jon Erickson suggests that "If performance studies has a problem with theatre studies, it is that, despite its emphasis on the theatrical, it is still too literary and in thrall to a textual regime, a regime that represents the imperial power of literate cultures over oral or nonliterate cultures," and over the nontextual culture of performance as well (248). At the same time, one aspect of the impact of the access to "'performance' as it appears in contemporary social and cultural theory," Julia A. Walker argues, is "an increasing awareness of the limitations of the metaphor of culture as text" ("Why" 157). While the "antitextualism" of performance studies is now familiar (Puchner, "Entanglements" 24), in the past three decades the critique of drama has been characterized by a complex challenge to read the drama differently by adducing a set of interlocking issues: a complex resistance to the institutions of literature and the practices of a purely "literary" analysis, requiring a reassessment of the relationship between writing and embodiment, an assessment that has also demanded a compromise with an understanding of performance as merely another kind of "text." Although there were compelling reasons for leaving traditional, literary views of dramatic performance behind in the fashioning of an emergent discipline, we might now ask whether an alternative genealogy of dramatic critique could be brought back into dialogue with the now dominant "traditions" of performance studies, and what the attractions of resuming that conversation might be.

Of course, "literary studies" itself can hardly be reduced to a narrow range of objects and activities, and dramatic writing – predominantly Shakespeare in this regard – has felt the impact of the multiplication of critical practices and perspectives characteristic of the well-known (inter)disciplinary ferment of the past thirty years. Here, though, I'm less concerned with perspectives that assume drama's likeness to other forms of literary representation, analyzing, say, the formal, ideological, psychoanalytic contingencies of a play's narrative, strategies of characterization, or fictive world. While such work has surely ramified aspects of (some) dramatic writing as cultural practice, by treating dramatic writing as textuality it confirms the drama's place in the boneyard: Antigone's bones lie near Aristotle's and Hegel's, and I suppose near Antony's and Anna Christie's too. Despite the apparent impact of "performativity and performance" in literary studies, reopening the territory between dramatic and performance studies requires a considerably more vigorous contestation of the "literary" dimension of drama, in which doing things *with* words resists the sense that it's the *words* that are doing the *doing*.[19]

The "theater of acting"

How might we read plays without conceiving stage performance as merely ministerial, "interpretive," derivative of the drama's "literary" design? More to the point, how might dramatic writing be understood in ways that reimagine the interface between *archive* and *repertoire*, text and body, in ways that could promote the affordance of dramatic writing to an emerging conception of performance? In his 1975 book *The Actor's Freedom*, Michael Goldman worked to redirect thinking about drama, attempting to "develop a way of talking about drama that is not contaminated by notions derived from literature" (4). As he suggests, this is indeed a difficult task, not least because "drama, reduced to the words connected with it – scripts – looks very much *like* literature, often has a decidedly 'literary' interest – and words are more at home talking about other words than about anything else" (4). It's a surprising gesture, in part because Goldman's frame of reference feels so familiar: T. S. Eliot casts a shadow, as does the Cambridge School, and *The Actor's Freedom* takes in the then-standard syllabus, *Oedipus* and Aristotle, *Quem Quaeritis*, Marlowe and Shakespeare, Ibsen and Chekhov, Brecht and Beckett, extending the critical outlines of

Understanding Drama or *The Idea of a Theater*. And yet, Goldman proposes a reading strategy in which the verbal organization of the script works not to structure a literary design echoed in performance, but something else: "the confrontation that takes place between any actor and his audience; plays are best understood as ways of intensifying that confrontation and charging it with meaning" (3).

Conceptualizing drama as an instrument of performance, Goldman's work can be understood as part of a widespread movement to rethink the "interpretation" of drama, and to resituate an "interpretive" model of text-to-performance taking place across dramatic studies, from Aeschylus and Sophocles, to Shakespeare and early-modern drama, and to modern playwriting as well.[20] But *The Actor's Freedom* is also a road not taken (and perhaps not seen), as Goldman sets dramatic performance – "the theater of acting" – at once within and against the wider sphere of "performance."

> I use the word "theater" in these pages to refer not only to the place where plays are given but to the entire occasion of acted drama – that is, to the performance of parts by actors according to some kind of shaping intent. The notion is broadly inclusive, not limited to performances based on a written script, or even to the actor's taking on a character entirely separate from his own. It applies, that is, as much to the Open Theater's *Mutation Show* as to *Hamlet*. Most readers, I imagine, will find the definition natural enough, but I call attention to it because some interesting recent criticism has approached acting under the general heading of "performance theory," and defined "theater" to mean any occasion of performance. I use "theater" in the more resricted sense partly for convenience, of course, but I do insist on the difference between the theater of acting and other kinds of performance because I think it is a radical one. Acting *is* a type of performance, as speech is a type of communication, but in both cases the subclass is so distinctive, so rich and singular, that it can be misleading to treat it on terms of parity with other members of the general classification.
>
> If anyone wishes to call a circus "theater," let him do so by all means. There are interesting points of similarity between circus and drama. And dramatic elements make their appearance in almost any kind of performance. But my use of "theater" does keep together under a single heading what centuries of artists all over the world have persisted in bringing together – what most people commonly have in mind when they say "theater." More important, it points to a distinction between this kind of theater and circuses, demonstrations, ballet, encounter groups, sports,

> religious ritual, etc., that corresponds to a widely held feeling – and the elaborate recognition of many cultures – that the theater of acting is very special, uniquely satisfying, like nothing else; that the difference is sharp, clear, and profoundly important; and that the theater of acting is as radically different from other kinds of performance as writing is from painting. (ix–x)

Implicitly countering the emerging practice of an as-yet-unnamed performance studies, Goldman's tactical "theater of acting" enables him to chart a distinctive course for dramatic theory, negotiating between a narrowly "literary" understanding of dramatic-performance-as-interpretation-of-the-text on the one hand, and the incipient force of a "performance theory" often working, appropriately enough, to marginalize dramatic performance in the wider arena of performance activity or to remove it altogether from the field.

First, Goldman counters a salient element of the "literary" view that the business of the stage is to "imitate" or "interpret" the dramatic world set out by the playwright. This rejection of performance-as-mimesis is precisely what the "theater of acting" shares with the conception of performance emerging from "performance theory." Defining the "theater of acting" as a genre of *performance*, Goldman positions *The Actor's Freedom* as a corrective to Richard Schechner's influential 1971 article, "Actuals."[21] In this foundational essay, Schechner makes a working distinction between mimetic performance events (dramatic theatre) and those – he includes Tiwi ritual, shamanistic performance, The Living Theatre's *Paradise Now*, Alan Kaprow's *Fluids*, Jerzy Grotowski's *Apocalypsis cum figuris* and *Akropolis*, and the Performance Group's *Makbeth* and *Dionysus in 69* – that refuse a conceptual "hierarchy," resist placing "any life-process 'above' any other," writing above enactment, mimetic representation above the present performance ("Actuals" 64). Yet as Goldman points out, "Schechner's distinction between the immediacy of the performer and that of the play, though 'anti-literary' in bias, actually has its roots in a distinctly literary view of drama" (32). Goldman doesn't characterize that "literary view," but perhaps he didn't need to, given the still-pervasive grip of the New Criticism in the 1970s. Seduced perhaps by the design of the printed page, for the New Criticism and an emerging performance studies, drama was principally an order of words, "dialogue" rather than action, and the function of performance was syntactically parallel with

reading. Schechner's dramatic theatre is "representational" in just this way: much like Brooks and Heilman, Schechner assumes that the purpose of dramatic theatre is to subordinate the act of performance to the inherent code of the script.

Goldman was right to note that Schechner's vision of drama in the 1970s was "literary"; the gestural resistance of performance studies to the disciplines of drama depends on it. We can all agree, as Schechner has more recently suggested, that "literature and performance: they're two different subjects" ("Interview" 202), requiring different methods and attending – sometimes – to different objects of inquiry. Yet drama isn't always and only "literature": sometimes it provides a material instrument for performing, and it's precisely in this arena that Schechner's distinction between "fixed" forms – films, films of performances, writing – and the informal mutability of "behavior" begins to break down:

> Behavior is marked by qualities of presence and contingency, both contested terms. *Presence* means that the author or producer of the behavior is there actually behaving, actually doing at the same moment and in the same space with the receivers. *Contingence* means that no score is perfectly reenacted time and again. Every instance is either an original or there is no original anytime. ("Interview" 203)

Of course, in the "theater of acting" the "author or producer of behavior is there actually behaving," acting in contingent ways that both change from night to night, and have little to do with reenacting any imaginable score. There's nothing in the script of *Hamlet* that tells an actor how to act, how to use "To be or not to be" to create a significant act onstage, or what to do with and through the sounding of those words. Yet anticipating Taylor's *archive* and *repertoire*, Schechner advances an arresting hermeneutics. The purpose of "the study of literature," and so of forms of performance predicated on "literature," is to "keep the words intact, but change their meanings through interpretation" (204). Antigone's bones: Schechner isolates dramatic performance from the principal trajectories of cultural and philosophical critique of the past quarter century, which have tended to see the "interpretation" of art objects changing the objects themselves, a condition that is especially true in relation to objects, like dramatic writing, that afford behavioral, contingent, present *performances* rather than mere "interpretations."

For this reason, Schechner's sense that a "behavior-based outlook, a performative outlook, introduces the ability to change the primary text" (204) is not only not news but installs a distinction that makes little difference (think of the editions of *Hamlet* published during or shortly after Shakespeare's lifetime, Q1, Q2, F1; of the editorial tradition performing the play in print for the subsequent centuries, Rowe, Malone, Bowdler, Bevington, Oxford, *Classics Illustrated*; but also of the performance tradition itself, Burbage, Garrick, Gibson, the Wooster Group). In its representation and instigation of behavior, dramatic performance has always (already) altered the text, rewriting it and multiplying it into the many texts used in a given production (the great majority forsaken by the performance itself), as well as absorbing writing into the *repertoire*'s practices of embodiment, action resisting digestion into textuality. As John Rouse notes, the "director's control is less over performance writing than over performance discourse" (147). Although we surely cannot study performance through textual materials alone, Schechner's notion that directors have a choice whether to take the "dramatic text not as the cause or the prior authority but simply as material" (210) is slightly misframed: the text is always material, and different *repertoire*s of performance use it, stake its instrumentality in different ways.

Sharing the intellectual milieu that inspired an antidramatic performance studies – anthropology, Freud and Erikson, Artaud, Grotowski – *The Actor's Freedom* explores an attitude, a rhetoric, and a mode of critique capable of seizing dramatic writing as at once material for use conditioned by its production in/for/as theatrical work, and as representation, not of a fictional world but of the present physical process of its own performance. Goldman takes dramatic writing less to determine the theatre's representational field in opposition to the present work of performance (*archive* vs. *repertoire*, writing vs. behavior) than as a Burkean interrogation of the *agents*, *agencies*, *acts*, and *scenes* of stage performance, the "theater of acting." Resisting the New Critics' "interpretive" theatre, *The Actor's Freedom* resists offering merely a new "interpretation" of textual meanings, instead undertaking a processual reading strategy, an effort to use the "unremitting immediacy of theatrical experience" to think through the possibilities – the rather generalized possibilities to be sure – for inhabiting the drama, not as a "representation of reality," but as "reality itself, there before us in the theater" (34).

To read drama as an element of performance rather than as a complete and organic verbal expression is to challenge the sense that the "work" inheres solely in the text, to be decanted more or less authoritatively to the stage, that since drama frames "*characters*, who make *speeches*" (Ransom, *New* 169), good acting is a form of "responsible" paraphrase-in-speech, as Brooks and Heilman argued in their reading of *Rosmersholm*. Rather than taking *character* to be expressed in *speech*, a mere enunciation of the play's verbal order, Goldman sees *character* as a medium of interchange, and while "all dramatic characterization has, in this sense, an iconic aspect," the purpose of the mask-like dramatic role is less to reify a mimetic fiction than to project "some motif in the actor's repertory of emotional aggression" (50). Dramatic writing provides the actor with a *repertoire* of potential activity to be seized by the available *repertoire* of acting; *character* is not inscribed, a thing, but an effect emerging consequentially from how the actor-as-character "*acts* – that is, how he moves in and out of his repertory of roles" (92). In the 1970s it was common to draw a parallel between acting and shamanistic rituals, but though acting may resemble possession, actors are not *possessed* by "characters": the virtual beings created in the "theater of acting" don't exist elsewhere, awaiting their reappearance, reanimation. This "thing" that appears "again tonight" at the opening of *Hamlet* is ontologically complex, to be sure, but on the crowing of the cock he returns to fast in fictive fires; but when Hamlet stops playing Pyrrhus onstage, Pyrrhus dissolves into the trivial fond records of sometimes misremembered words. Theatrical presentation materializes, sustains, localizes, and so betrays dramatic representation: "acting itself is always in some sense the subject of the play" (92).

As many playwrights (Shaw, Stein, Parks, and Kane come to mind) have recognized, the printform of plays – neat columns of type, tidily assigning various "speeches" to various "characters" – at once imprisons the drama and, occasionally, provides an instrument for challenging the *repertoire* of performance practices. In the "theater of acting," words are incorporated through all the means of the actor's *repertoire* for inhabiting an action, to render the contingent *behavior* of the stage significant, to make something happen in the qualified but nonetheless palpable event of the theatre. Far from modeling dramatic performance ("*characters*, who make *speeches*"), "Speech is a problem in drama," not least because "Each line of dialogue must make up for what it destroys" (117). Speech interrupts the presence of performance,

inserting its textuality into the lived and living enactment. The "theater of acting" must discover not the literary expressiveness of its dialogue, but its precise affordance as action within the disguise/revelation dynamic of acting: "Speech in particular, because of its mobility, its density of impressions, should always be thought of as a disguise – a disguise that slips, reveals, changes, strains to be adequate, strains even to be true or transparent to what it describes, breaks away, breaks down, stiffens, must be bolstered up" (93). And insofar as acting, acting with words in this case, is "a way of learning to think with the body" (89), it belongs to the *repertoire*'s strategies of embodiment, "performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing" (Diana Taylor 20). The purpose of acting is not merely to clothe *Antigone*'s bones with new flesh – the zombie theory of drama – but to use writing as a means to render the present relation with an audience significant through the actor's shifting repertory of role-playing.

Reading drama between *archive* and *repertoire*, writing and behavior, poetry and performance demands a resistance to "literary" notions of textual fidelity and reproduction; it involves a processual engagement with *character* as a process of *doing*, of change, disguise, role-playing, performance. It means thinking "with the body" about how language can be used to specify and develop an event taking place onstage, and the significant inhabiting of that unique relationship between actor and an audience of spectators. It also means thinking with bodies in history: today's actors are trained – in New York and Johannesburg and Los Angeles and Montreal and Mumbai and London – to do things with words, to do specific and different things, and certainly do different things than Olivier or Irving or Garrick or Burbage did. Yet both Schechner and Taylor see the possibility of this kind of event taking place to be foreclosed by the essential fixity of writing, and by the ideologically reproductive function of writing sustaining the cultural *archive*. In his more recent meditation on the work of dramatic genre, *On Drama*, Goldman more directly takes on the critique of writing, the "textualization" of performance, arguing that the "mutual permeability of actor and script" addresses a "more-than-philosophical anxiety about the relation between between persons and texts." Far from endorsing either the Geertzian sense "that cultural forms can be treated as texts" (Geertz 449), or the familiar critique of the ethnocentrism of Geertz's "textualizing" perspective on performance culture developed by Conquergood and deployed by Taylor, Goldman has come to see a

"textualized" performance to be "crucially challenged by the phenomenon of theatrical performance" itself. For all the theatre's text-like conventionality, acting is not "reducible to texts," merely providing "a text supplementary to the script" (*On Drama* 49), what Schechner and others call a "performance text." Much as Judith Butler underscores the "scandalous" dimension of embodied performance, the extent to which the speaking body "always says something that it does not intend" (*Excitable* 10), so for Goldman, "in drama one finds inevitably an element in excess of what can be semiotically extracted" from a reading of performance (*On Drama* 49–50). It's precisely the dramatic text's externality, the fact that "Contrary to Derrida, there is *always* an horstexte, a place from which someone at some moment needs to enter, even to constitute the text as a text" that marks the drama's insistence on the "mutually constitutive commerce between that which is writing and that which is not" (51). In the theatre, "text and performance are experienced as generating one another" (52–3), and this generative principle animates the vitality of "the theater of acting."

I spend so much time here on Goldman's work because it marked – at the dawn of performance studies' critical emergence – one alternative strategy for conceiving the work of drama between poetics and performance, a strategy addressing several of the problems that both literary studies and performance studies had with dramatic performance. Reading drama in 1975, Goldman provided a point of resistance to the illusory dominion of "literature" in the theatre, modeling a way to seize the specificity of dramatic writing as an encounter with embodiment, a means to reflect writing as an instrument of action rather than as a script of subjection. Nor was Goldman alone: Bernard Beckerman's 1979 pairing of *activity* with *action* as a means of leveraging dramatic analysis out of the text, and his articulation of performance as a holistic activity ("an audience does not see with its eyes but with its lungs, does not hear with its ears but with its skin. […] Nor do we have to discriminate the dramatic signals mentally in order to react") evokes a wider effort to pursue a critical and theoretical resituation of dramatic writing in performance (150). With the benefit of hindsight, we can see why some of the avenues charted in *The Actor's Freedom* may not have been pursued: many of its key terms (absence/presence) would soon be widely foregrounded under the sign of Derridean deconstruction; despite its attention to acting and theatre, few actual moments of acting and theatre are brought to bear; actors, the plays they perform, and the

audiences they perform with are unmarked by gender, sexuality, race, location, politics; the Western theatre incorporates the presence of the "primitive" – drawn as much from traditional cultures as from children's play – without much explicit self-consciousness of the acts of appropriation that such cultural transfer might involve (one might well have similar hesitations regarding some of Schechner's or Victor Turner's work in the 1970s, too). And yet, even while the animating gesture of Goldman's work is to reorient a program of *reading*, what we read when we read drama is not the intrinsic relation between words on the page but the ways writing can be understood to instigate *behavior*, action *contingent* on the means of a given historical theatre and the ideologies of acting, action, spectating, and visibility it materializes. Goldman's perspective stands behind more recent work, such as Simon Shepherd's *Theatre, Body and Pleasure* (2006), which suggestively reads the demands of enacting specific roles in the history of Western theatre (Horner and Harcourt in Wycherly's *The Country Wife*, Herod in medieval cycle drama, Marlowe's Tamburlaine) to document how the "acting bodies" shaped by dramatic performance "are specific to particular sorts of text and theatre, and hence they are both shaped by, and contribute to, the 'dramatic rhythm' of the text" (81). Anticipating the "constant state of interaction" between *archive* and *repertoire*, Goldman, Beckerman, and others opened a means of attending to the specificities of dramatic performance that are only now beginning to be realized as their cultural and theoretical legacy.

Rethinking writing

There is hardly a dearth of writing about drama. Much of this critique, though, is concerned with making dramatic writing "perform" in a range of nontheatrical rhetorical, theoretical, and ideological venues, and even "performance-oriented" criticism frequently tracks the purpose of critique back to performance-as-interpretation. Some of the most celebrated readings of drama under the sign of "performance studies" – I'm thinking here of Joseph Roach's superb account of the 1710 visit of Iroquois ambassadors to *Macbeth* in *Cities of the Dead*, or of Timothy Raphael's surrogation of *Hamlet* in Ronald Reagan's address at a military cemetery in Bitburg, Germany, a cemetery in which members of the Waffen SS were buried ("Mo[u]rning") – primarily engage the drama's narrative and thematic dimension as an analytical

instrument for reflecting on the cultural consequences of signal political events (Raphael) or reconstruct a specific theatrical event to ramify and particularize the significance of deeper cultural trends (Roach). Jon McKenzie has noted that the "liminal norm" characterizing performance studies "operates in any situation where the valorization of liminal transgression or resistance itself becomes normative," and dramatic writing and performance have often been constitutively positioned across the disciplinary threshold of this "transgressive" self-conception (*Perform* 50). Yet the impact of performance studies has been registered in the absorption of its gestures and categories across this "liminal norm," in ways that alter the disciplinary boundaries and what it means to transgress them. In what we might take to be its two signal gestures – a resistance to reading dramatic performance as the literary illumination of the text, and a reciprocal reflection on the uses of writing in the embodied conventionality of performance (the *performative*) – dramatic critique, since *The Actor's Freedom* at least, has worked less to privilege the determining function of writing than to resituate the potential *agency* of writing in reshaping the interface of *archive* and *repertoire*, the *scene* of *writing* and *behavior*.

The decisive moment in this trajectory was opened by Jacques Derrida's celebrated essays, "La Parole Soufflée" and "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation" (1978), which locate Antonin Artaud within a wider effort to unseat the logocentric hierarchy of metaphysics, and the collocation of the foundational categories of presence and absence with speech and writing. Rather than locating performance in a derivative, secondary, lapsed, and merely "interpretive" relation to writing, this critique charts the interaction of writing and performance in their mutual co-creation. Contemporary dramatic theory is not "against interpretation" exactly, but in resisting familiar "literary" models of the priority of text-to-performance, it necessarily resists "interpretive" accounts of theatre and the paradigms of reading, writing, and performance they sustain, models essential to interring drama in the *archive*. In this sense, contemporary dramatic theory promotes alternative ways of *reading* drama, strategies that resist a "literary" determination of dramatic theatre and the "textualization" of performance it implies. The four influential studies considered here – Stanton B. Garner, Jr., *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (1994), Herbert Blau, *The Audience* (1990), Benjamin Bennett, *All Theater Is Revolutionary Theater* (2005), and

Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (1999; English translation 2006) – are hardly monovocal, yet they suggest a considerably more dynamic horizon for the reading of drama against the background of contemporary performance.

Noting the impact of performance studies – "Dramatic performance, it is often maintained, is only a subset of theatrical performance (which is itself only a subset of *performance* in its broadest meaning, a category that has grown to include other performing media arts, ritual, and various forms of social performance)" (5) – Stanton B. Garner, Jr.'s *Bodied Spaces* openly confronts the challenge "that a study concerned with the phenomenological parameters of theatrical performance should conduct its investigation largely in reference to the dramatic text, that prescriptive artifact whose traditionally literary authority contemporary performance theory has sought to overthrow" (5). Yet Garner calls for "a markedly different notion of the dramatic text from that of traditionally literary study" (6). While Goldman rejects a "literary" account of the drama in order to pursue its instrumentality in a "theater of acting," Garner urges a phenomenological mode of reading capable of describing the peculiar oscillation between the fiction onstage and the "complex participations of the dramatic event," a field including "not only the spectator and the performer who offers his or her body to view, but also the character whom this performer bodies forth" (7). This phenomenological reading, moreover, must resist "the neo-Aristotelianism that still governs much critical theory" of drama in order to "reembody, materialize the text, draw out this latency – not simply as a teleological point of realization beyond the playscript, but as an intrinsic component of dramatic textuality itself" (7).

Garner proposes a means of "reading 'through'" (6) the dramatic text to discover a range of "phenomenological configurations" it might motivate (5) within the implicit conventions of contemporary Western theatricality. Here, dramatic writing neither governs the theatrical event nor casts it as mere "interpretation," nor is it conceived principally from the actor's perspective. Instead, the text provides a means to conceive, explore, and theorize the uses of performance, the "specific bodily configurations and perceptual orientations" (7), as well as the historical record of past encounters. Charting writing's "multiple relationships to the moment of performance" (123), its operation in the "intercorporeal field" (36) of the theatre, seizing the theatre not in terms of "presence" but "in terms of *presencing*" (43), *Bodied Spaces* finally

resists a logocentric role for the text in performance and also resists – strikingly, in ways resembling those of Conquergood and Taylor – the application of a Geertzian "textuality" to embodied culture. For Garner, too, is impatient with the abstraction of "the body" such textualization implies, "the apparent ease with which contemporary theory has dispatched the phenomenal (or lived) body in favor of the representational (or signifying) body" (13). Transforming the body into a text-like sign, reading its meanings in purely symbolic or semiotic terms, articulates "a model of enactment and spectatorship essentially Aristotelian in outlines: in which the theater plays its meanings before the gaze of a privileged spectator who stands (or sits, as it were) outside the conditions of spectacle" (45). *Antigone* may be bones in the *archive*, but the relationships it enables us to produce, inhabit, and perform emerge in the precise configurations of specific modes of theatrical encounter. More to the point, contemporary drama encodes paradigms of spatialization that represent and so render legible the phenomenal codes with which we inhabit the world.

For Goldman, dramatic writing is the instrument of an actor's encounter with an audience; for Garner, writing similarly provides an instrument for charging the *scene* of that encounter with spatial and perceptual specificity. Garner's effort to spatialize the embodied relations of dramatic performance resonates not only with phenomenological accounts of drama, but also with efforts to engage the material functioning of space and place in dramatic performance.[22] Herbert Blau's work, difficult as it is to characterize, might be described as assimilating contemporary critique of the drama to a longer literary and philosophical tradition through the insights gained from performance itself. While Goldman uses dramatic writing to explore the action of the "theater of acting," Blau (co-founder and co-director of the Actors' Workshop of San Francisco; co-director of the Repertory Theatre at Lincoln Center; director of KRAKEN) asks how writing and its enactment might, occasionally and unpredictably, precipitate theatre, and his influential series of books constitutes "a meditation, through that experience of theater, on the dynamics of disappearance," a dynamics which, in Blau's writing, often takes place at the interface between the historicity of writing and the immediacy of doing (*Take Up the Bodies* ix).

Despite Blau's insistent contemporaneity, the history of dramatic critique reverberates through his writing, including the salient studies of the 1950s – Burke, of course, but also Francis Fergusson and Eric

Bentley jostle alongside Derrida and Butler – and one disarming and revealing element of *The Audience* is the return of T. S. Eliot to the field of dramatic theory.[23] Blau, in one sense, straddles the literary goals of an earlier generation and the resistance to textual authority characteristic of the Derridean 1970s, a tension that's palpable in his treatment of Eliot, and of the function of writing in performance more broadly. Though Blau hardly sees the dramatic text determining performance, he has no problem with poetry in the theatre: Yeats's "impatience with narrative sprawl, the mechanics of credibility in the unfolding of a plot" is brought forward as an instance of performance "at the edge of the unrepresentable" (*Audience* 160) (we might note that Blau at Stanford and Goldman at Princeton wrote PhD dissertations on the theatrical force of Yeats's plays). For Eliot, "words slip, slide, decay with imprecision," but "However bad-mouthed they may be, or aleatory, so long as you can make them out, there's a sticky accretion of the social that in the politics of the unconscious bears the stain of history" (125). Writing bears the "stain of history" into performance, but although (recalling Eliot's distinction in "Tradition and the Individual Talent") "the difference between art and the event is always absolute," it's precisely the uptake of art*work* – writing in this case – in the event that is at stake in dramatic performance, "the indeterminable overflow of art into life reciprocated by the ceaseless incursion of life in art" (265; see Eliot, "Tradition" 42). This distinction, for Blau as for Bentley, draws Eliot into the orbit of the modern era's most pervasive theatrician, Bertolt Brecht, and defines the place of writing in dramatic performance. While the theatre is not predicated on language, it can – sometimes, in some forms – be precipitated through the *agency* of language, the reconstruction of art as living event.

For Blau, drama and theory permeate one another as means of thought, perhaps what Burke would call "symbolic action," and despite the theatre's use of writing, that writing is always in motion, thinking about and with performance, not in place of performance, and without predetermining performance: it's the "playing out of expectancy as *alterability* that constitutes the history of a text in performance" (47). Blau cannily notes that the moment "when performance came on the scene to posit itself *against* theater – a correlative of the antioedipal assault on logocentrism – it was in a period of body language, nonverbal or antiverbal or schizophrenically verbal, that was also against interpretation" (137). As in psychoanalysis or the Oedipus complex,

the interminable assault on language constitutes dramatic performance: "Whatever the style, hieratic or realistic, texted or untexted – box it, mask it, deconstruct it as you will – the theater disappears under any circumstances; but with all the ubiquity of the adhesive dead, from Antigone's brother to Strindberg's Mummy to the burgeoning corpse of Ionesco's *Amedée*, it's there when we look again" (137). In theatrical performance, writing offers less a "stable signifier" than an opportunity to look again, to "take up the bodies," *our* bodies, for a renewed assault on writing, and on history, through our means of affording it performance.

Dramatic writing provides a means for exploring acting, for interrogating bodies, for searching the desire to perform and to watch performance, to see "this thing" appear again tonight with the unerring recognition that its appearance will replace the writing we may remember, and instigate remembering it anew. It's perhaps not surprising that Blau articulates drama with performance. For Benjamin Bennett – who is more directly drawn to the interface between drama and literature as institutions – it's precisely performance that marks the drama's inability to be conceived fully as "literature," and, more implicitly, drama's status as writing that locates it differentially in the field of "performance" as well.[24] In *Theater as Problem* (1990), Bennett argues that drama "*as a literary type* […] has a profound *disruptive* effect upon the theory of literature in general" (*Problem* 1), a disruption arising from its necessary implication in and of the stage, a productive medium external to the process, values, and materiality of "literature." Extending this argument in *All Theater Is Revolutionary Theater* (2005), Bennett rejects the "interpretive" theatre of the New Criticism and its refiguration as *archive*, because any theatrical procedure for realizing the drama stands in an exterior and arbitrary relation to the text, a necessary means of exposing the text to performance rather than realizing it in some definitive manner. On the one hand, the arbitrariness of performance is necessary to the category of "drama" itself, for "precisely literary tradition, the domain of the tyranny of writing, insists on a clear generic distinction between drama and other literary forms, which would be a meaningless distinction if it did not imply that theatrical performance is necessary for the complete unfolding of the meaning (or indeed for the very existence) of a dramatic work" (*Revolutionary* 66). On the other, Bennett rejects the notion that it is possible to "distinguish between possible performances and the drama 'itself,'" in the

manner both of older "literary" criticism of drama and of much recent performance-oriented critique (of, say, Shakespeare), because this distinction "would imply that performance is not strictly necessary after all, since the drama prior to performance is knowable" (67). In other words, "The 'work' itself is not available as a standard. Only the performance is available" (and here Bennett means the individual, contingent, behavioral experience of an actual performance in a theatre), performance which must always, from the perspective of "literary tradition," exhibit "strictly contradictory qualities" (67).

For this reason, "the exposure of writing to performance" (61) demanded by drama is the source of its disruptive position in the *archive* of literary genres; and – though this is not the burden of Bennett's argument – it is also the source of drama's disruptive position in the *repertoire* of performance genres, at least to the degree that we understand the always unscripted *repertoire* to gain, on many notable occasions at least, conceptual and even "revolutionary" leverage from the friction of writing. Bennett does not associate writing and textuality with oppressive Western epistemologies in the manner of Conquergood and Taylor. At the same time, his resonant critique of "interpretivity" also rejects a Geertzian "textualization" of culture while moving beyond a static dichotomy between writing and enactment. Performance resists being reduced to *hermeneusis* and cannot escape it; performance is for Bennett motivated by "interpretivity," the constitution of performance as an interpreting experience (though we should not understand "interpretation" as the New Critics did, as a paraphrase-in-performance of the dramatic text). What performance generates is a "social event," the incorporation of an "interpretivity" that finally cannot deliver an "interpretation" within the event, a closure to the hermeneutic circle, because performance "lacks the textlike focus and stability that enable an interpretation (in hermeneutic space) to serve as the text for further interpretation" (185). Interpreting a text produces another text that is itself subject to further interpretation, but the interpretation of a performance does not transform the performance into a text: the relationship between the interpretive text and the performance remains incommensurable, much as the relation between the dramatic text and the performance developed from/with/against it. Performance "introduces a nonlimitable plurality even at the starting point of the hermeneia" (185), excess that exceeds even the "heresy of paraphrase" (Brooks, *Urn* 180).[25]

Bennett's vision of dramatic performance resembles the most pervasive models of nondramatic performance analysis: Richard Schechner's *restored behavior* and Joseph Roach's *surrogation*. Both Roach and Schechner are concerned to model the nontextual transmission of history through forms of performance outside of or strategically resistant to writing. Yet as Schechner notes, "Performance is not merely a selection from data arranged and interpreted; it is behavior itself and carries in itself kernels of originality, making it the subject for further interpretation, the source of further study" ("Restoration of Behavior" 51): Bennett's distinction between hermeneutic and performance space suggests, though, that by "interpretation" here we should understand "further performance."[26] Framing an undecidable relation between dramatic writing and its exposure to performance, Bennett implies that the *repertoire* of performance *restores* or *surrogates* writing as behavior, rather than being overwritten by it. The dialectic between culturally inflected features of the text and the available (and similarly culturally inflected) practices of embodiment is where the dramatic event takes shape.

It has been some time since dramatic theory regarded the principal function of dramatic performance as the *representation* of a fictive world. In historical terms, the influential New Critical fiction of the theatre-of-writing is, as Erika Fischer-Lichte argues, belied by the modern theatre's shift toward the sense of "performance as an autonomous work of art" in which "No longer does the text steer, control, and legitimize performance. Rather, the text becomes one material among other materials – like the body of the actor, sounds, objects et cetera – each of which the performance manipulates or adapts, thereby constituting itself as art" ("Avant-Garde" 80–1). Yet while she takes this democratization of the materials of performance as typical of modernism, she also notes, "Theater always fulfills a referential and a performative function. While the referential function deals with the representation of figures, actions, relationships, situations, and so forth, the performative deals with the realization of actions – through performers and through the audience – and in this sense, with the 'eventness' of the theater" (81–2). The history of theatre, and of modern and postmodern theatricality in particular, might be tracked through the shifting ratio between these functions, referential or performative, between the Burkean *agency* of writing and the *scene* of theatre, between what Julia A. Walker characterizes as the "conceptual" register of writing

and the "affective and experiential register" of embodied action ("Why" 165).[27]

This both/and understanding of theatricality drives and complicates Judith Butler's conception of the "performativity" of gender, and motivates the wider spectrum of theatrical interrogations of identity, beginning with gender, race, and sexuality and extending into a conception of transnational, globalized, and intercultural performance today. Elin Diamond even characterizes stage realism – surely the mode of theatre most evidently predicated on the production of a representation *there*, onstage, *in front of us*, derived from the loquacious direction of the text (think of Shaw or O'Neill) – at the referential/performative interface, as "more than an interpretation of reality," but a means of producing "'reality' by positioning its spectator to recognize and verify its truths" (Diamond 4). Realism famously works to occlude the visible presence of the *theatrical*, and yet the ideological work of that occlusion is nonetheless palpable. So, too, the theatre's massive generation of alternative means of performance has used writing in a disarming variety of ways, often to expose rather than conceal the ideological constitution of *agents* and *agencies* on and off stage. If "textuality and performativity, in theory and in practice, always appear complementary and yet at the same time contestatory" (Vanden Heuvel 132) – a theoretical frame materialized in Baz Luhrmann's ironic insertion of "text" into the visual field of *Romeo + Juliet*, a gun labeled "sword" – then retaining this dynamic differentiation should be crucial to the theory of dramatic performance.

The consequences of interring dramatic performance in the *archive* extend beyond disciplinary practices along the borders between literary and performance studies; they also bear on the emerging critical practices and outlines of performance history today. In Hans-Thies Lehmann's powerful study of *Postdramatic Theatre*, theatre has entered a new epoch, defined as postdramatic precisely in its rejection of the dominance of the text and of the "representation" it puts before us. Contemporary performance surely exceeds the frontiers of the dramatic stage, which has always been a specialized form, distinguished from dithyrambic performances, the Mass, bearbaiting, dance, and even from genres like opera and musical theatre. But in *Postdramatic Theatre*, Lehmann suggests that the displacement of drama's "representational" character – fully identified with its scriptedness – motivates

a contemporary transformation of the field of performance. Rather than locating dramatic performance between "the referential and the performative," for Lehmann dramatic performance is ferociously *archival*: its spectators "expect from the theatre the illustration of classic texts," leading to "a comprehensible fable (story), coherent meaning, cultural self-affirmation and touching theatre feelings" (19). Since its mode of performance is urgently derivative, "subordinated to the primacy of the text," dramatic performance consists in "the declamation and illustration of written drama" (21). Even taking various disruptive devices into account – plays within plays, choruses, prologues and epilogues, lyrical language, and epic dramaturgies – "the drama was able to incorporate all of these without losing its dramatic character" (22), namely the imposition of a textually derived representation over the presentational reality of the theatre.

Lehmann's argument arises in one sense against the landscape of European disciplinary and institutional traditions, often located under the term *Theaterwissenschaft*. In this perspective, the theatre studies/performance studies, and theatre/drama distinctions may appear to map a distinctively North American territory; as Willmar Sauter suggests, "for northern European scholars the term 'theatre' does not designate any given genre of artistic activities" (43). For this reason, though, it's somewhat more surprising that Lehmann's vision of dramatic performance is so determinedly "literary" in character.[28] For Lehmann, "Wholeness, illusion and world representation are inherent in the model 'drama'; conversely, through its very form, dramatic theatre proclaims wholeness as the *model* of the real. Dramatic theatre ends when these elements are no longer the regulating principle but merely one possible variant of theatrical art" (22). Distinguishing between dramatic and postdramatic theatre, Lehmann – in ways reminiscent of Taylor's *archive* and *repertoire* or Schechner's *literature* and *behavior* – articulates a familiar sense of dramatic theatre as a fundamentally "literary" genre of performance. But this vision of postdramatic theatre begs the question: is a "text" always – or ever – "staged" in this way, translated in some direct manner into speech and depiction, "declamation and illustration"? Historically, the rise of print and the coordination of the representational technology of the theatre privileged a sense of the "natural" execution of certain forms of drama by the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century stage. But we should note that many of the figures most associated with implementing the

textually "illustrative" theatre – Stanislavski, Granville-Barker, Meyerhold – were simultaneously involved in alternative strategies for locating the work of writing in the panoply of theatrical performance, symbolism, biomechanics, and so on. Lehmann's "dramatic theatre" is hardly recognizable in the lens of contemporary drama studies, in which resisting the theatre-of-textual-interpretation also means resisting the projection of "representation" as the defining task of dramatic performance. Goldman's "theater of acting" constantly foregrounds the *process* of representation as its means, and its principal satisfaction as well: *acting* is the focus of our attention, not the *text*. Garner conceives performance as a complex "multiple positionality," deploying actual and fictive bodies and spaces in ways that constantly negotiate the "illusionistic crisis" of performance (43). Like the bodies of the actors themselves, those "self-modifying signifier[s]" (211), Bennett's theatre is "revolutionary" precisely because its "interpretivity" cannot be reduced to a reading of something else, the reproduction of textual "representation." It's the fact that dramatic performance gives "equal rights" to the "gestic, musical, visual" (Lehmann 46), and kinetic elements of performance that distinguishes it from *reading*, and the necessity of conceiving those elements that foregrounds, in Bennett's terms, the "fundamental defectiveness" (*Revolutionary* 194) of both reading plays and performing them.

While *Postdramatic Theatre* brilliantly accounts for the innovations of contemporary performance, and situates them in relation to stage modernism, the terms it brings forward might more usefully be conceived as definitive of emerging forms of dramatic performance. For example, "there are directors who may stage traditional dramatic texts but do so by employing theatrical means in such a way that a *de-dramatization* occurs" (74). Postdramatic theatre *de-dramatizes* writing (when it uses writing at all), accenting the "perpetual conflict between text and scene" (145), emphasizing the actor's "*auto-sufficient physicality*, which is exhibited in its intensity, gestic potential, auratic 'presence' and internally, as well as externally, transmitted tensions" (95), and even refiguring the status and meaning of the "*theatrical body*" which "does not exhaust itself" in signification and representation, having in performance "a value *sui generis*" (162).

Once we recognize that the "declamation and illustration" of the text is not essential to dramatic performance, then the defining principle of postdramatic theatre seems much less distinctive. Much the same

might be said of Diana Taylor's heuristic for analyzing the textless performances of the *repertoire*, the *scenario*. While Lehmann assigns a purely representational force to dramatic performance, Taylor's liberating methodological alternative to the hegemony of writing over performance, the *scenario*, depends for its innovative force on the captivity of the drama and theatre to the iterative logic of print and a sense of theatre as purely representational. Taylor wants to use the *scenario* as a means to distinguish the radical energy of nonscripted performance from the normalizing force of theatre; the *scenario*, in a sense, *de-dramatizes* the narrative elements of the *repertoire*, drawing our attention primarily not to the fictive elements of representation but to the circumstances of presentational performance. The *scenario*, first, enables us to locate the performance in "a material stage as well as the highly codified environment that gives viewers pertinent information, say class status or historical period" (29). While these features of theatrical performance are often part of the dramatic scene or theatrical setting, they are of course also always features of the material historicity of performance as well. To see a performance in the Berliner Ensemble is constantly to be aware of the fin-de-siècle ornamentation of the building, and the history of warfare, political struggle, and artistic experimentation literally inscribed into its walls (the red X that Brecht painted over the Prussian coat of arms still visible before the proscenium; shrapnel marks in the banister; the Russian tank wheels that Helene Wiegel scavenged and had installed so that the stage's turntable would revolve more smoothly and quietly in support of, for example, Mother Courage's wagon). In other words, despite the fact that dramatic performances use texts, they are not in this sense any less part of the material and codified *scenario* of nonmatrixed performance. Similarly, we might find that the spectator's "need to deal with the embodiment of social actors" (29) is often a feature of dramatic performance, as is the sense that, like *scenarios*, dramatic performance offers "formulaic structures that predispose certain outcomes and yet allow for reversal, parody, change" (31).

Much as the representational fiction of dramatic performance cannot be distinguished from its presentational *agents*, *agencies*, and *purposes*, a *postdramatic* or *de-dramatized* emphasis on the presentational or performative aspect of performance is often haunted by the trace of representational referentiality. Dimiter Gotscheff's *Ivanov* at the Volksbühne in Berlin (which I saw in January 2005), for instance, fills

the stage with smoke, framing Chekhov's drama as a series of *de-dramatized* dialogues: each character appears and disappears from the fog, apparently summoned by Ivanov from … *where*? his mind? memory? rage? desperation? anomie? – well, summoned from somewhere else on the stage. The production plays largely to the audience, and the slowness of pace and bouts of monotone shouting characteristic of *postdramatic* German theatre enforce a constant awareness of the performance present. Even the events of the drama are staged in a way to defy the representation of a world elsewhere. For the climactic suicide, the smoke parts, Ivanov spray-paints a huge stick-figure of a man shooting himself on the upstage wall, and bodies drop one by one from the flies. And yet, while the production deflects the narrative order of a represented Chekhovian "world," it seems more adequate to say that the performance's interactive engagement of writing and performing constitutes an altered, responsive narrative, one that encodes perhaps a minimal degree of representation rather than entirely displacing it.[29] It discovers a new *agency* for Chekhov's play, fashioning a distinctive instrument for making play in the social technology of the contemporary stage.

Lehmann's brilliant and provocative book, much like Taylor's, charts the landscape of performance, reminding us that dramatic performance, for all its impact – an impact surely deepened and prolonged by print, which at once preserves the text and enables alternative means of access to it – is only a small and perhaps unrepresentative corner of performance *per se*. At the same time, as a range of dramatic critique suggests, a commitment to the work of performance need not exclude the drama on the basis of its apparently "literary" character. As Hamlet remarks, even *The Murder of Gonzago* can accommodate rewriting, a "speech of some dozen lines, or sixteen lines" (2.2.477) that marginally *de-dramatizes* or retheatricalizes its *agency* to serve present purposes. Rather than cataloguing the wide variety of ways the theory and criticism of drama have encountered the materiality of performance, I've tried here to attend to the distinctions that have in a sense positioned dramatic performance across the threshold of the "liminal norm" defining performance studies: the sense that written forms are "fixed" in a literary *archive* in contrast to the resistant multiplicity of the *repertoire* of performance, and the sense that dramatic writing exerts, like other forms of writing and like a Geertzian strategy of reading enactment as "text," a deforming pressure on both performance and our understanding of it. Although Shannon Jackson underlines the fiction of taking

"dramatic literature" as an institutional dominant (it "was already outside the literary canon" 24), dramatic performance has been imagined in performance studies as a powerful and defining antithesis to notions of a transgressive, embodied, mobile, and often subaltern reaction and resistance to authoritarian culture and its modes of historical representation. As David Román has argued of the metaphorical use of "drama" to organize "moments of institutional or disciplinary chaos" in American studies, so in fashioning performance studies, "Drama" – and dramatic performance – "is what is presumed to be known, so much so that it goes without saying" (23). Restoring complex strategies of reading drama, strategies capable of engaging the double *agency* of writing in the layered *scene* of theatre, would enable the interrogation of dramatic writing and performance to move beyond a "what is presumed to be known" that has been largely "known" as error, misrepresentation, for some time.

Even this small selection of texts suggests that there are not only powerful reasons for resisting this dichotomy, but for trying to reframe our understanding of the critical functions of writing in performance. Much as the critical projects assembled here may seem to stand apart from the "drama-to-cultural studies" genealogy, their concerns – writing as an instrument for embodiment, writing in the design of space, writing that precipitates an event, writing that abrades the conventions of experience – are readily and even necessarily inflected with specific materialities. To deploy these lines of inquiry toward their richest potential would mean asking whose bodies, which spaces, what genres of experience are being put into practice, questions that emerge at once pointedly and fitfully in this work and that demand a closer attention to the *performance* of dramatic performance. One instance of such a practice arises in Simon Shepherd's work; though Shepherd resists engaging specific performances, he charts several ways in which bodies are "culturally produced" in dramatic performance (Shepherd 12). "Theatre requires special things of bodies" (2), and dramatic analysis requires (at the least) a "generalised notion of a culture's performing technique," in order to "be alert to the particular moments at which that technique's relationship to its audience is affirmed, challenged, negotiated" (27). Though we might hesitate at Shepherd's framing of dramatic performance as a "particular scripting of the body" (27), to assess the terms of such an encounter means not only reaching across the textual horizon to seize the *repertoire*s that make symbolic exchange

between different forms, moods, and shapes of expression legible, but also resisting the notion that performance is captured once we can transcribe the code.

Blau takes language to bear the stain of history to the stage; writing bears an alterity of embodiment and subjection into the location and temporality of performance. If acting implies the ideological discipline of bodies toward culturally embedded means of signification, dramatic writing – with its comparable dialectic of conventionality and change, conformity and reconstitution – brings external patterns of *agency* to the production, language recording and instigating subjects in action, subjects it instigates but cannot fully represent. The material alterity of writing – like fabric or lumber, waiting to be shaped for use in/as performance – is readily perceptible in any cross-cultural event. The knotty unfamiliarity even of Shakespeare's or Jonson's or Shaw's language insists on this alterity even in the most contemporary or post-dramatic production; while our Antigones tend to speak a contemporary idiom, their words resonate with alien values, perspectives, attitudes. Recent dramatic writing also brings this alterity to the stage, a distinctive rhythm and reference to be worked into something else, the performance. Dramatic writing is writing for use; however we use it – under the sign of fidelity or betrayal, inclining toward the referential or the performative – it retains a grain, a warp given shape in the event. While this alterity is more visible and audible in some texts than others, it's always there, as much in David Mamet's scabrous nonsequiturs as in the opaque repetitions, rests, and spells of Suzan-Lori Parks.

This may sound like a return to the characters-making-speeches "literary" theatricality of the New Criticism, but that theatre only lives in the *archive*: we can find it in museified performances, often in "performance-oriented" criticism of dramatic literature, and – as Goldman pointed out in 1975 – in the framing of some of the critical instruments enabling performance studies. Dramatic performance must constantly rediscover the affordance of its tools in the changing social technology of the theatre, confronting the *archive* with the *repertoire*, or in Bennett's terms, exposing the *archive* to the *repertoire* in order to produce a unique event at the interface of art, unanticipated either by the text or by the stabilizing surrogations of restorative behavior. All the same, booking plays materializes the illusion of their *archival* stasis, or perhaps better put, fixes one form of writing as the pretext of the playing, a form of writing that's already multiple, and multiplied and forsaken in the

production process. Rather than prolonging the distracting distinction between *archive* and *repertoire*, we might now attend to the aspect of dramatic performance that this dichotomy fails to capture.

Writing can function as an *archive*: drama is a repository of instigations to action, software for producing significant events in the social and cultural technology of a given theatre, and the ideologies of action, acting, behavior, and identity it sustained. And yet, however much we might track broad continuities in Western drama, the theatre's means of transforming writing into performance are always under pressure. Changing valuations of the human, of meaningful acts, of the means and purpose of attention constantly change the shape of even the most conventional regimes of performance. What is the affordance of different kinds of dramatic writing in different systems of production? How does writing perform, in Anthony Kubiak's phrase, as a "lens through which experience, thought, and emotion are excruciated" (14)? How do we understand the warrant of "conventional" or "experimental" or "postdramatic" production? How might we develop critical and pedagogical models for reading the drama as a site of *agency*, an instrument for the construction of that peculiar – but not peculiarly hollow – *act* performed by the *agents* of the stage in the *scene* of theatre?

Developing these questions requires, as Taylor indeed suggests, a sense of the interaction between *archive* and *repertoire*, ways of reading "the text" as open, material for use, susceptible to (re)construction within contingent but nonetheless conventional systems of performing, of rhetorical behavior, remembering that representation is not definitive of the rhetoric of theatre, and that the distinctive behaviors of the "theater of acting" themselves relate to – intensify, reverse, quote, epitomize, reduce, alienate, embody, what verb you will – the formalities of behavior in that other theatre just offstage. But, finally, it also implies developing ways of assessing the materiality of writing, not only in its generic formalities but how it instigates process and place, locates the interface of representation and presentation, provides (some of the) material for the distinctive "interpretivity" of dramatic events, events that remain, it should be noted, a potent force of political critique, resistance, and action worldwide. It may well be, as D. J. Hopkins and Bryan Reynolds suggest, that the "retention of the word 'drama'" itself is the problem, or part of it, "a counterproductive vestige of theater's fealty to a preexisting literary work" (273).[30] Fair enough: perhaps the word "drama" is merely a distraction, incapable of being

disinterred from its connotations of a textually driven, organic, literary representation imagining its privilege over the means of the stage. But conceding that "Academic disciplines that focus on a study of 'drama,' whether that drama be read or performed, are rightly the province of literature studies," and that the "study of theater is 'theater studies' " (274), seems only to reify the problem at hand, a problem which strikes me as falling legitimately within performance studies' tradition of disciplinary intervention and disruption, a problem embraced by the dramatic conjunction of poetry and performance.

How do we, can we, articulate *writing* with/in/through *performance*? At a moment of concern with the "imperialist" potentiality of performance studies (McKenzie, "Imperialist"), and of restless disenchantment "with the critical and theoretical paradigms that have dominated the field since the 1980s," one avenue of inspiration might be traced by revisiting critical openings overlooked, bypassed, or misconceived in the energetic fashioning of the field.[31] It may also imply developing ways of assessing the materiality of writing, not only in its textual formalities but how it instigates process and place, locates the interface of representation and presentation, provides (some of the) material for the distinctive "interpretivity" of dramatic events. As Peggy Phelan has suggested, "Theatre continually marks the perpetual disappearance of its own enactment" (*Unmarked* 115); it also marks the perpetual disappearance of drama, a fiction of significant action that becomes significant by remaining in play. As we shall see, dramatic writing often allegorizes the openness of writing as *agency*, the incomplete identity of the play with the book, of acting with character, of the fictive landscape of the dramatic setting with the terrain of theatre. The *archive* preserves writing, enabling readers to encounter and imagine the work of drama, and the work that drama might *do*, anew. But the *repertoire* is the drama's difference engine, the machine of its (dis)appearance, and so of its distinctive survival.[32]