Discovering the trigger, the trace of writing, the affect and the risky playfulness of the body: this seems to be the task of performative writing. This latter is always, as Carl Lavery notes, a postscript, ‘a living archive aiding the analyst to reengage with the lost effect of an absent body’ (Lavery 2009, p. 39). Thus, the idea is to be ‘using the text as a “postscriptal” method for revisiting, bodily, a performance event that has disappeared’ (p. 40).

To rediscover the absent body is not all that easy, however. We need to reconstruct the situation in which it was, for a brief instant, grasped and embodied by the actors and by the whole stage. This is a delicate task, but not an impossible one if we give ourselves the means to pass through a kinaesthetic empathy, a notion which is currently being widely studied (see empathy;* Foster 2011; Reason and Reynolds 2012).

*Kinaesthetic empathy* enables the spectator to understand, experience, imagine and complete a movement. Can this faculty be transmitted to readers, who will not have seen the performance, or to the spectators who, although present, will have forgotten the detail in this physical experience? This is not easy and it could be that we base too many hopes on this magic notion – or potion. For this empathy is not universal or always conscious, and its transmission does not guarantee that the object can be recreated as it was before. In addition, corporeality is just one aspect of the theatrical experience. We still need to assess the aesthetic, political and moral significance of the performance, and this demands, yet again, that we go through discourse and a whole series of mediations between the work of art and the audience that receives it.

The mediations, however, are so numerous and complex that they inevitably create a gap between the performance and the critic, and then between the critic and the reader. Now, these mediations also need to be recreated: they are historical, cultural, ideological and socio-economic in nature. With patience and determination, we will be able to bring them out and show how they are reworked in the aesthetic crucible like a reduced and, above all, experimental, model of the world. Finally, we need to establish how they infiltrate and colour our kinaesthetic perception. For kinaesthetic empathy is not cut off from the world, but fully immersed in it. So it is more or less conscious for the spectator and user of the movement involved; it has been acquired through repetition and training; it bears the trace of different cultural and social practices that give it a set of identities that can of course be reworked and modified, within certain limits of time, work and social reality. Drawing on the corporeality and sociality of the actors and the performance, performative critics will need to pay attention to all these parameters, analysing them and then composing a summary for the use of future readers. Critics may indeed harbour the ambition of bringing their readers closer to a past personal experience, of accompanying them in this transfer of experience to the present moment, but this can only be on the condition that these future readers are known and acknowledged, as the critics endeavour to write as closely as possible to physical experience.

### PERFORMATIVITY

**PERFORMATIVITÉ, PERFORMATIVITÄT, PERFORMATIVIDAD**

#### 1. Origins of the notion

**A. In linguistics**

Performativity is an essential aspect of the theory of performatives of J.L. Austin and his groundbreaking book *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). The theory of speech acts distinguishes between constative utterances that describe and report propositions, and performative utterances
that perform an action merely by being uttered: by using a performative, by uttering a word or phrase, we do what they say (‘I swear . . . ’, ‘I thee wed . . . ’, etc.). Since the 1970s, the concept of performativity has spread throughout cultural practices and the human sciences.

B. In sociology and anthropology

At the same time and in parallel with this, the sociologist Erwin Goffman (The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959), Stigma (1963), Interaction Ritual (1967)) focused on how all individuals present themselves and are characterized through their behaviour and actions. The anthropologist Milton Singer coined the concept of ‘Cultural Performance’ in his study Traditional India. Structure and Change (Philadelphia, 1959), a concept that went on to enjoy huge success in Performance Studies from the late 1980s onwards.

C. In the cultural study of performance

Under the influence of anthropologists such as Milton Singer and Victor Turner, the object of ‘theatre’, once it had started to be observed in other cultures than European culture, went through a sea-change from the 1970s onwards. Interest was no longer directed solely at performances, or text-based theatre with its representation, but at all kinds of performing actions, mises en scène, happenings and types of performance art. To this we should add ceremonies, festivals, rituals, all that a culture can produce as a manifestation, an externalization, in short as ‘performativity’. This ‘performativity’ is always a production (also in the English sense of mise en scène), a productivity: the production of an experience, a situation of enunciation here and now, a meaning. We cannot study plays, or literary texts, written without taking into account their possible stage performance or their reading, their adaptation, their intertextuality.

2. The performative turn and the spheres of performativity

Both the human sciences and new theatrical experiences, including, in the 1960s and 1970s, the emergence of Performance Art, indicate a paradigm shift, a ‘performative turn’. The theory of speech acts in Austin or Searle (Searle 1969) is then extended and applied to other human actions performed by the fact of saying or repeating gestures that become second nature. The areas of performativity are infinite in extension because performativity becomes almost synonymous with ‘practical application’.

Let us list some areas of the humanities and social life currently dominated by the theory of performativity. As the list is potentially unlimited, we will limit ourselves to areas close to the performing arts and cultural performances.

A. The identity of sexual gender

For feminist theories, the notion of performativity is crucial, especially as this notion owes much to their reflections on theatre and social representation and the formation of sexual identity by repetition and rehearsal of the same behaviour. Performativity allows us to go beyond the question of identities and the politics of sexual identity.

Judith Butler – more an anthropologist than ‘theatrologist’ – conceives gender as the repetition of stylized performative actions visible on the surface of the body, which is, however, just the deceptive effect of a stable inner substance: ‘Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce on the surface of the body, through the play of
signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications, manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality’ (Butler 2006, p. 185).

As a ‘fabrication’, gender is the result of repetitions of gestures and types of behaviour, of justifying discourses, and thus of performative acts, all of which eventually leave traces on the ‘surface’ of the body in the sense of behaviours that present themselves as based on an inner essence, i.e. one that is invisible, secret and unalterable. ‘Gender’ is defined, determined and recognized by performativity, as the way subjects regulate their actions, a form of regulation that allows them to live in society as the latter demands and dictates. Our behaviour ‘performs’ (carries out and realizes) different social conventions. For Butler, ‘gender is a process, a perpetual becoming’. . . We are always deeply shaped and constructed by gender norms. The latter are not immobile, fixed; to be effective, they must be repeated and reproduced. Can they be reproduced in a different way? Performativity is the process that leads to these norms being replicated in a subversive way’ (Butler 2014, p. 8). Theatre, particularly the actor’s performance and the mise en scène, constantly reworks its norms, fixing them before it changes and varies them. Out of a desire for subversion, it changes the norms, alters identities, becomes a stage for rehearsals for a play that is, precisely, something to be played with and modified; it is based on the norms of gender identity, providing it with a model of repetition, performance, and more or less subversive experimentation.

**B. The actor’s performance and mise en scène**

Thanks to the model of the production of gender by means that are basically ‘theatrical’, we are better placed to understand the hidden and explicit conventions of the acting and the mise en scène. These conventions are more or less conscious and regulated. The mise en scène, the regulation of the different regulations, is the never definitive result of the work of all the artists involved in the performance, whether part of a pre-existing repertoire or implied behind the actions and projects. All those involved, and thus not only the director, put into practice and test out a proposal or an idea in order to regulate (and ‘deregulate’) the performance: this, precisely, is the art of mise en scène. By extending the notion of performativity considered as mise en scène to other areas of social life, we gain in return a better understanding of how theatre, mise en scène and other performing arts actually work. Politicians and managers have sometimes became experts in mise en scène applied to the flattery, deception and persuasion of the most diverse and gullible audiences.

**C. The anthropology of the body and corporeality**

Thanks to the contribution of gender and cultural studies, the human body, particularly the body of the actor (the performer, more precisely!) is placed in its cultural and intercultural context, depending on its sexual, ethnic, political, national, professional (etc.) identity. Performativity provides us with a theoretical framework to monitor how actors ‘perform’: that is to say embody, show and reconstitute their roles, whether in social reality or on a stage. Performative theory applied to corporeality means we can go beyond the semiological or socio-political conception (Gestus**) of the body of social and stage actors, a conception which tended to reduce the body to static signs or social stereotypes. Performativity encourages an anthropological approach to the body, is interested in its vectorization, its energy, its stylization and intensification. It facilitates the assessment of sensory affects on the body of the actor and then the spectator. Culture presents*
or represents itself by the playful or mimetic means of performance as a way of bringing things into view and into the flesh.

D. The ritual
Of whatever kind it is: religious, ceremonial or everyday (housework, preparing a class, the bodily technique involved in taking a shower or greeting a person), ritual demands our knowledge of the rules of performativity. We observe repetitive actions and deduce the rules needed to understand the meaning; we are more interested in the process than in the final product, the way things are done more than the things in themselves. This ritualization of social life and behaviour is similar to that of the process whereby sexual identity is acquired, as in Butler. Mise en scène becomes, or becomes once more, after its appearance in the Baroque period, the best metaphor to describe how our lives are organized depending on our origins: this cannot fail to lead to a certain determinism and fatalism.

E. The art of storytelling
Storytelling is everywhere: from children’s stories to politics, from telling a passer-by how to get to his or her destination to presenting the results of a maths problem. It is a way of producing and conveying knowledge. It is not a simple narrative technique for embellishing explanations, it is a technique for producing meaning, making oneself convincing, getting the other to understand. Knowing how to tell a story, even on the basis of an abstract or boring text – is this not the task of the dramaturge and the director, the task of the actors at each point in the performance?

F. The rhetoric of discourse and the control of spectators and listeners
Rhetoric is the art of influencing others, persuading an audience or moving the public. The ‘performers’ (actors, orators, politicians, professors) establish a relationship of collaboration or persuasion. They occasionally use devices of comic relief or else trigger a discharge of affects. Rhetorical performativity consists in evaluating the effects of speech and actions, so as better to control their production. Everything in the text, as in the performance, is designed and manufactured with an eye to the performative actions they are sure to arouse.

G. Economy
Experts constantly refer to measurable results, easily quantifiable, with a specific cash value. This means, as in the witty title of Jon McKenzie’s book, ‘to perform or else’ (McKenzie 2001). The threat of retaliation is thinly veiled. Individuals, but also countries and their economies, are assessed, awarded marks and punished; the result and impact on the stock market and socio-economic life are immediate. In his _The Postmodern Condition_, Jean-François Lyotard emphasized the economic and technical sense of performance, whether the word is used to refer to the stock market or a car. Performance is linked, according to him, to efficiency (Lyotard 1984).

H. The university
Academia, interested in performativity (and indeed performance) evaluates the performance of a professor, a researcher or student in accordance with the Anglo-American model. It quantifies
their research and thereby abandons any attempt to assess their quality. Imitating the methods of industry, and succumbing to the culture of results, it fails to understand the rules of social science research. Performativity, it is true, frequently takes a quantitative form as a matter of convenience, but the task of intellectuals is to counter this trend by offering qualitative evaluation criteria.

I. Everyday and professional life

Everyday life is increasingly subject to the often implicit but relentless norms of the ‘rules of life in society’. These everyday rules include the set of performativities proper to all the areas listed above. They become second nature, just like gender as in Judith Butler or the performance principle as described by Herbert Marcuse (in *Eros and Civilization*) or interpellation* in Louis Althusser.

Professional life also gains from a clarification of the interactions between people. The doctor-patient relationship, or that between teacher and student or employer and employee, benefits from being better formalized with the tools of performative theories applied to labour relations.

3. The limits of performativity

Fortunately, performance may fail and not everything can be reduced to economic performance or a universal performativity. Performance is sometimes transformed into a counterperformance: in sport, in the stock market, at school, in our daily lives. It may be the difficulty, on the part of the reader, spectator or user of the media, to decipher – correctly and productively – the cultural object they face, to recognize the performative gesture of the author, the director or the journalist, and to grasp in what process they are involved, or involve us.

It is too early to judge whether performativity is the culmination and the summit of Performance Studies, or whether it marks the beginning of its own end by itself putting forward a radically new epistemology. However, we may well fear that by extending itself, often metaphorically, to all areas of social and symbolic life, it runs the risk of losing its methodological consistency, just as Performance and Cultural Studies quickly lost their theoretical and analytical force in favour of the universalization of their object.

4. Performativity and mediality: a new start?

Performativity seems to have invaded the space of our lives without us even realizing it. Whatever we do, whether we are at work or at leisure, we are always ‘performing’ something. In saying something, we are doing something: we are carrying out actions simply by virtue of saying a few words, giving orders, starting up mechanisms and organizing projects that engage our liability and that of others. What applies to psychological and social life applies even more to performative actions in a performance: the actors, whether they are playing a role or presenting themselves as performers, are carrying out symbolic actions, real or simulated acts, rituals aimed at a audience whose value resides not just in what they represent and signify but in the symbolic effectiveness they reveal and the impact they have on the audience. Actors are familiar with this phenomenon whereby their actions and their words are embodied on the stage. They know that the important thing is not just their physical presence that ‘performs’ and carries out a specific action, but the way they bear and embody the words that reach the audience.

This performativity is accompanied by another phenomenon, which appears unrelated but has also transformed our lives: the mediatizing of human relations, the widespread use of all kinds of media, not only writing and printing but, increasingly, audio-visual media and the computer in all its forms. All these media are not just tools, they contribute to a renewal of our thinking and our
This media exposure can be scary: it can sometimes arouse fears among actors, artists and spectators that they will be eliminated from the interplay of signs and bodies on stage. But mediality can also enrich the current spatio-temporal situation of the theatre. It then adds to the theatrical relationship – the meeting between an actor and a spectator – a whole range of new perceptions, new experiences and boundless extensions. Through this new relationship to the world and this computerization of our lives, our concrete existence that we had imagined was isolated, personal and unattainable assumes an unexpected new dimension.

For the theatre, has the time not come to question its potential and its future, to leave our narrowly psychological ivory tower, to engage, without fear but without illusions, in the world of performative mediality that has become our daily horizon?

This is what we should reflect on when confronting the notions of performativity and mediality, trying to rethink the relationship between theatre on the one hand and action and the media on the other, to better understand the world we live in and the artistic world being created in front of our eyes, and together with us. Performativity and mediality are with us every day.

Let us sum up. When I speak, I perform miracles, since I act on others and the world without them realizing it: this is performativity. And as the world places between itself and us all kinds of machines and media aimed at speeding up its progress, miracles are speeding up: this is mediality.

Each new mise en scène, each freshly written dramatic text, each original theatrical experience forces us to rethink the world, to rebuild it in our imagination. To build this tiny or insignificant object, this world in miniature or in pieces, we have to bring it back to our world and therefore reflect (on) this world. Philosophy is not far away. Indeed, it has always taken a close interest in the theatre, even if, with Plato, this meant banishing poets from the city, or, with Aristotle, being wary of the game of representation.

Philosophy has long since stopped wondering whether the theatre is literature or an autonomous art, whether it can represent the world or improve our morals, or even whether actors or playwrights are necessarily, as claimed by Nietzsche, able ‘to see oneself transformed before one’s very eyes and now to act as if one had really entered into another body and another character’ (Nietzsche 2000, p. 50). We are now far removed from the suspicious attitude of the Greek thinkers, the Fathers of the Church and the enemies of stage representation. Far removed from the big questions of philosophy. But the need for philosophy remains! Why?

1. The need for philosophy

Is it because philosophy helps us to better understand the contemporary practice of theatre and performance art? Beyond a normative reflection on how the theatre is supposed to imitate human actions or improve morals, we can see the usefulness of philosophy in the everyday use of theatre, both from the creators’ point of view and that of the spectators. Over and above the big questions about the origin and essence of the theatre, after the great revolutions in the human sciences from the 1950s to the 1970s, philosophy seems to have broken up into a long series of often contradictory theories, all closed in on themselves. For each era, each historical moment, there is a dominant philosophy which manifests itself as various theories or methodologies.