

## TO PERFORM

*'La poésie ne s'impose plus, elle s'expose.'*

26<sup>th</sup> March, 1969

Paul Celan<sup>1</sup>

‘Nothing is more important than acting without reasons in art, unless it is acting with so many that they never quite come to rest’.<sup>2</sup>

Art is for movement. Part of the point of making's running performance is to display its own movement as and on behalf of art. Its only hope is to offer things that move others somewhere else, to an elsewhere that is art's alone. To move others to sites that are already under the control of and answerable to other modes of performance is anathema, pointless, to art-making. But being bound, absolutely committed, to movement, exposes making's fateful and perhaps fatal relation to 'place' and to 'time' (to all kinds of 'placing and 'timing'). Celan's sentence draws us inexorably into art-making's necessary interruption of our routine reliance on commonsense understanding of 'place' and 'time' and thus, of course, the latter's relation to 'work'. To engage his '-pose' is to experience our everyday certainties about place and time falling disquietingly away.

### **Displacing Movement**

By virtue of this intrinsic relation to movement, art becomes, and this is what the moderns reveal and offer to us, the volatilisation of place. For they began to realise that in the necessary restlessness that self-exploration entails it would be impossible for art (its making and its things) to ever settle down. In the optimistic and joyful nascency of this project, the possibility that art might be effectively corralled and allocated its place was not, could not be, contemplated. Yet in its subsequent trajectory, in the ever more complex ties to the surrounding and penetrating culture, it has been the arts' lot to be steadily incorporated into the latter's machinery. What began as a celebration of art as a migratory self-exiling by the individual maker as lone hero, who suspended any sense of art as having or requiring a home, a firm ground, for performing, may now have been transformed into a very different kind of project. Performing may still be in receipt of the moderns' legacy but the terms on which it has to be engaged have been turned inside out.

Confronting contemporary makers is the troubling problem of reconciling the moderns' vision of art as the hopeful attempt to move-beyond on its own terms, with the subsequent exorbitant and unpredictable movements of the surrounding culture. The project of individual self-displacement, necessary exile, defining an essentially homeless making process, now discovers that it has been incorporated into a vast 'art'-generating network. Individual performers are collectively absorbed and allocated possible routes through and temporary stopping ports according to the network's needs. The kinds of movement that making entailed under the moderns' 'no fixed abode' (a desert wandering) undergo a genetic mutation. For every kind of movement (how and if art things can move) now depends on modes of placement within the managed network. Circulating within its new 'home' of planetary techno-representation, performing and its gests face a completely unprecedented form of

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<sup>1</sup> Published as a single sentence in *'L'Ephémère'*, Paris, 1970. See his 'Collected Prose', op. cit. p.29.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Morris, 'Have I Reasons : Work and Writings, 1993 – 2007', Duke University, London, 2008, p. 250.

sociality. And it may be that the forms of movement to which art has committed itself since modernity cannot be reconciled with the emergent collective life that constitutes its real contemporary horizon.

Perhaps this transformation is traceable as running along, zigzagging back and forth across, a fault-line that both fixes and shifts art's relation to culture in ever more complex ways. It occurs, marks its way, wherever performing confronts, touches, crosses, takes on, rejects, seeks to find ways of surviving, the technoscientific machinery that is chaotically revolutionising representation in all its forms. And it is around the disjunctions shaping this fault-line (more, perhaps, a vacillating zone) that social relations are simultaneously being re-shaped; for the universally disseminated processes of substitution, the 'standing-in-for' defining representation, set up the world as we know it as a world-almost-in-common. And the technical-means 'responsible' for the dynamic of representation across all our surfaces exemplify and enact a completely different model of 'performance' to that which has animated art since the moderns.

Across the arts, performers are still in thrall to the residual and constantly reiterated romantic-modern conception of making as a self-generated activity carried out on a marginal site of lonely self-exile. There the maker's responsibility to art and themselves is to 'express', to push out, into a specific vehicle whatever it is within them that binds them to art's unavoidable 'good'. The hope (and assumption) is that, when carried out scrupulously, something essential to both art and the maker's self is fused in the 'expressing' moment. But is this 'expressing' the same as, reconcilable with, '*s'expose*'?

Within the rhetoric of this now mythified vision, endlessly rehearsed and reinforced across the art-representing institutions as well as in popular culture, emergence of the art-full is dependent on movement to this place of exiled isolation so that an art-thing can be expressed in the purity of its difference. This site is supposedly external to any social relation except those constructed symbolically, conceptually, by the maker in the course of a personal struggle with the inner demon and the legacy of tradition. But this struggle, the maker's reflexive conversation, impelled by the paradoxical modernist combination of doubt and hope, is also now permeated, commandeered, re-shaped, and re-directed according to the feeding habits of the representing behemoth. In order to survive, the resulting hybrid-maker has to come to terms with its re-routing, for the once-site of exile has been thoroughly penetrated, criss-crossed, and networked. The separation and solitude defining the modernist exile, its self-distancing from the culture's commonsense and routines, is transformed into a site subjected to the unavoidable cacophonic bombardment of multiple 'voices', images and channels. Forms of survival depend on how the performer manages to pick a way through this deafening drowning tinnitus.

Not surprisingly the commonest support networks are those of one's 'peers' who have been drawn towards or into institutional representation through similar organisational 'career' trajectories, most obviously via exposure to performance requirements of educational systems. For it is in such settings that potential makers are formally introduced to the multiphonic play of networked flows. Under protected conditions and through learned vocabularies of response, would-be performers (all of us at some points) are encouraged to experiment with and rehearse their responses to the multiple. At the same time they are subject to formal requirements, common to all institutions grounded in a competitive economy, that centre on assessed and measured acquisition of knowledge-based skills put to work under a rule of productivity. And what is being measured is 'performance'. Such

performances are essential constituents of the institutions' output. Potential performers are assessed according to formally agreed criteria. But obviously what is being assessed in this preliminary introduction to art as productive performance cannot be art-as-such. The things of student-makers (at whatever educational level of 'development') are not treated as if they could be art-as-such (though some might become that were they to be released from their institutional controls). Rather, given that the making-performance has been carried out under enclosed, protected and closely monitored conditions, the 'assessed thing' (student performance) is an 'as if'. Performance is measured according to its ability to simulate, to represent, the assumed reality (according to institutionally defined criteria) of art-making in the world beyond the institution.

What the assessment process constructs in order to produce things as measurable outcomes is a projected potential for performing; this has to treat the in-house performance as a kind of apprenticeship, a rehearsal that has taken making to the brink of the real-to-come. Assessed performance is the dress rehearsal for life (art) beyond the walls; it has to have all the appearance of the thing itself. How this 'appearance' is generated (performed) is the basis of the measuring judgments. The institutional experience is thus constituted in part through the continuous emergence (the flow-through of apprentices) of taste communities of peers and their teachers which have different relations to and expectations of the currently dominant taste norms external to the academy. Geared to the specific forms of exchange between those with institutional authority and those without (all students), the making performance thus becomes highly responsive to expectations of teachers and peers. They constitute the split audience for and to whom things are constructed and offered.

But, following emergence from this protection and subsequent exposure to very different sites of power, performers may use elements of the informal networks of peers as means of both support and a bridge to participation in the exchange economy of art-representation with its febrile and fluctuating, but institutionally managed, norms of taste. Confronted by the paradox of that institutional world's absolute need for continual recruitment but lack of interest in and inability to monitor the huge over-production of potential artists as individuals, would-be-makers have to rely for support on fragmenting peer networks and the drift through the art-economy's lower echelons. The latter, constituted by the coming and going of small organisations largely external to the mass representation of art, are almost completely cut off from the construction of 'taste' and 'aesthetic value' engineered within the global art economy and its role in the general aestheticisation of culture under the info-spectacle. Performers are recruited from this under-culture serendipitously according to the shifting taste-defining needs of the aesthetic economy's managers

Both as students and as participants in the lower echelons, the receptive audience for would-be-makers is largely constituted by these peer groupings which, in turn, act as aspirant mediators between the difficult terms of surviving as makers and the taste-conditions of institutional aesthetics (what's in and what's out...). Neophyte performing thus finds itself pulled back and forth between the demands of responding to differently generated tastes. Accustomed by the academy to make in response to the interests manifest in that sheltered zone, and still making for an audience significantly constituted by peers sharing the struggle to survive as makers under hostile conditions, aspirants are at the same time highly aware of the taste-structures in play in the 'real' art economy above (as well as the conventionally seductive plurality of popular cultural forms that penetrate all areas of social life under the info-spectacle). If one is selected out for recruitment into institutionalised aesthetics the peer support network may recede in importance. Nevertheless it has still established and firmed up

a kind of tacit rule that, primarily, one generates gestures that will appeal first of all to other performers, especially those who have shared similar modes of induction into 'art'. The specificity and esotericism of the resources shaping the would-be-art-things of neophyte performers are thus likely to be almost completely invisible and unrecognisable to any wider general audience (whose relations to the arts are largely mediated through and by the deftly controlled mass representation of the arts). Their things' context, references, and affiliations will be accessible to peers who, in mutual support, can affirm their rightness and hoped-for relevance to the current play of taste (aesthetic and popular) in the surrounding culture. But what the peer support cannot offer is any significant role in moving the maker up into the managed system of aesthetic representation.

While these remarks on the structural plight of aspirant makers may seem close to the 'relational aesthetics' of Bourriaud, in which, in the visual arts, 'the work of art represents a social interstice'<sup>3</sup>, its implications are very different. For Bourriaud, performing in the visual arts has become the production of 'forms of conviviality capable of relaunching the modern emancipation plan.'<sup>4</sup> The exhibition, he suggests, 'creates free areas, and time spans whose rhythms contrast with those structuring everyday life.'<sup>5</sup> An exhibition may indeed be an 'area of exchange' with a form (open, variable...) of its own that offers art as a 'state of encounter' with commerce. For Bourriaud the contemporary 'artwork' is more than its materiality; it is now a principle of 'dynamic agglutination'. Embracing the 'whole scene', it appears to be thoroughly social. But however much it appears as a 'trajectory evolving through signs, objects, forms, gestures'<sup>6</sup>, its aim and destination is still that of a marketable position (exposure) within institutionally controlled systems of representation. This is its only chance of a public life, access to which is aside from all principles. It is precisely this switching function, which, for the visual arts, is operated by the exhibition, that is the crucial moment as the possible key to makers' cross-over from peer-support network to the representing system of managed aesthetic response. Quite aside from a maker's hopeful pledge, a making-trajectory can be switched from being a moment in and a contribution to alternative conviviality, into an icon of techno-power.

In the visual arts the exhibition is the site of exposure that provides a potential conduit into the spanning enclosing system of representation. Far from displacing the influence of the made-thing in favour of a temporary conviviality, exhibiting performs a critical function on behalf of representation: it inaugurates the fetishising of the thing made. On its recruitment into and by representation each thing becomes a potential site for the congealing of that 'aesthetic significance' (the accrual of 'meaning' and the construction of an 'identity' for the thing) by means of which its passage through the representing network will be managed. Exhibiting thus effects a rite of passage by providing for the conversion of the thing from being currency-less (an isolated thing outside both aesthetic and exchange-value) into a potentially aesthetically, and thus socially, valuable sign. And, because it is controlled aesthetic response that determines the thing's destination, this 'given' of the plight of performing marks the fracture within which performers have to find ways of reconciling the irreconcilable. For surviving as a performer within and on representation's terms means setting aside, or at the very least compromising, the moderns' vision for the thing to become otherwise. The maker's need to sustain and live by a reflexive doubt-filled hope-for-art as unbecoming is in insoluble tension with the system of representation. The other voice to

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<sup>3</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, 'Relational Aesthetics', les presses du reel, France, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit, p. 20-21.

whose call the moderns trusted themselves and dedicated their making always called them away from institutional aesthetics. *Whereas the entire project of the latter is to gather up the entrancing weakness of that other voice and convert it into reflections of its own power.* The consequences of this conversion for the maker are incalculable. It is a conversion common to all the arts though occurring on medium-specific sites and terms.

Whilst exhibiting is the crucial site of possible conversion for the visual arts, performing across each of the other arts faces similar zones of transformation where the things are turned (or not) from isolates into socially available (meaningful) values. The machinery of transformation is always beyond makers' control and effective access. For the contribution of possible audiences and guarantees of continuous supplies of materials to sustain them is on an industrial scale that exemplifies a supposed post-industrial mode of operation in the field of 'cultural services' (so-called 'cultural production'...).

This transformation has the most profound effect on the performance process. For performers across the arts are drawn into and fixed by the systematic construction of a public identity. It is through the manipulation of this identity that performers and their gests are circulated within representation. As the sole public destination of the arts' things (displacing by obscuring the precious lower echelons), the place where all value is allocated, it is impossible for makers to avoid its effects. To achieve some kind of exposure performers have to perform within terms that accept what may be done to them. For in spite of the still unbridgeable gap, the difference, between making and aesthetic response, making's horizon is institutionally defined. The arts' institutionally-generated mini-mass audiences now develop their opinion-supported tastes, their art-consumption habits, through the socio-technical processes of construction that define the routine production of representation. In the face of the enormous machinery of response, any performing which seeks to keep alive the moderns' hope for art's celebratory otherness dug out of a reflexive questioning about one's own and art's plight, is condemned to context this hope within a necessary resignation. Performing's ultra-metaphysical state-of-becoming, the aura surrounding any making project which seeks to hold to the demands of the reflexive turn, is an unprecedented immiscible mix of hope and melancholy, of pulsing desire and fateful acceptance of a kind of entropy. The commitment to make under the utopian drive of otherness finds itself caught up in and run down, turned against itself, by institutions' requirement for their own continuity. This manufactured continuity, the incessance of the programmed production line, ensures that specific gests now have minimal 'shelf-life'; like all the products of mass consumption they are presented as having a built-in obsolescence, of living (so briefly...) precisely in order to be surpassed and displaced. Performing knows in advance that, even if one of its gests does receive preferential illumination and dissemination (sent everywhere in an instant in the same (virtual) form as information) under the spectacle's glare, its brief shining will almost certainly be followed by rapid disappearance: hence the aura, the strange combination of hope enfolded by resignation. If performing now has to live within this terrain, to confront endlessly the kind of action required of it, to try always unsuccessfully to hold together its love for art-as-such with its condemnation to an institutionally derived life, then its running performance will be a reiteration, a show-trial without end, of how it lives out this tension.

Irrespective of chosen medium, committing oneself to the running performance of making-towards-art requires actions whose primary significance is their attempt to perform art's difference. This is the dramatic legacy to performing bequeathed by the moderns. It is still operative today, though makers now have to confront its challenge under radically transformed socio-cultural conditions. Once art became unequivocally its own justification,

its very doing marked it out. To take on, perform for, art (any or all of the arts) entails activity whose performance requires specifically directed ways of becoming-doing. The very doing (without guarantee that others will gather the upshot gests to art) enacts a trajectory whose point is its irreconcilability. The hope is that this difference will be fixed in and made manifest by the gest though the relations of its details, relations that will indeed lead to their being gathered up by others as art. Performing seeks to show itself as this utterly specific differentiating performance. It hopes to show that the ways it chooses to make manifest its performance will be taken as an excision that differentiates it from all other activities.

It is in this sense that the moderns instituted a new kind of performance. Their gests opened up and set under way a dynamic, a plane of making, which was defined, destined, according to its performative demonstration of art's necessity. That is, the challenge for each performer from then on has been to extract and offer gests which showed the vitality of their commitment to art rather than something else. Performing has to form, per-form, what it is that makes it vitally necessary to cling at all costs to the difference that art's gests expose. It is the search for a way of inserting accessible traces of art's hoped-for difference. Thus, aside from and before the aesthetic distinction between the so-called performing and non-performing arts, each possible art-thing/event has to embed and to show as its defining 'moment' its attempted leap towards and hoped-for affiliation with art as a different way of becoming. Finding and showing this difference is making's pre-predicative predicate, undeclarable but there, available for the taking for art-willing attentive respondents. This is what all performing-toward-art is about and what it is that is always about (encapsulating) it, for what it is art summoning the performance to try to become, to make-for, art alone: *to become nothing but art*. In its movement it has to try to displace, in spite and in the face of the cacophonous and seductive demands of the representing machine, everything else.

### **Riven Performative Pledging**

Its aim, its telos, is to be a performative, or rather, perhaps, a reverse- or para-performative. For, unlike Austin's performative in language where a saying, a speech-utterance, embodies, performs, an action (as in promising), in art-making the thing has to silently declare, show, its attempted contracting of itself to and as art. In its silence it has to perform-by-showing, to make available, the very thing it has to keep quiet about – its art pledge. For it is this continuous silent hum accompanying everything 'going on' within it that will define its reception and its possibility of being gathered up as art. What it tries to perform is the yearned-for claim. And the moderns' gift to us is to have shown that this is the only way art can now be done, performed. Outside all institutions, art 'is', it becomes, only in its things, and this becoming can only come about in a constancy that runs through the things' myriad particulars. This constancy is the continual showing of difference – that the relations between its particulars relate to and for art alone: they are on behalf of nothing other. Art is the 'how' through which this constancy might just be held to, a sustaining-gathering charge that is something like, though never quite resolving into, a mappable vibration. And the performing is the attempt to insert a recoverable residue of this para-performative in its gests, to generate, each time anew, a driving 'how' through which the relations between its particulars (inflected words / sounds / marks / shapes / colours / gestures and so on) can be felt out and gathered up as art's alone.

For performing, part of the point of this gathering-attempt is to ensure that, for however brief a span, the gest can only be engaged, embraced, as art – it either becomes an art-thing or it is nothing. And this is the performing's inescapable challenge and fearful risk. For its destination can never be known in advance. Performing begins by conceding failure as its

perennial accompanying haunting shadow. Every performing moment is fraught with the possibility that the something that it is generating will be nothing (for art). For if it fails in and as its very difference to be affiliated with, to show, art, then whatever other journey the culture might send it on (through zones of entertainment, comfort, knowledge, information, heritage, gold, trash...) is of no consequence to the maker. At the very least performing's task, as bequeathed by the moderns, is to find a way of imbuing its things with a way, ways, of showing how, in its very doing, it is taking on what it takes to be art. In this way it extrudes (though covertly...) its own difference as its aspirant 'take' on art's possibility.

But ratification (or rejection) of this hoped-and-aimed-for difference is only effected by institutional processes after, sometimes long after, the fact of the performance. In spite of the moderns' bequest of art as self-generative, performing now finds itself, in modernity's afterward, caught up in the culture's dynamic of aesthetic commodification. Under the dazzling light of representation art is offered as one such commodity. The identities and places constructed for it and its gests are dependent upon how institutions shape, manage, distribute, and sell its commodity-difference. Caught up within the dynamic of this aestheticising regime, the arts' running performance becomes a tension-driven compound. It now tries to survive in the split between the vision of making inherited from the moderns, and the management of aesthetic response. Bound to each other, but irreconcilably different, the two modes of performing – art-making and aesthetic responding – together constitute art's performance as a split 'cultural' form (a not-quite-something). The para-performative is partially withdrawn from art in the very compounding process in which it is labelled as 'art' by the machinery of representation. Performing's gests are riven by this com-promising of its hoped-for promise (pledge); the pledge suffers the wound of its plight.

In attempting to cling to, to maintain, some residue of art's difference in the face of appropriation, performing is turned into a tactical struggle: how to bury some grains of difference within gests that are represented through alien operations gathering them according to their own organisational concerns. Still generated in hope in the name of art, the gests become the witnesses to the tension. They embody, body forth, the paradox of trying to show the necessity of otherness, of making toward culture's outside, in all its disquieting incertitude and untimeliness in a culture dedicated to ensuring the hereness of everything (even though only in representation). Under these conditions it would be quite mistaken, quite unfeeling of us, to expect whole fortified and powerful gests able unequivocally to show, gloriously celebrate, and thus live on in and as art's absolute difference.

If, in the immediate wake of the moderns, we might have suggested that art's hopeful 'vision' and drive was to project itself (in its gests) 'over-there', hovering at the edge of things, looking-searching in all directions for ways out, then, from within such a vision, the gests emerging from contemporary performing are conglomerates of immiscibles that may fall apart, burst asunder, at the slightest glancing touch or touching glance. Their potential as reserves of art's beyond is extremely fragile.

In drawing us toward the tensions defining this fragility the late sentence of Celan heading this chapter perhaps bears witness to performing's emergent evolving plight. The challenge it faces is how, performatively, to show the tension it lives in in trying to hold to its hopeful pledge to be only art-as-such-and-as-other in the teeth of constant recuperation.

### Tensions of Performing as ‘S’*expose*’

Published as a single sentence in the journal ‘*L’Ephémère*’ in 1970 when the moderns’ vision and influence across the arts were trembling in the face of emergent global representation, it offers a summary statement of poetry’s, poetising’s (and thus making-for-art’s) contemporary fate. As ‘*La poesie*’ includes the activity of poetising, *poiesis*, that is common to performing across the arts, we may extend its applicability to all the arts now. In proposing a life-defining switch in what such making-toward- art now ‘is’, what defines its condition, Celan is inviting us to reconsider its possibilities.

The shift he remarks seems at first to have been a straight substitution by reversal in how poetry/art is able to place itself. The play on ‘-pose’ takes us to the ‘heart’ of poetry’s plight, but only by revealing the uncertainty, the unplaceability of this ‘heart’. For im-posing and exposing offer more than the simple opposition that first appears, especially, as here, when proposed in their reflexive mode. By characterising the life-change undergone by *poiesis* through the verbs whose common root articulates the process of placing (via ‘*ponere*’- the Latin for ‘to place’), Celan draws us directly into poetry’s/art’s vexed and complex relation to ‘place’. The sentence asserts, boldly and unequivocally, that poetry is a kind of -posing, a placing of itself, that has undergone a qualitative change. Poetising, making-for-art, for whatever unstated (unstatable?) reasons, has to –pose itself, set itself forth (up and down somehow, somewhere), differently. For Celan, how poetising becomes the kind of activity it is possible for it to be now, is dependent upon how it performs its relation to the activity of ‘placing’: poetising’s possibility turns on how it engages place. And this engagement can no longer be what it has been. While we are left to decide for ourselves when the turn marked by the ‘no longer’ of ‘*ne plus*’ occurred, we may surmise in the light of Celan’s own life, that the decisive ‘time’, the time when his and our ability to continue to live, to poetise, *as if nothing absolutely disturbing had happened to our relation to place and time*, coincided with the holocaust. Perhaps this is the decisive divide, the ontological scission severing us from what ‘place’ was taken to be (by both culture and our moderns). Thus on the far side of the divide, ‘behind’ both him and us, lie both pre-modern and modern poetising (tradition and its modern contestation). We have to assume that the ‘no longer’ of the ‘*s’impose*’ includes the modern project, the very project that fired Celan himself in his early poetising. It seems that, for him (and he invites us to follow the implications of this), it is no longer possible to continue to poetise as an uninterrupted continuation of somehow combinable legacies of pre-modern traditions, modern traditions, and perhaps now post-modern (de-)traditions.

It seems that Celan is echoing the moderns’ own gestures in ‘placing’ poetry at the extreme edge again, a some-‘where’ from which an entirely new beginning would have to be made. But this is surely a different edge-site that has, at least in part, to both include and get beyond, or set itself aside from, the moderns’ legacy. For him the terms on which poetising can offer itself are precisely a matter of its self-contexting, how (where) it seeks to place itself. Through the kinds of gestic it performs it has to effect (as we have seen earlier) a ‘turn’ from ‘im-’ to ‘ex-’. But the reflexive verb, ‘*s’imposer*’, has specific connotations in French that are not immediately hearable in a literal English translation as ‘imposes itself’. Rather ‘*ne s’imposer plus*’ draws our attention to an ontological change in poetising’s possibility, the very terms of its becoming (of, indeed, whether it still can ‘become’...). ‘*S’imposer*’ pulls what it is ‘to impose’ under the sway of necessity, of being vital. The aphorism thus seems to say that, irrespective of how ‘necessary’ it may be for its makers, poetising/art is no longer culturally-socially vital, no longer ‘necessary’. We might turn this slightly to say that it no longer matters very much (to the social body, to the ‘state’, to the ‘interests’ effecting political-economic-military control, and, *eventually, thus to ‘us’*) what poets and artists do:



what poetising does and what it offers can no longer carry the stamp, bear the authority, of necessity. ‘Our’ culture is one for which art/poetising is no longer fundamental. It can do without it, take it or leave it, *do what it likes with it*. And what it likes to do necessarily includes dis-posing of it - deciding in the end to have none of it, to waste it.<sup>7</sup> Somehow art has lost the way (and the ‘place’) through which it ‘insisted’ (as a standing-in) in ‘our’ preceding cultures. It is no longer treated by culture (its dominant continuity-maintaining agent-institutions) as the response to an irresistible need, as something which we cannot do without, something essential to our becoming. It has lost the decisiveness of whatever ‘authority’ it carried within itself (in hope and on ‘our’ behalf).

In response to this diagnosed shift in its ‘structural’ possibilities (how it, *poiesis* itself, might define what a culture ‘is’ in its very gests...), in how it might become, all that art can do is to ‘*s’expose*’ - **to lay itself open**. But such a patency via ‘*s’exposer*’ carries an explicit sense of risk, of danger. Self-exposure, as a laying bare, knows in its very doing that it is leaving itself exposed to attack. As such an exposing, it performs a specific kind of acknowledged weakness, of im-potence, of becoming-object, in which the very setting-forth accepts, takes on, that it is aside from the conventions for exercising power and claiming authority. In this changed situation making-toward-art already includes within itself, and is thus partially constituted by, this sense, if not quite of failure-in-advance, then certainly of *an acceptance that it is in no position to make any demands*. Its gests have to pose themselves from within a ‘somewhere else’, a culturally placeless place, that, in spite of being surrounded and permeated by representation, still tries to remove itself from the placing work of commonsense. It has to try to do so precisely because routine conventions of placing (the differential allocation of power and authority through taken for granted terms for relating) cannot comprehend this kind of performance. Its very exposing is the out-figuring, the making up, the com-positing, of a ‘where’ that is unrecognisable according to commonsense ways of putting things in their places. To begin to appreciate, to move toward the not-here where gests are striving to hover, commonsense has to de-pose itself, dis-pose itself elsewhere, move away from the security of its unspoken grounds and give itself over to this other way of becoming.

But the dis-posing now faced by respondents approaching, trying to ‘take to’, art’s gests, is almost exclusively developed, directed, and orchestrated by the culture’s art-representing institutions. As now just one loose collection of inessential commodities – cultural goods – among techno-capitalism’s multiplying proliferation, art-making and its gests find (and thus lose) themselves borne into and through culture in and as an irresolvable tension. In the no-longer days of ‘*s’impose*’, art was, perhaps, deemed essential through its ties to and dependence upon the sites of power. It commanded value and position, in part, through this symbolic association. And though the moderns sought to tear art away from these affiliations and make toward patency, true to their idiosyncratic combining of romanticist and enlightenment visions, they still engaged art as a way to show ‘essential’ truths about their own human becoming. The aspiration to command, though differently, was persistent.

But for Celan, seeking to simultaneously remember and exile himself from both the darkneses of twentieth century experience and the rapidly emerging technoscientific culture, poetry/art had to recognise its crisis as the no-space to which it was condemned. Aside from all power, and dissociating itself from any desire to be in command of the essential, he saw that art could offer nothing but its own fragmented weakness. Its possible ‘relevance’ would

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<sup>7</sup> Aspects of making’s relation to waste are considered in ‘To Risk’.

lie in what its laying bare of its own patency might remind us (respondents) of. Poetising's plight now is to be condemned to try to survive in an in-between, drifting in the no longer and the not yet of a lost and now unenvisageable necessity. *Somehow, would-be performers have to convince themselves that they can go on in spite of this.* The challenge to and point of making is to offer gests that perform the hope of this conviction, that show that it is essential for them to perform and offer just these inessential gests in this very way.

Performing under 's' *expose* occurs as and at the disjunction of necessity and the inessential. Beyond any scene of command other than its own sense of being-summoned by a call to otherness, it chooses to make things for which no-one has called, bargained, ordered. Its elsewhere-summons has dis-tracted it into the exploration and attempt to show what it might be to be absolutely open, exposed, about the tangent of its own becoming with whatever it has drawn from art (the arts) and its own contexted-experiences. This is the sourcing about which it is challenged to be absolutely patent and it defines the performative task it faces: how to be patently for art alone in the face of the administrative projection of performing's gests into the planet-orbiting trajectory of spectacular commodification. To pledge performing patently to art as the hope for otherness, for that which is not and cannot yet be, condemns it to acting out, performing, the irresolvable, in some senses hopeless, tension.

For, in the years since the publication of Celan's sentence, the culture of techno-representation has come ever more explicitly to define the conditions and possibilities of performing. In the face of its seduction and promises it has become even harder to hold to the project of patency and weakness. As already noted, the institutions representing the arts now are global in aspiration, scope, and controlling powers. They devote themselves to trying to re-implicate art with power, but this time differently. For now, rather than being bound up with the fortunes of the traditional sites of power and authority, art is being spectacularly transformed into the essential, the pure, commodity, the commodity, if we can borrow simultaneously from Musil and Agamben, 'without qualities' and 'without content'. Under the general aestheticisation of culture generated by the mutual implication of capital and technoscience, art's gests begin to emerge, are represented, as exemplary cases, the model for every other commodity development. Freed from the symbolic associations with sites of traditional power the arts become the occasion for demonstrating how 'value' can be manufactured from 'nothing', *from nothing that anyone asked for, let alone envisaged, in advance.* For, in the beginning, as inessentials, without 'use' or 'practical value' as consumables, the arts' gests offer the perfect opportunity for the invention of value out of nothing.

Their virtue for the spectacular economy may ironically lie in their very patency. By seeming to lay themselves bare, and emerging aside from any need other than the urgency of the performer's other voice, the gests' value can then be invented *ex nihilo*. The arts' gests thus offer themselves as ideal materials for experiments in value-creation (and value-destruction) for they enable institutions to manipulate them in whatever ways suit their own shifting needs (long-term survival being fundamental). I say 'seeming' to lay themselves bare because, of course, once the institutional dynamic is established, performers' participation is, at least in part, a knowing one. It is very difficult for them to avoid developing tactics for engaging institutions if they want their gests to have a chance of reaching, touching, moving, audiences.

Poetential respondents' relation to the gests is now almost exclusively mediated by institutions. But patency and a knowing relation to the structures of mediation and valuation

are utterly incompatible modes of becoming. The point of the institutional project of value-creation is to transform the weak, the open, the hesitant, the (patently) obscure, the near-empty, the fragmenting, the self-dispersing, into icons of assuredness, connection, probity, fullness, confidence, and exemplary mastery (maker's gender notwithstanding). And all this management work has to be performed as a knowledge-project so that the things, in order to circulate as commodities in public space-times, have to be sent forth as objects recognisable to and absorbable by commonsense.

The aim of aesthetic management as a knowledge-project is to establish a site under its control where the managed things and commonsense can be reconciled. And the point of the reconciliation is to ensure that the things' potential to move submitting respondents is controlled according to the terms of institutional interests. That art could be a site for the exploration of radical difference, for becoming-different, for the otherness of a being-beyond-culture, is anathema for the managers of culture for whom the challenge is to draw respondents into their cycle of value-creation-and-destruction and the construction of an endless coherent (knowledge-defined and -supported) 'tradition'. Art's performances have to be managed through controlling the distance from respondents at which its gests are suspended. It is the role of the institution of criticism (backed by the knowledge-academies), as sense- and taste-making mediator, to hold the things at just that distance which withdraws respondents from submission to art's performance. Holding and fixing them at arm's length, critique represents the gests as essentially ephemeral, for it knows that culture now controls their passing, the rise and fall in their value. Critique enacts the barrier between the things and respondents' self-loss, that becoming-other in which a suborned dissolving self becomes multiple (and thus beyond control...) under a gest's sway.

Yet, even under these disastrous (for it) circumstances, much performing still seeks to cling to the performance of a patency which is necessarily to one side of sense-in-common, of 'meaning'. But in trying to expose itself to and 'in' culture's outside, to be an opening onto 'otherwise', to become where meaning is not (yet), making-towards-art experiences its relation to the real conditions of performing – engagement with institutions – as an unbearable tension. It soon discovers that it cannot approach this opening, this gap, as a way out of culture, except by passing through the representing institutions. And the entire project of the latter is to keep performing within representation's limits. From within the institutions it is very hard to see the edges and the possible points of rupture, let alone to find or make ways through to them. Being straightforwardly, 'nothing but', patent leads inexorably to immediate cooptation and re-modelling. Making as a performing-for, an attempt to expose, art's multiple difference, thus finds itself caught in a plurality of tactical struggles. Paradoxically the very attempt to perform some kind of abruption into culture's beyond now entails the development and maintenance of complex binding ties with its representatives. It may be that the real terms of performing's life under representation condemn it, for the most part, to depositing only minuscule traces of its attempts to extricate, excise, itself from culture. While still hoping to leave such remains as its offer, performing seems condemned to live on only through gests manifesting just this tension; their inner movement is defined by this alternation between abruptions of and acceptance of institutional strategies. Their possibility, how they might move others, is bound up with how they perform this drifting in and out of meaning. Fixed, placed, at a distance by critical knowledge-discourses that inhibit any radical movement, any self-loss, among respondents, the gests are liable to implode quite unpredictably.

All this is a far cry from the delirial interruptions of the moderns' flight out of tradition's framing rules. Across the arts the moderns' performances entailed committed gestures whose residues were things-as-events. For it was the very ways their gests congealed and made manifest the absolute necessity of their commitment to art's difference which defined their trajectory. The movement they offered to others was precisely a being-moved-out-of. But such movement depended entirely on how their gests preserved the 'force' constituting their commitment to art's difference. And for each maker this difference was revealed through the emergence of personal 'motifs', open complexes of charged felt thought-about-art-life, whose only possibility was to be realised in discrete things (objects, events...gests). Such motifs could only be glimpsed through the specific gests, and each gest entailed a transformation, however slight, in the motif itself. The motif was nothing outside its manifestation in specifics. And performing defined itself in and through its repeated performing and remodelling of a motif in the concrete things which were its residue.

For the moderns the possibility of art's difference lay in it being concretely graspable in each gest's recognisable achievement and embodiment (or otherwise) of the motif, the unformulatable sourcing (call included) that drove makers to the distraction of performing. The striving for this achievement constituted their significant gesture in all its singularity. As the performance of their commitment to art (with all the hopes for art that were attached to this) the point of this gesture was to make itself manifest and recognisable in each thing in such a way that others (willing respondents) could re-constitute the gesture (rehearse something of the performance) for themselves. Art moves (us?) through such re-constitutions. For the moderns the movement's essential term was a leap out of cultural givens and knowns into the otherwise of art's elsewhere. The radicality of such a withdrawal, borne along on our emoted perceptions, carried within itself an over-load of conflicting and possibly internecine tensions (anguished joy, joyful disquiet). Such disjunctions generate the gests' precarious lives and arise precisely from the loss of both conventions of meaning and the comfort of secure grounds for judgment. When such securing parameters are removed we are plunged into the perversities of our own disarray.

What we let ourselves in for, as both makers and respondents, when we give ourselves over to performing and its gests, is a fall out of those knowledges that have enabled us up to that point to place ourselves and survive in a world-in-common. Entering art's gests on their terms we face, each time uniquely, an idiosyncratic combine of sensuosities and a truncated perverse fashioning of language. Each gest sets itself forth through and exposes itself as a singular 'language', a 'just this once', that, being sufficient to itself, absolutely absorbed in and by itself (in becoming itself), bears an unknowable relation to Language-in-general and other languages. What we need to do to take it on its own terms, to find ourselves within the difference of art's fullness, is to allow its untranslatability to completely absorb us. Our absorption is its way of showing us how it has exhausted its language, a language never to be activated again. Irrespective of any superficial similarities or consistencies that seem to relate it to other things by the same maker or other makers (frequently gathered round concepts of personal 'style' or 'vision', or collective '-isms'), each gest becomes art in convincing us finally of its absolute separation. This is its performative 'moment' as an event patenting nothing but itself-as-art (remembering Ad Reinhardt again...).

And in showing that it is outside knowledge in a language which it completes and exhausts (as sufficient to its occasion), it reminds us that its constitution as performance is not something which can be gathered to any externally defined concept of 'action'. It is not reconcilable with either commonsense or analytical notions of 'doing', 'behaving', or

meaning-making. In whatever ways it may be subsumed within the concerns and discourse of analytic or technoscientific practices, the terms they use to place it and account for it are generated according to completely different interests to those of performing. Nor is this performing some practical performance in a dialectical relation to a complementary field-specific theory. There is, can never be, no theory-and-practice-of art. It is not in the service of or bound to any theoretical interest or paradigm. Rather, it is a becoming-before, or -quite-aside, from all ontic, ontological, epistemological, or metaphysical categories. All attempts to place it within theoretical-analytical frames, however crucial for the theorists' own project, are beside the point of performing and its gests. For, in performing art as that which is embedded in the particularity of each thing's difference, its concreteness, making displays sensuously that which is other to the possibly typical or generalisable, or repeatable. It offers itself as the absolute particular that excises itself, its being-done, from the continuities of place-time, of eventing, which define the limits of sense and meaning-making in both our knowledge practices and our everyday life. The very 'moving' that the 'thing-as-performing' performs for the maker and, potentially, for attentive desiring respondents, is the suspension of the categories of placing and timing through which we assemble a sensible world together. Each gest's 'point' as art is to move us to an elsewhere that is nowhere we know, where we may become (though we are no longer the 'we' we already recognise) outside.

This outside is that which art-as-performance seeks to gather, to make run, course, through the bits and pieces it assembles in each made thing. Performing's hope and its pledge is that this outside will be experienced concurrently through each gest's particulars which, singly and together, may provoke the syncopes effecting our being-moved, our becoming-delirious – tremors, shivers, tingles, swoons, tears, terrors, laughs, disgusts, hysterias, angers, anxieties, mood-leaps, reveries, fancy-flights...

The gest's outside begins where calculability, amenability, similitude, reason (all our means for holding steady the terms of our judging comparisons (the bread and butter of all critique...)), have ground to a halt. And undoubtedly the cut that art's defining performances incise through the taken-for-granted securities of commonsense can be taken as potential woundings, as damage inflictions. In their own small ways they pose niggling threats to the social body by offering a becoming that is outside, before, planing away from, the Law. In exposing themselves in their seeming powerlessness, their performance constitutes an aside from the Law. And there are always limits to the kind of self-damage the body can tolerate, especially where, as in art, the threat resides in its very incalculability – anathema to institutional (instrumental) ordering and control.

This incalculability is compounded by the paradoxical immanence of the outside that art performs. While art's other, the elsewhere it is making for, is an excised tumbling out of culture, *it is simultaneously one that occurs in our very midst*. Enacting an absolute proximity, it is an 'over-there' that is right here. Its self-exile couldn't be closer to home. And herein lies its perceived danger, the threat posed to culture by its performing the exposure of its own weakness. It offers itself in the full know-how that it can do nothing practical, nothing that is useful in the world's terms, for anyone. Not here, anyway, yet.

If treated as exemplary, as a model, by respondents, its display of uselessness would be disastrous for a culture turning around the axis of work and power. Approached in this way, the management and representation of the arts can be taken as culture's damage limitation exercise. The specialised discourses of aesthetics recruited to this task offer a counter-performance which tries to substitute potencies for the abject weakness of making and its

things. Converted, under the concepts' rule, into icons of power, selected art-things are fixed into culture's vaults and held up as exemplars of our culture's technical virtuosity, its bravura value-and-meaning creation. Thus, what is at stake for performing now, in this afterwards of our moderns, is precisely the quality of its gesture, the defining peculiarity of the gest's embedded mark, that might still extract it and us from culture's binds.

For the penetrating culture it is the radicality of changes within which the arts have been absorbed, re-formed, and re-directed, that has made the question of art-as-performance ever more explicit.<sup>8</sup> We can now see that performing's life, its real possibility, is defined by its engagement, its bringing off, of the question of itself as gesture. The gests resulting from this engagement (how it has answered the question of the kind of gesture it performs) offer themselves and are placed precisely according to judgments about performance. It is the 'how' of their being done that creates the possible significance of their gestures. It is 'how' the thing shows the maker's relation to, understanding of, and feeling for art in its difference. But the crucial judgments about this performance are those made within the institutional networks, for it is they that send the thing on its way. Performing's point is to seek to embed in its things precisely what it has put itself through, the 'experiences' of its self-questioning in order to set the thing off on its own. This is the attempt to hold the reflexive turn back through itself to the demands of art alone. Only then might art's plight, the hopeful struggle to realise art's promise, be manifest in the gest offered.

From their first halting emergings the modern arts were engaged in just this struggle; performing gests that were inventive responses to both the specificities of their contemporary experience and art's articulation with that experience, required suspension of taken-for-granted thinking and making conventions. By the time artists had begun to offer and circulate things explicitly differentiating themselves from and challenging established performing-traditions, the society whose emergent 'principle' (thanks to the fusions of technoscience and capital constituting power) of permanent change via consumptive-productive expansion, was already off and away on its plane-beyond-control. Caught up in and responding to this inaugurated dynamic of endless emergence and change, would-be-art-performers turned performing into an exploration and celebration of movement itself. Not only were they able to make art's project (to find, reveal and offer what moves on, in, and for art's terms alone) explicit, they developed this project through multiple engagements of the society's constantly evolving forms of movement. Art confronted, took on, movement – what it is to move and be moved. For it, 'being' was/is the movement of becoming, becoming as movement. Its makings thus aimed to constitute the difference of its own moving and to show what its own attempted move out of culture into culture's other might involve concretely. What it sought to realise on every occasion of performing was an absolutely specific thing that held in tense suspension the qualities of movement that its performance had necessitated. Herein lay the gests' hope of moving others out of culture, outside use, and into the patency of its not-yet. In spite of all absorption by the info-spectacle machinery, making-for-otherness tries to create something of this in its things, knowing well enough of the absorptive conversionary powers of the culture engine – their ability to fix identity and eliminate the possibility of movement.

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<sup>8</sup> This is signalled clearly in the relatively recent emergence of the study of 'performance' itself as an accredited separate sub-discipline within the academy. See, for example, P. Phelan, and P. Lane, eds., 'The Ends of Performance', New York University, New York, 1998. Such disciplinary separation and institutionalisation has little to do with my insistent substitution here of 'performing' for 'making' across the arts. My concern is not with abstracting or isolating performance from other ways of making-for-art but, rather, to draw attention to the ways all such making-for gather themselves as activities around the drive to art, and thus may bear upon the kinds of gesture-for-art they seek to embed within their gests.

Acutely aware of the terms of this absorption and of the generalised resignation this has generated, performing still hopes to move, however slightly, differently. Aware that this is its only chance, it knows that it operates at the conjunction of two kinds of movement (the movement of measuring and placing by knowledge-makers, and the movement out of this very frame by art's gests). Held up and borne along in this conjunction, all it can hope for is to be momentarily disjunctive, to confront the small pleasures of institutionally generated satisfied response with something that might just throw this response out of joint. To become at and in this disjunction, to make towards it for art, is to try desperately to make for art-as-such over there from within art-as-culture right here.

Invoking the entire legacy of touched thoughtful sensibility that has always marked the arts' extra-mural possibilities sets up a tragi-comic project. It is resonant with a strange combination of failure, weakness, sharp sensibility, humour, mania, and erotic pulsion. The only, the singular, resource that making has left to it when everything else has been suspended or appropriated, is the wit, *witz*,<sup>9</sup> *esprit* (with its allusion to breath and inspiration), peculiar to art – an indefinable 'knowing' aside from knowledge that lives, comes to life, precisely through its ability to jump out of itself, out of sense-in-common, to an elsewhere previously unenvisageable. And what holds it to art is each maker's desire to try ever and again to re-animate for themselves the inexplicable movement through which specific gests turn out of themselves. This is the summons-inaugurated movement that is conventionally glossed with the word 'creativity', a word whose generalised cultural usage gathers up art alongside the most diverse range of practices. Drawing 'creation' into an absolutely specific zone of becoming, this movement marks the rupture where knowledge falls away, where analysis, try though it may, can never reach. In thought we do indeed reach out toward this dedicated zone through using words like 'inspiration', 'intuition', 'invention', 'immediacy', 'spontaneity', 'extemporisation', and 'improvisation'. They refer to disturbing unaccountable conjunctions and disjunctions where the fragmentary self cedes some control to elsewhere-eruptions. They try to mark the 'when', 'where' and 'how' of the take-over explored previously through the muse-sourced summons. They point to pulsions and breaks that are disruptive of the continuities we rely upon for our routine constructive developmental accounting procedures. Such disruptions are the undoing and dispersing of reason. Coming from nowhere identifiable, they are also *ex tempore*, out of time as we conventionally measure it and live it unreflectively. They are that for which one is unprepared. No ground can be prepared for them – they just come (or not).

But the crucial condition for their possible value to the would-be-art-maker is the context of the performer's responses, that with and through which the maker engages them. For, unless they fall under the sway of, are gathered up by, a response-drive for and toward art, their occurrence is without relevance to art's possibility. Without the eruption and the leap out it provokes there would be no art, but without the peculiarly felt-thought reflexive turn that, 'knowing' how it is moved by art, is dedicated to art-as-such, the eruption would be without interest (except as curiosity for analytic frames). Thus, although our culture now is partially moved on by industries where applied 'creativity' is crucial to its dynamic (the panoply of design-related practices and the multiple media sub-worlds of entertainment, publicity, and information-dissemination – everywhere where the production of 'meaning' and knowledge

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<sup>9</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy show the importance of *witz* (specifically its relation to the fragment) to romanticism, in relation to the 'sudden idea' that '“falls” upon you' and is thus 'less found than received'. See Lacoue-Labarthe, P., and Nancy, J.-L., 'The Literary Absolute', trans. by Barnard P. and Lester, C., esp., pp. 50 – 58.

defines the practices' challenge - a.k.a. the info-spectacle), the creativity required for such work bears no relation to art's making towards otherness.

### **Performing as Suspending, as De-Composing**

Art suspends (it has to) the discourse of work. It also suspends the place-time assumptions intrinsic to the making of sense. The 'other' of art's 'otherwise' is the difference art strives to make on behalf of what-is-not, and the '-wise' is cognate with the *witz* partially constitutive of this differing. It is in the beginning and the end, before and after all analysis, that on which art is completely dependent. Yet, in spite of this necessity it is a dependency the far side of any guarantee for, in its utter unpredictability, it is bound to chance. That is, the 'what happens' in art-making's relation to 'creativity' is precisely that for which each maker is unprepared, and for which she or he can never, despite all habits, routines and rituals of preparation (which all performers develop as ways of dealing with the permanent crisis that performing is), prepare. *It is that about which each maker is at a loss.* This other from over-there is what confirms art in its intrinsic groundlessness; it neither claims, nor can it be given, support, under-pinning, principles, from anything outside itself. The other which comes to the maker and is fused into a possible gest through the maker's compulsive attachment to arting, is precisely what detaches art from our conventions of grasping understanding. What the thing seeks to deliver, to offer, is what may be most troubling because it both de-composes our ontological givens of space-time and substitutes something essentially strange in their stead.

But while the commonest substituting metaphors seek to 'fix' otherness topologically, associating it with space via senses of place (beyond, elsewhere, outside, edge, border, margin, exile, void, site, region, sublime and so on), time's 'others' seem more elusive. Yet the 'eventing', the emergence of performing and the subsequent life of its gests, are processual (they are on the move in utterly distinctive ways); part of their point is precisely to take us out of time as we ordinarily both take it for granted and account for (measure) it. So the experience of art's 'happening' (where the 'happ-' recalls chance, fate) for both performers and respondents, may necessarily confront us with the *ex tempore*, the 'out of time'. Being-with-art, becoming-through-art, may draw us into, be constituted as, modes of 'passing' that cannot be reconcilable with the measurable 'universal' linear time upon which commonsense tacitly establishes itself.

Recalling the intertwining of syncopation with inspiration discussed earlier, it might be said that art syncopates, disrupts, the absolute sense of linear continuity with its equality of moments, on which our sense of time relies. Part of art's hopeful pledge is that we might become differently, at least during our passing within (along with) and through its things. In suspense, held up within them, we keep on passing, though no longer in thrall to clock-time. But in our search for words that suggest time's disappearance and substitution by whatever holds it at bay, we hover, perhaps unavoidably, around, or cling to, the 'present' tense and its participles. And perhaps art is showing us that, in attempting to take on time and defer it, however 'briefly', from its hold over us, it is searching for something that lasts, although we may lack the lasting words for holding it down, delaying it. *Ex tempore*, art seems to be trying to precipitate something that is for, on behalf of, ending. Each thing in its particularity confronts us with its finitude. Precisely in the specificity of its difference the gest wants to bring things and us right up to an end. Yet simultaneously, in hoping to keep art going (this is what it tries to perform), it tries to stop, to hover, just short of the end: art – wanting to last, to be lasting, without ever quite being the last.



Certainly each gest is conclusive in its particularity. Yet in spite of defining itself as this being-brought-to-an end, the ‘point’ of this end is to remain ajar, on the turn, offering in this strange incompleteness an opening for beginning again. It wants to seduce us through an opening-out, a stretching, of time that annuls the latter for the nonce. Wanting to be forever open it invites always temporary completions, ‘conclusive’ interpretations that are themselves caught and defined by the restrictions and demands of their own context. If the gest achieves this invitational openness it can survive as the always untimely, that for which there is no defining justification or explanation either in what has preceded it or what follows it. Avoiding time, its being-open is thus bound up with its withdrawal from what passes away, from what we consign to a definitive past.

Following Nietzsche into the opening, openness, that is interpretation, for which there is no final determining defining ground, Deleuze shares his sense of creation. He thus offers art, too, as exemplifying the impossibility of an ultimate authority. Art becomes, emerges, in and as Nietzsche’s new dimension of ‘the untimely’, which ‘operates both in time and against time’<sup>10</sup>; through art’s things this ‘untimely’ can be a ‘singular element of upheaval’<sup>11</sup>. For Deleuze such e-ventings, out-comings, however ‘tiny and imperceptible’, perhaps ‘announce an exodus from today’s desert’<sup>12</sup>. Decomposing time, the untimely art-thing is disastrous for the routine continuity of commonsense. For, in holding time’s on-running at bay, however unmeasurably briefly, its syncopating self-exposure performs the catastrophe: it turns time aside, takes it out. Being irreconcilable, it is the ruination of everything we think we can count on and with. Both dislocative and *ex tempore* then, art seeks to seduce, to draw us into its improvisatory becoming, for it is in its improvising that both space and time are avoided (and voided...). In the ‘right here’ and ‘right now’ of improvising the performer has always already been withdrawn into an otherwise. And the emergent syncopating gests offer respondents in their turn the occasion of joining with them into a *caesura*, the cutting out of space and time.

When engaged by willing respondents the emerging syncopating gests, through the *caesurae* they offer, enable the cutting away of space and time as they are conventionally lived in and through. This is the e-venting of the gest. Irrespective of the multiple ways we have of approaching it, art is what improvises us, puts us out of time. But how might improvisation shape making processes across the arts?

### **Improvisation**

Commonly used to name certain kinds of musical performance, perhaps the movements constituting such performing can be transposed to other arts to show its atemporal disruption. Summoned performers respond improvisationally to what is offered them in the syncopated break that the call inaugurates. Improvisation is the conjunction of the uncalled for and the imaginative wealth of its performer lying in wait for its attachment to a project, an e-venting. It is the gesturing that fuses the call from elsewhere with the ‘know-how’ emerging from the intensities of the performer’s relations with both art and its gests and the context of living-making. Improvisation is what recalls the outrageous ‘given’ of the call and seeks ways of turning it into a running line, a break on the move, that will be nothing but passage – the passage of this gest alone, sufficient to itself. Yet it is this same gest which, through the respondent’s enraptured and dedicated attention, can be lived through as her/his own passing,

<sup>10</sup> G. Deleuze, ‘Desert Islands’, *Semiotext(e)*, New York, 2004, p. 129.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 130.

a passing out of this world. The gest offers respondents-to-come the possibility of a kind of transfer, the opportunity of improvising their own passing through it. Improvising is the strange conjunctive passage where the ‘know-how’ built into the performing drive undertakes the forming of the chaotic givens; this is the forming that constitutes the performance and it occurs without ever taking place – it is constitutionally uninterested in the taking, the appropriation, of place.

Perhaps we can thus begin to see that art’s possibility (the emergence of a thing able to withdraw willing respondents into a world filled only with other art gests, a world not of this world) is dependent upon a performer’s improvisatory fusing performance. Performing is the interval (the break-out from commonsense space-time, from the life-interval that is the info-spectacle’s entertainment) set up by the conjoining of the elsewhere-materials and the maker’s *witz*. In the performing, com-posing, of a thing that is also a self-ex-posing, this *witz* manifests itself practically as a know-how for, being completely a-theoretical (unformulatable), it bears no relation to what in commonsense and analytical work would be gathered as ‘knowledge’, a sharable communicable iterable agreed fund. Nor is it purely ‘personal’ knowledge derived from the idiosyncratic but recognised and memorised contingencies of an individual’s life experiences.

Performing’s know-how is devotional and hands-on. It emerges from a specific kind of devotion to art that is usually focussed on, obsessed and consumed by the materials of a specific medium or media. But it is an obsession that does not just want to be ‘in the presence’ of gests – it is driven to try and ‘repeat’, reiterate, art on its own terms. It wants to perform art again and again. And the know-how emerges out of the intimacies comprising this desiring relation in which makers devour and are devoured by the gests which drive them toward performing. This is both a deeply affective and a learning relationship in which the performer, in getting ‘the feel’ of and for art, emerges as a kind of auscultator, one who listens both to the ‘inner organic movements’ (calls included) and to the resonances of art’s things. Performing, then, improvises the conjoining of these two multiphonic sources in order to draw out something unique. And the improvisation’s only point is the gest’s particularity. It performs a kind of in-gathering in which shaping and rendering inclinations, corporeal perceptual facilities and ‘skills’, pulsed and thoughtful responses to life-experiences, voluntary and involuntary memories, affiliative affections and revulsions for specific gests, are explored for the ‘rightness’ of their relevance to the demands of the particular thing. Improvisation thus relies on an ‘insider’s’ hands-on ‘feel’ for the medium and its languaging resources and possibilities. It is essentially haptic in that it trusts itself to and is mediated by and in some kind of ‘contact’; the movements of performing entail touching and being touched. Whatever the gest’s medium or media (whether text, sound, image, object, embodied performing, singly or in combination), something passes through, is transferred into the thing in this touching-being-touched. In performing’s self-disruptive weavings (its false starts, hiccups, falls, diversions, as well as its unbroken flows and continuous associatings) there can be neither guarantee of nor necessary desire for the eventual hanging together of everything. Performers do not make from within an ‘aesthetic’ of unified form but from the syncopated and chaotic rhythms that mark the passage through the sourcing’s urgencies, compulsions, and reflections. These result in combinings and collagings in advance of any ‘vision’ of a unified field as outcome. What they move toward is an ending, the closure of a passage, and not a whole. Performing’s dynamic bears the performer along precisely through the mix of continuity and disruption that leaves its indelible traces in the gest. Bound essentially to the uncertainties of this trajectory, which constantly recurs onto and through itself via doubt and self-questioning, performing performs a strange kind of

play.<sup>13</sup> Though sparked by *witz* it may nevertheless be characterised by intensities that seem to have little to do with the critical-aesthetic categories of ‘pleasure’, enjoyment, comfort, and cathartic satisfaction. For as the site where immiscibles are crossed with or bump up against each other, the tensions of living through, sustaining, this strange project, generate anxieties, disquiet, as much as euphoria. They seem directly responsive to drives’ ‘chora’.

In its movement, its propulsion, as an endless attempted conjunction of disjunctions, performing can never escape the question of how to preserve its ‘motive’. For what drives it, surely, is an essential disjunction. What sustains performing is movement itself, its own movement as a foundationless flux that can never stop putting the question to itself *of how it is to keep going, what it is to make of its initiating abjection: the fear of being-in-between, cut off from the mother but not yet in language - becoming a no-subject*. The only ‘answer’ it can give is to keep performing toward something else, yet another one-several. The only way it can keep exhaustion at bay is to keep on hausting, drawing in, absorbing (whatever it needs) in order to find the way (each time different) of making patent its ‘something to say’, its ‘s’*expose*’, as *poiesis*, making-for-art alone.

Performing is thus a crucible in movement, a bottomless melting pot for gathering molten things, things in flux without fixed forms or identities. But, as Arthur Miller acutely showed in his eponymous drama, a crucible is also a place of great risk, an extreme and ferocious trial where living, how to live, is both at stake and under the severest scrutiny. Whilst by no means every improvising performance, every art-thing, may be seen as posing such extremities, nevertheless this is what making has to confront. For, precisely by being groundless, without any foundation other than its own momentum, it can never escape (as Beckett never stops reminding us, as in, for example, ‘Krapps’s Last Tape’<sup>14</sup>) from ‘first’ and ‘last’ questions: what is it ‘to begin’ (from nothing) ... what is it ‘to end’? From the molten flux in the crucible something is precipitated, begins to harden but its possibilities of lasting are unknowable. It may fall apart, disappear, in no time at all. And yet the tensions generated by the essential disjunctions to which it is the response may sustain it far beyond the context and time of its making. These defining disjunctions show that performing is a pulsed zone whose constituting movement is that of a crossing. This crossing forms a crux (between fragments of trajectories, of dimensions, of languages, of feelings, of memories, of thoughts, and so on) where differences, crossed with each other, melting *and thus miscible just this once*, are conjoined in and as the one-offs of art (potentially, always only potentially, in performing’s movement). Each one-off becomes a new species of which it is the sole member.

### **Becoming Hybrid - Disquieting Gestures : Objects of Knowledge**

While the moderns inaugurated the specific terms (to which we are still the disquieted heirs) of this crux as a troubling matter, a life-death puzzle, by offering performing as a self-supporting self-questioning performance, this trouble is complexified into a manifest crisis under the conditions of contemporary techno-representation. Performing is nothing if not troubling for the maker. By extension, we might expect residues of the troubling to be

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<sup>13</sup> Gabriel Josipovici contrasts ‘art as window’ (the realist novel for example) with ‘art as toy’ in which the art-thing, like the hobby-horse on which we can play and then discard as ‘a mere stick’, seeks (and requires too) ‘our active cooperation’. G. Josipovici, ‘The Singer on the Shore’, Carcanet, Manchester, 2006, p. 81. For Agamben, what the toy, through its miniaturisation and dismemberment of sacred and economic models, preserves ‘is nothing other than the human temporality contained therein: its pure historical essence.’ See his ‘Infancy and History’, Verso, London, 1993, esp. pp. 70 – 74.

<sup>14</sup> Samuel Beckett, ‘The Complete Dramatic Works’, Faber, London, 1990, pp. 213-224.

unavoidably precipitated in, thus partially defining, contemporary gests. As collaged incompatibles they make themselves felt at the site of response (of aesthetic consumption and interpretation) as disquieting things, simultaneously euphoric and, and ... (and what ... melanophoric, pathaphoric?).

Somehow aesthetic response, brought up on and still perhaps longing (however covertly) for satisfactions of beauty as making's hoped-for pinnacle, has to not only reconcile itself to this essential ambivalence, but also learn to take it as partially definitive of art's difference. The thrust of performing's momentum emerges precisely from the interaction of incompatible pulsings. Thus its gests, in their and art's specificity, will be indebted now to the very strangeness of their forced fusion of immiscibles. Untimely, unlocatable, unhomey, uncanny, according to our everyday conventions of fixing and knowing, the gests separate themselves off and out as irreconcilables. They can only be reconciled with other cultural modes of becoming (entertainment, education, heritage, for example) through selective appropriations which eliminate anything that might trouble such modes. And, as techno-representation permeates all our modes, art, as a project seeking to resist and ironise (be as absolutely other to it as it can manage) representation, is bound to create troubles for these other modes and, first of all, for itself.

Thus the know-how on which the improvising performance draws has to include some kind of 'take' on, some practical distillation of, the real institutional conditions permeating the making-offering zone. However devotional it is, performing's know-how needs to know as a matter of practice how to defend itself against institutional manipulation; it has to find ways of building certain kinds of resistance, of reserve, of double-dealing, into its things. For, across the arts, this representation is performing's defining circumstance; it is the all-covering umbrella under which art is exposed to that which is its anathema. And, given the centrality of its role both in introducing potential makers and respondents to the arts' performings and gests, and in setting up the terms, the agenda, of their experiential offer, no representing institution is, as already noted, more important than the academy. For it is in the latter that the two kinds of know-how – that of art-making and that of aesthetic response – are introduced and mediated alongside and intertwined with each other. And this occurs under education's powerful authority and its strict formal conditions and models. This authority grounds itself on the political-economic necessity of fusing enlightenment (knowledge), work (production-consumption), and control of the 'young' *in loco parentis* (for parents have themselves to be at work). Knowledges are inculcated (including those relating to and appropriating the arts) as preparation for subsequent active participation in economically productive roles.

Simply by juxtaposition, by close proximate placement alongside culture's dominant knowledge discourses, the arts are, from the beginning of our formal exposure to them, affiliated with and subsumed within culture's knowledge (technoscientific) project. Thus gathered up, intertwined and set forth, they are subject to the same value criteria, to the assessment and measurement of their performance according to rational (means-ends) schema and criteria. In this context not only are they treated as 'objects' for other knowledge-producing practices (operating within technoscience-derived conceptual and methodological frames) but they themselves are subject to determined transformation processes. They are incorporated by simile into the machinery of knowledge. Through the constant reinforcing reiteration of 'as if' procedures, performing and its gests are treated as if they are engaged in the production of one more framable knowledge species that is compatible with existing accepted forms. The arts' fate is just one symptom, exemplar, of the broader cultural shift from the always contested dominance of a liberal-humanist education to the post-humanism

of a technoscientific training for a life of work-play (where play becomes something to be worked at...).

In considering the arts' possible fate within this mutation, the academy<sup>15</sup> emerges as the crux. For it is the site where the experimental project of crossing two alien kinds of performing defines the terms of their everyday life. The arts are required to participate in and be observers of (and thus researchers in) their own mutant becoming. As a condition of survival (but at what cost to, with what effects on, performing and its gests?) they are drawn into becoming almost willing accomplices in their own mutation. Required to become methodic assessor-researchers of their own performance, through self-conceptualising processes imported from analytical sites (housed, quite literally, 'next door'), where the task is precisely to produce methodologically certified texts ('results') and not gests, apprentice-performers participate in extended and discursive written work. The point of this alternative form of interpretive work is the production of texts and modes of discourse that are given some kind of knowledge-status. In this process performing becomes ever more closely bound up with its own assessment, valuation, and thus aesthetic placement. The boundaries between performers, respondents, critic-analysts, and organisational managers, begin to dissolve, for all participate in the reproduction and sharing, the passing round, of interpretive discourses about performing and its gests.

As the academy sets performing's terms through its control (on the state's behalf) of training and the accreditation criteria for entry into something like a performing-'career' (art-as-work), the tension between making and 'personal critical reflection' may generate a turn-around in their relation. Where analytically 'grounded' (necessarily uncertain, halting, vague...) self-reflection is a condition for a would-be-performer's passage through academic training, apprentice-performing is necessarily both permeated by and subordinated to conceptual-organisational concerns. For the very means and end of academic work is the development and maintenance of a machine for endless interpretation, according to communally agreed (loosely) rules of production and exchange. Caught up in this machine, performing and its resultant gests emerge as hybrids, symptoms of the disappearance of the modern-art-thing in the face of the arts' institutionalisation.

The participation of other institutions in the contexting and representation of the gests serves to confirm both this emerging hybridity and the now defining importance of performers' own active participation in the construction of critical interpretation. For the point of the academy's routine work is to be responsive to the functioning of the surrounding permeating and controlling institutions (public and private). Integrated into techno-representation through its production of system-relevant knowledges and labour-potential, the academy prepares would-be performers and their interpreters alongside each other and others without distinction. The preparation for performing and interpreting art, and for gest-evaluation, is subject to the same rule of accountability as every other 'discipline'. In the contemporary academy there can be no 'art-as-such', subject to distinctive performance requirements, but only 'art' as a discipline-site where productive (knowledge and administrative) interests compete over scarce resources according to 'common' (supposed) criteria of performance assessment. This is why the informal peer networks of pupils/students is the site of potential resistance and trouble. They generate site-specific responses through bringing in things from

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<sup>15</sup> Further aspects of the relation between the academy and the arts' insertion into and role within the programming of culture, are explored later in this text under 'Programming Performing'.

‘outside’ the academy’s control (the values and interests, for example, of autobiography, popular culture, entertainment and the info-spectacle).

Under techno-representation performing and its gestic are thus constituted and circulated, through the info-spectacle’s expanding media-range, as moments contributing to a culture’s profile. For the culture-mediating institutions (the global mass-media and their ancillary organisations), the ‘placing’ of art requires an endless flow of interpretive cross-media representing work. The everyday ‘meaning’ of art emerges out of and is sustained by this multi-flow whose primary concern is the production of a consistent audience response through interweaving entertainment and information (audience research). The representation of art occurs within this context and is subservient to its requirements. The arts are included, represented, according to criteria for fusing the newsworthy with the playful and distracting – the offer of pleasure and, possibly, education; their role is to be the other, the redemptive foil to and re-charger for, the world of work.

Feeding off the spectacular combining of ‘personality’ and ‘fabulation’ (story-making), information-entertainment needs to endlessly renew the supply of ‘celebrities’; ‘artists’ (being constructed as such by the media guarantees entry into the myth-making of popular culture) become one minor group of potential recruits for this need. The multiplicity of representations across all media in which performers may be both contributors and ‘objects’/topics (considering the extraordinary range of media-events and texts within which the arts and their things make some kind of appearance) form the material residue constituting art’s cultural ‘appearance’ – what it is taken to ‘be’ and to be ‘doing’. In this media-representation performers are required to become ‘actor-performers’ on another ‘stage’ to that of art (the studio...). Through their image-construction and the ‘stories’ supporting it, they represent themselves (and thus indirectly their makings too) via their constructed media-personalities (very occasionally becoming ‘celebrities’ too).

The only ‘knowledge’ relevant to the generation of this acting-performance is that which can contribute to the construction and recognition of a ‘character’ around whom entertaining narratives can be woven. The storied life is supposedly the key to the performer’s gestic. Performers themselves contribute to this endless hybridising of their own and others’ things when they are recruited as critics and interpreters (of their own or others’ makings). This points up the troubled role of ‘knowledge’ in relation to both performing and evaluative judgments about its gestic. For it is assumed that, through the combination of their academic training and their experiences of performing, performers are equipped with special insider-knowledge that enables them to also become evaluative critics of their peers’ gestic. For example, it is common for fiction writers and poets to write ‘professionally’ as journalist-critics of their peers’ writing. It has to be assumed that they see no contradiction, experience no pain, in these mutant acting-performances. But perhaps this apparent transformation of the affliction of making into an object of critique (distance, negation, and, possibly, knowledge) is merely an exemplar of the ethic of art generated as essentially a site of competitive work. This is witnessed in the contemporary proliferation of media-sustained sponsored prize-rewarded competitions across a range of arts.<sup>16</sup> Where art is treated, at least in part, as a spectacular contest with publically labelled winners and losers, it is not surprising that some makers treat this ethic as a guide for their own schizzed performance.

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<sup>16</sup> The relation between ‘competition’ and ‘performing’ is also elaborated later in this text in the sub-section ‘Programming Performing’.

If, under competition, performers come to see the drive to make as leading to some kind of privileged (insider's) 'knowledge' that provides them with the ground, means, and the desire, to critique others' performance, we might need to ask what constitutes such a 'knowledge'. For if, after modernity, the point of the *gest* is its offer of an occasion for a transformation of mundane becoming, for an ontological shift out of the self's 'givens' into an other world (that of the *gest* alone), then it is surely knowledge itself which is in question in these processes. Quite apart from the pertinence of Deleuze's question as to why one would want to write about something one did not like, something that did not move, possess, one, is not art, the moment of art in the *gest*, precisely that which requires us to suspend our knowledge of self and world in order to allow it to take us to its own elsewhere? Philip Roth draws us into the crux of the entirely problematic relation of art and knowledge when he asks of writing and himself: 'How do you drive the wedge of consciousness into experience', for this is the problem 'for any writer with serious ambition'. But, in trying to effect this through the writer's 'double affliction' of 'playfulness and deadly seriousness', the writer realises not only that the 'knowledge produced by the writing' is 'not *your* knowledge', but also that 'when I'm not writing I don't know anything either.'<sup>17</sup>

Once they are out of the performing situation and consider their activities from the distance delivered by the return to the commonsense world, they realise that it is unaccountable. Performers (as writers, or whatever) remain non-plussed in the face of what they have generated. When regarded as an object through categories of conventional knowledge they do not 'know' what they have done. Irrespective of medium, it seems that performing is a making-out that somehow, through know-how's and improvisation's combined response to the other 'voice' (that is both more and less than a 'voice'), 'writes'-/makes-out, sets forth (down), ex-poses, itself ('self' here as art's hoped-for 'self' and not that 'self' of the performer outside of the performing-event) as a composed not-knowing (and thus necessarily partially dis-composed...). Returning to Celan's 's'expose', that which is being exposed is not something already inside the subject-maker. Rather, it is an attempted exposure of a 'something-for-art', something that seeks to show an attachment, an affiliation, to the Body (Art's...) that draws the performing incessantly onwards but away from the known and familiar. It is this being-dragged away toward Art's unspeakable indescribable elsewhere that can only be shown - exposed - in this precise way on this context-specific occasion: each making-for-art event as an indexical situated performance. What the *gest* seeks to make patent is a trace of Art's Body.

Such an experience of being-moved by not-knowing is aside from all epistemologies and all competitive hierarchies of value and taste. Precisely by being of no assistance according to the terms of a knowing judgment-for-use operative in this world, it draws us out through holes in knowledge's safety-nets into its own world. The improvisation through which the performer's know-how takes on and fuses with the other voice(s), offers us nothing that our knowledges of this world would regard as improving, developmental, or enlightening. Rather, precisely by being dislocative, interruptive, untimely, unhomey, each *gest*, as improvised performance, differs us from ourselves and what we think we know. It shows us however fleetingly, that the worlds we routinely inhabit are made practically, both in advance of, after, and in spite of, conceptualisation, in a crucible where intense propulsive streams of becoming unavoidably meld without forewarning. Performing aims to reiterate, each time as if for the first time, this world-forming activity outside the bounds of knowledge and the worldly-practical restraint that it lives through. What confronts it now, and thus what know-how has

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<sup>17</sup> From an interview with Philip Roth, B.B.C., Radio Four, 20.3.'03.

to contend with, is the systematics of techno-representation that have to programme and code everything according to capital's requirements for the management of meaning and information flow-and-exchange. In this programming the arts merely constitute one tiny site routinely available and malleable for whatever reconstitutive work the mechanics of representation require.

As other to representation's now banal authority, performing's know-how is challenged to take this on on each performing occasion; to stay in touch with art's pledge it needs to risk itself by finding ways of taking up the challenge. It begins with an advantage. Precisely by being indexical, by its celebration of its specificity, its situated circumstance-bound difference, it still presents a very peculiar challenge to representation's gathering processes. To deal with the challenge, the institutions set up elaborate systems of screening, containment, and penetration. For the very point of representation is to constitute 'things' and processes that effect a 'standing in for': to stand in for the represented thing on behalf of some independent interest, an interest that then manages the supposed interest of the represented thing. Gathered up, the gestic themselves become concentrated representatives of this other interest, and thus cease being entirely themselves. The hoped-for laying-bare of their intended exposure of art-as-potential then becomes a vehicle for all the framing and directing work that has gone into their repossession by organisational interests. Each gestic is re-shaped by the immense load that it has to bear as representative alongside its 'own' pledged becoming. It stands in for all the interests that ensured its at least temporary visibility and availability through their investments. Each also becomes a thing possessed by and inseparable from the 'spirits' of the framers (those who manage the 'how', 'where', and 'cost' of the appearance of the arts in 'our' culture). It is this inevitable re-modelling of the possession-to-come, the destiny of all gestic under representation, that know-how confronts each time it contemplates an alliance with improvisation.

### **Com-Posing as an Improvisatory De-Tensing Zone**

Driven by the desire for art, the need to make for art's elsewheres, performing commits itself to the absoluteness of the distinction between the presencing of improvisation and the representing that is the foreseeable destiny of performing now. Improvising seeks to sustain itself as a process of responsive becoming. It aims to devote all its attention to, to be completely engrossed by, the challenge of registering its response to what comes from elsewhere – the unearthly uncanny others sounding it out – in their finally uncapturable emergence and flow away, their becoming before representing enters and takes over the frame. It thus needs to bring all of its know-how into an acute play to find ways of fixing the disjunctives (sounds, images, colourings, textures, moods, voices, and so forth). For it is they, if their 'essentials' can be hung on to, that will offer the greatest resistance to, and best defence in the face of, representation. For performers, and subsequently pledge-focussed audiences (beyond and after the formal intervention of the representing respondents...), will try to hold to the pledge of the surprise-, shock-, amazement-, trouble-, disquiet-, delight-to-come in their very unprecedenced. Grasped in their passing and fitted somehow into the gestic-under-way, they perform as neither 'presences' nor 'representations'. Their essential contribution is to confirm and display the only 'rule' of improvising performance - art's self-exposure via com-position - that performing relies on absolutely in generating its gestic: *one thing leads to another... inexorably*. The being-moved that, with art as its goal, in Roth's term, drives consciousness's wedge into experience, is enacted, borne along, by this metonymic pulsing out of which something like a composition may emerge. And what is crucial for this emergence is the way in which each of a gestic's 'wave-particles' is linked, however strangely, to what has just preceded it and what follows it. The metonymic here is



the resonant quality of the linking – how each ‘particle-wave’ turns simultaneously both back to and away from the one-and-many-such that preceded it.

For there to be a com-position there has to be some kind of non-determinative overlap between each successive ‘thing’ that is pulled into the emerging performance. The *witz* of improvisation is to find in each thing elements that ‘remember’, recall, what has passed and offer something to what is to follow. This is the free-play that defines improvisation as the most tightly compressed zone imaginable. For the linking seems to happen immediately, aside from any measurable speed. Thus, what this effecting linking, this coalesced remembrance (re-tension) and anticipation (pro-tension), might be, in its emergent becoming, *is that which is unprecedented*. Since the moderns’ inauguration, the challenge to performing has remained that of using its know-how, its art-full *witz*, to find and set forth links that are both unprecedented and right, just this once, for each particular performing. This linking process is the improvising gesture through which performing constitutes ‘itself’. It is how performing becomes a through-forming – a per-formance. For the links (the ‘taches’ that ‘attach’), a gest’s unique ‘internal’ ‘one-off’ relations, are what generate each gest’s tension, how it tenses, its potential for a liveliness that offers a link with something quite other. And this tension arises from improvising’s ability to set forth, assemble, linkings (all the ‘elements’ that aesthetics might gather as the thing’s ‘content’) that are paradoxically double: simultaneously both ‘right’ and inexplicable. They make the links, form the ‘lines’, of the thing’s emergent singularity, but by inserting wave-particles that were entirely unpredictable prior to the improvisation.

Thus, the linking that, however precariously, holds the gest ‘together’, occurs through disjunctives that join. Com-posing performers recover things from elsewhere which, without their quite knowing how or why, come into play as the unprecedented disjunctive ‘new’, while nevertheless containing particles of both remembrance and promising anticipation. Improvising waves its way along an ungraspable groundless present-becoming via and as lines constituted by this strange string of interlocking impossibles. It seems that one ‘thing’ does indeed lead to another, but only by simultaneously drawing, in completely unpredictable ways, on past elements that seem to hint at something fulfilling (of the thing’s ‘needs’...) to come.

Among the arts it is music that most explicitly takes on this passing, our passing away, as both its theme and content. In the self-ex-posing musical performance that turns time out of itself on art’s and our behalf, we experience our resonant passing. Music whiles us away through the nascence and dying away, the disappearing arrival, peculiar to its vibrating ‘linear’ (do we know what a ‘line’ ‘is’?) blocks. And, while each form of musical composition depends in idiosyncratic ways on improvisation as the ‘means’ of invention, it is in jazz that performance and improvisation coincide, fulfill and exhaust each other. In this coincidence jazz takes as its explicit theme, its goal, that gesture which constitutes the performance peculiar to the arts of modernity and its afterward. For, in setting aside the everyday givens of place and time, improvising’s risky self-exposure identifies itself absolutely with, as, the emerging-disappearing of becoming. It ‘says’, in and as the compression of its unrepeatability, that, for it, becoming is all that there is, for this music has no experienceable before or after. It hazards everything on an expanding-contracting passage through (and, hopefully, out (of this world)). There ‘is’ only what can be invented (improvised) in the unfixable unboundaried non-presence of becoming. This is what it interrogates and celebrates in the totally elusive specificity of its withdrawal. Perhaps this is the ‘nearest’ (always so far away) that the arts of modernity get to finding, making and

concluding themselves in that untouchable obscure ‘present moment’, Rimbaud’s ‘absolutely modern’ moment, of , simultaneously, sourcing...ending. Even the painted gestural mark of the abstract expressionist painters, which might be taken as ‘holding’ the physical trace of the vitality of a passed becoming, nevertheless remains fixed beyond the experience of its passing to be given a new shiftable significance.

Certainly the Poundian exhortation to ‘make it new’ seemed to call for nothing less than a project whose point would lie in its chancing everything on its attempt to glance up against the ‘is’ of its own possibility. The improvising performance, trusting itself to ride the wave of becoming, hopes to show that, for it, there is nothing beyond that becoming, no before or afterwards, only its becoming-filled-to-bursting by a self-ex-posing com-posing.

Of course there is now a vast archive of improvised performances saved through recording procedures whose technical changes have paralleled and marked the continuing transitions in improvising’s modes.<sup>18</sup> These transform the music’s disappeared resonances into something else; they prepare the way for the recorded performance to come into representation as a potential object of knowledge and thus to become, through reiterative familiarity, a no longer troubling old acquaintance. Nevertheless because each recording registers a unique composition whose very point is its unrepeatability, these recordings can remind us of the occasioned quality of the gests. For, in spite of the fact that we may listen to them time and again, each can show us that, as a scoreless composition, it is bound absolutely to the circumstance of its performance. It is not an interpretation or a representation of or on behalf of something (a ‘score’) outside and in advance of itself, from somewhere, some time, other than its being performed. Each is, rather, a tenuous holding on to and delivery of the resonances generated by being filled up, completely taken over, by the music’s demands in that becoming. The drive to make improvised music attaches itself unequivocally to the occasion of its ‘being-composed’ and not to something anterior to it. For improvising musicians, whether performing alone or collectively, the challenge is to make music that simultaneously both eliminates from the passage of becoming all distracting mundane concerns and substitutes musical eventings which redefine, exhaust, that passage entirely in musical terms. And, because music’s defining transformation occurs, invests itself, in the conjunction of sounding and the obscurity of the relation between our passing and its measurement by time, the improvising gesture situates itself, per-forms, in this in-between; it traps itself between sounding and timing in order to probe the continuities (flows) and breaks (syncopes) through which they ‘get along’.

Absolutely tense for the performers sustaining this flow aside from space-time coordinates, the experience of making is necessarily always precipitous. It becomes music’s possibility only by moving off a permanent brink. Each sounding moves off the sheerness of the edge formed by the immediately preceding sound or silence; this moving is supported by nothing other than the force, the intensity, of its own resonance, and the ‘feeling’ that this is ‘right’, ‘just what is required’, for the music’s continuing flow. There is no ‘time’ for ‘thinking’ in any conventional sense (common- or technoscientific-) as some kind of ‘planning ahead’. For the performer is consumed by the inventive pulsed sustenance of the flow. The threat of an instant tumble into music’s cessation, together with the euphoria of maintaining the flow in the face of the ever-minatory collapse, constitutes the improvising performance as an anarchic interweaving of contesting intensities. It is bound to, it lives and dies by, filling up the brink

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<sup>18</sup> The troubling (for performers...) relation between music-making and recording is discussed at greater length in the final chapter.

of becoming. In this sense it offers itself each time as the gesture that exemplifies, makes absolutely concrete, the now ageing but still very lively modern commitment: to hold performing to a filling up of the now-here of its becoming with whatever it can discover of the art-full. Aside from all nostalgias, it stakes itself, its possibility, on this as performing's hopeful zone-beyond – *ex tempore*.

Perhaps each performance of improvised music brings into focus, crystallises, those defining constituents of the modern project and its afterward which may be less explicit, more 'buried', disguised, and separated in the performative gestures of the other arts. And, as respondents, audiences, we may come to recognise, in the concentrated focussing of this spontaneous generation, how art, through the particularity of its things, improvises us. For, in being drawn into a performance on the terms of the music's gesture, and thus withdrawn from our conventional self, we find ourselves having to participate in our own re-invention. To be with, in, the music, we are turned, however briefly, into improvisers of ourselves. We feel out how improvisation is our own essential possibility.

For the performer(s) inventing the performance in this *ex tempore* interval, it seems as if the anticipatory foreseeing of commonsense, trying to provide (provisé...) for what comes next, is transformed into an un-foreseeing. In the seeming immediacy of improvisation performing seems to invest everything into filling up the movement of becoming with sounding lines and blocks which extend and develop what has preceded them. Improvisation, in making appear what could not have been foreseen, seems to expend itself in making a link, making connections between, what has passed and an ever-emerging 'present'. It seems thriftless, unconcerned about its future. Yet the know-how which enables improvisation's driving movement is forward-looking; it devotes itself necessarily to and hopes for the possibility of performances, performing, to come. And, in spite of its apparent heedlessness and commitment to the primacy of the 'present' of performing, this future-orientation is a fundamental constituent of the improvising process. But, because of the extreme and intense compression which constitutes the process, our conventional temporal submission of 'time' by tenses no longer seems to operate.

Across all forms of musical improvisation, from operating within strict limits of harmonic form, time signature and tempo, through the loosening of each of these into open freed improvising aside from any advance structuring constraints, time is plasticised. From being that which we experience passively in everyday life as an external measure of passing (clock-time), in music, and acutely so in improvising, time is transformed into a possession. The improviser seeks to turn time out of itself into that which can be played, toyed, with on behalf of and in the course of an excavation of passing itself (coming-going, appearing-disappearing, arrival-departure...). Thus everything is done (this is the *witz*-full know-how of the improviser) to make our passing and pure resonance coincide; improvising seeks to be absolutely absorbed in and by its plasticising of what we 'think' of as the 'present instant'. Its point is to make the experience of its (our) passing at-one with its sounding. And it can only do this by trying to suspend our routine application of tenses (language's included) to the process of becoming. For what it tries to accomplish in its sounding is the displacement of time passing. It substitutes, for the time that it banishes, an interval in which it (and hopefully respondents) is utterly absorbed. Once taken over by and held up within this re-sounding interval, all abstractions of time and measurement are evacuated. The entire thrust of the improvising is to maintain this interval on its own terms through its, the music's, stretchings and contractings. Its point is the generation of the previously unheard (the unforeseeable) as

the bearer of a compressed sounding-out of the passion of living, of becoming, of our emergence and dying away....

And, for the performer, this has to be achieved, effected, in what sounds to a listener like the twinkling of an ear, in no-time-at-all. That is why the sounding boundaryless interval which is both on the move and what moves us, is the effect of both a continuous stretching-contracting and a compression. For much is packed into this motile interval. The sounding-out that seems to 'occupy' the maker's presencing (becoming) is sustained through a complex of disparate processes. They appear to be simultaneous and interwoven, making their semi-autonomous ways through unanticipatable transitions between 'willed' and involuntary pulsings that fuse in the singularity of the sounding-out (which of course may include silences, breaks, as intrinsic to its projecting). Caught up, entangled within these processes, the improviser is both in and beyond control. In the strange combination of know-how (a combined repertoire of instrumental skills and aural-phonic musical 'memories' all shaped by desire, love, affection, and circumstance) and invention (the context-driven-and-bound first-time-one-offs), the improviser trusts that the already-known will be called out of itself by an other (voicing/sounding) that will carry it over into the previously unheard. Improvisation enacts the hope for inspiration. But it performs this under the most exacting conditions, for its only hope and chance are tied to the absolute ephemerality of the context-bound sounding interval. On each occasion it has only this one chance to invent and sustain its interval without ever knowing in advance whether the 'other voice' will carry it out of itself. It cannot take time out, wander off, absent or reflect on itself, not be-there. Aside from all guarantees there is either the intensity of improvising or there is nothing. Know-how can set some of the terms of the scene, open up the interval, but it can never ensure its own transcendence, its becoming-other. Perhaps that is why it is so dependent, utterly so, on its know-how in opening up the interval of performance.

By stretching this interval, a kind of expansion of the 'absent present', it appears to give those processes that are in tension with each other the greatest chance of generating the unanticipatable in the course of their confrontation. If the sustenance of a flowing sound seems primarily dependent on those resources that root the performing in a knowledge of and love for (some) past music, then 'remembering' would be improvising's dominant guiding process. But because the quest is for the singular new unheard, the unanticipatable, then processes in conflict with memorialising's habits seem to hold the hope of interrupting these habits and turning them, at least some of them, aside, supplanting them with the 'new'.

But it is not in the nature of 'mastery' to call itself into question, to put itself at risk, though this is precisely the demanding challenge of improvising, and, of course, of all the arts. This challenge to habit's memory-skill repertoire may emerge from that sounding-out that folds back upon the re-assurances of musical habit. It may be found in that dimension of performing's movement that has to turn to take account of, and respond to, the surrounding demanding context of the performance. For, recalling the vitality of 'atmosphere' in the wait for and response to the 'other voice' in poetic 'inspiration', the perceived content of this context provides a completely different corpus of materials upon which improvising has to draw to be true to the conditions of its becoming. Context is always, in unforeseeable ways, in tension with the experientially derived repertoire one brings to it. Musical improvisers have to be acutely responsive to context; the need for this is at its most pressing and obvious when the improvisation is a collective and not a solo project. For the immediate context is defined by the collective performing of the other musicians. Yet, whether as solo or collective performance, what context requires of the improviser is the continuous adjustment of the

motion (as emotion...) of response (the invented sounding) to not only the experience of 'what is happening' but also, and this is the crucial shift, to project the sounding towards what may follow. The response, as inventive 'reply' to what has both preceded and is accompanying it, has also to hazard a kind of casting ahead that seeks to offer something both to itself (to its own improvising-to-come) and, where relevant, to co-improvisers.

In this anticipatory dimension of the current flow, elements are offered that may become material resources, waving-particles, for the following developing improvisation. Something of what it offers is already exceeding, ahead of, itself. Its sounding-out seems to stretch, to expand, and to hold on to (thus delaying ever so slightly?) its fleeting passing. Somehow it manages to compact, to live within, the three primary tenses – past, present, future – simultaneously. It is as if, quite aside from the inexorable measuring of clock-time that divides passage into discrete equal intervals, the improviser has to contain, slide imperceptibly back and forth between in no perceptible time at all, these three historicising dimensions. How could this be? What might be 'going on' in the improviser's construction, apparently 'instantly' (without delay, time for aforethought...), of the passing-sounding as a parenthesis<sup>19</sup> without placeable brackets? In focussing all the musical desire and attention on to the challenge of filling and keeping open this parenthesis the improviser collapses the boundaries between tenses and somehow runs them across, alongside and into each other. The zone of improvising is para-temporal. In its sounding-through, its being sounded-out, it makes the tenses tensile, turning them out of themselves and thus extracting itself from and substituting itself as music, hopefully, for clock-time.

In the movement of improvising the performer inhabits the past as a vast resource of musical (and other) affections, knowledges, and instrumental controls; this wellspring is in play in the sounding as that from which the improviser draws and begins to shape utterly specific materials to constitute the sounding lines-and-blocks. But, far from being a matter of informational recall through a voluntary memory search, what is being formed and released (haptically embodied through the fingers, hands and breathing) is a transformational re-composing of these 'past' elements according to the felt demands of the surrounding context. In other words, the 'past' that is drawn into the 'present' is already mutating and only emerges in this changed form. Securities of, say, instrumental control or harmonic knowledge, established in the past, are brought into highly selective play because the improviser feels their passing relevance, albeit in necessarily mutant form, to the demands of the current performance. As the 'ground' (finally groundless) from which the improviser sets out, they precede each performance as apparently taken-for-granted latencies, pre-existing potentials, awaiting re-activation. But when brought into play they enter not in the form of fixed 'abstract' information but re-formed precisely as intense response to felt contextual needs (atmosphere, mood, the collective sounds of other performers, audience response...). The 'past' is 'there' but differently, re-embodied as partial constituent of, contributor to, the emergence of the unanticipatable.

But the sounding-out (what the improviser and we hear as 'the performance', the reverberating parenthesis that hopefully rivets us to itself) that fills the performer's 'becoming' and that we hear in and as 'the present', is, paradoxically, always also belated. It

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<sup>19</sup> The sense of parenthesis I am trying to invoke is pointed to by Philip Roth when he quotes Primo Levi's description of his journey back from Austria to Italy via the Soviet Union as 'a parenthesis of unlimited availability'. See Philip Roth, 'Shop Talk', Vintage, London, 2002, p.11. Subsequently in a discussion with Aharon Appelfeld about the Jewish imagination he writes about 'the search to retrieve primitive energies' (op. cit., p. 35). Improvisation seems to me to effect this retrieval precisely through its unique parentheses.

comes after, in the wake of, something else that has already had to have happened. For what is ‘ahead’ of it, what draws it along in its train, is precisely the improviser’s being in another tense – the future – simultaneously ‘ahead’ of her-/himself. In order for the embodied sound to have emerged, to ring out, to pass and be heard by both performer and audience as suspended reverberating, the improviser has already to have been ‘ahead’ of this emergence. However subliminal, there is a necessary gap, a stretch(-ing) between the thought-feel that finds-and-invents the inflected sounds, and the emergent reverberations. Something from nowhere is transmitted ‘back’ to the focal ‘point’ of making (the ears-eyes-fingers-limbs-lungs-heart relations) that is transformed into sound. Felt-thought<sup>20</sup>, becoming everso slightly ‘ahead’ of the fingers’ translations, transliterates ‘instructions’, for the sounds-to-come that have already been ‘heard’ silently by the performer, to the transcribing fingers and other corporeal instrumental contacters. The emerging sounding-out, what the performer and we really hear as the music’s eventing, is already part of the performer’s past. For improvisation demands that the performer always be already beyond the music’s emerging-becoming in a ‘future’ from within which the unfolding sounding line is sent ‘back’ to the transposing body. Something very similar, though entirely lacking the found-invention, happens in a performer’s sight-reading of music where the player has to be reading the music-to-come in advance of what is currently being played. Again the three tenses are seemingly simultaneously in play, lived-involuntarily by the performer.

While this extraordinary coordination of internal time differentiation and collapse generates a singular unique unanticipatable flowing performance that gives the music its always fragile-febrile identity, it nevertheless means that the improviser is absolutely displaced; the singularity of identity is dissolved. We cannot say ‘where’ or ‘when’ the performer ‘is’ in the improvised performance; he/she is dispersed across the multiple processes required to generate it. In performing ‘the’ maker is already several, and thus both placeless and untimely. Yet it is out of this very dispersion, this not-being-one, that the improviser’s, hopefully unique, ‘voice’ emerges and is sustained.

It seems that everything contributing to the recognisability of the improviser’s ‘original’ musical ‘voice’ (intonation, timbre, tuning, timing, phrasing, accenting, lining, harmonic/rhythmic invention, emotional range, and so on) can only emerge from these acute ‘internal’ disjunctions of time and place. The recognised original identity in its very emergence can be attributed to no ‘one’; the unique improvising ‘voices’ of individual musicians are always generated in response to and are sustained by a shared performance project.

Of course, within that musical form – jazz – that is defined by its celebration and exploration of improvised performance, it has to be remembered that performing is essentially collective. The unique ‘voices’ of individual musicians are always generated within and sustained by their developing responses to shared performance projects. With rare exceptions, only the piano lends itself to sustainable solo performance and even in its case the possibility of such performing always emerges out of collective music making. No jazz pianists sustained exclusively solo careers, although several moved back and forth between collective and solo performing (Morton, Hines, Tatum, Waller, Ellington, Garner, Powell, Peterson, Tyner, Jarrett, Mehldau, for example). Also a distinction may be drawn between the numerous

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<sup>20</sup> The extent to which ‘thinking’ might or might not be involved in this complex process was shown to be utterly problematic by Jim Mullen, the wonderful Scottish guitarist, in his introduction to a performance of the popular song ‘It Never Entered My Mind’. For the title was, he suggested, a succinct characterisation of the improvisation process, the ‘It’ of the improvised line seeming to come from somewhere else altogether.

improvisers who developed a recognisable personal ‘voice’ (‘style’), and that very much smaller group whose innovations opened up radical new possibilities for collective and solo improvisation. When performers begin to experience urgent disjunctions between the received wisdoms, affections and conventions of know-how, their own drive to invent may result in specific contextual challenges (challenging, too, what other performers are doing in the course of collective performance); their response may entail decisive breaks in performing conventions and the eruption of new modes of improvisation and collective musical relations. Breaks in the flow of received practices, and consequent structural shifts in how improvising is approached and contexted, are often attributed solely to the innovations of specific individuals (Armstrong, Ellington, Hawkins, Parker, Gillespie, Coltrane, Coleman...). But in jazz all of these disjunctive leaps occur within a collective context. They could only have arisen out of the supportive sharing and development of musical ‘visions’. The revolutionary impact of the virtuosic re-inventors is both dependent upon, generated within, and mediated out of the crucible of contextually specific intensive performative collaborations, shared hearing, a being-at-one with each other *in the course of performance itself*.

Perhaps the collective jazz performance crystallises and concentrates, through the apparent instantaneity of improvisation, the processes common to all contemporary performing but which, in each of the other arts, are necessarily dispersed and interact in unique ways. Being art-saturated and dedicated, art’s performings are all, though differently, intensely embodied, contextually bound, know-how (memory/skill) supported, affection-suffused, self-and-language questioning, call-responsive, place and time disruptive, collectivity-dependent, and, invariably, disconcerting because they expose, and expose themselves to, precisely what ‘trust’ is and what it is to ‘put one’s trust in’ one’s peers (co-performers) and respondents. For these are the others participating in the laying bare, the patency, that constitutes performing. Bound utterly to the conditions of its own passing (emerging-disappearing), improvised performing risks everything on, tries to pack everything into, that stretched gap (the unboundaryable parenthesis) in which its bareness, dicing with chance, is all that it can offer. In that passing, as in all making-toward-art, and irrespective of the reflective re-composing, re-writing, and erasure-displacement that may constitute the eventual emergence of its ‘thing’, it is, in crucial ways, both irrevocable and irresponsible.<sup>21</sup> It can never be held fully to account, coming as it does from behind itself, ahead of itself, beside itself, and beyond itself.

The ‘*s’ expose*’ of the performing is thus revelatory in a double sense. The very point of performing something that may indeed engage, appeal to, others, is first of all to surprise oneself, or, rather, to allow the other voice(s) about which one had (and can have) no idea, to take one over completely and substitute their uninvited irresponsible beyond-reason.

### **Programming Performing**

Performing always hopes, without ever quite knowing how, to slip outside the circle of innocence and guilt that is the Law within which the laws of commonsense and clock-time are unquestioningly sustained. Of course, because all the arts’ performances occur within a

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<sup>21</sup> This irresponsibility is, perhaps, what the pianist-composer Mike Westbrook celebrates and explores in his ‘Chanson Irresponsable’ project. Responding to the clamour of the sedge-warbler’s chorus, both a collective and an independently sung warbler song ‘competition’, he likens the independent and collective song to the musician’s relation to performing. See his accompanying notes to the recording ‘Chanson Irresponsable’, c.d. ENJ 9456, 2003.

tightly regulated political economy whose laws are worked out, but never unequivocally, in the name of individual, occasionally corporate, and state responsibility, names are attached to actions and things so that possession and responsibility, and thus ‘appropriate’ rewards and punishments, can be decided. Required to be name-tagged from the beginning by responsible adults in (tacit) collusion with the state, we are all participating collaborators in the permeating culture of identity-formation and fixing. Worked out under culture’s aegis to fit into the requirements of political economy, the arts share fully in all the things that flow from the key social attribute of named identity and the construction of subjectivity, individuality, and ‘character’. Surrounded by the machinery of ‘Total Entertainment’<sup>22</sup>, the arts are treated under and on the same terms as popular cultural forms: the insoluble relation between performing (art-thing) and character (singular identity) defines how things are represented in tandem with circumscribed rules for all kinds of ‘authorship’ – authentication of performance-as-thing and its attachment to author-performer being culture’s first rule – for this enables the thing and the performer to enter simultaneously into the info-spectacle’s representing machine within which both are prepared for the construction of a ‘career’. Once sent on their way, circulated, within the machine, their only possibility of a ‘life’ is dependent upon the construction of a reputation. And, because the culture of entertainment gathers everything around celebrity and becoming the other to ‘work’, however distant the neophyte entrant into the machine may seem from it, access to celebrity is the machine’s fantasy-promise. Because the flow-through must be maintained and endlessly renewed everyone is a potential recruit at any time. And all makers know that they have to buy the time-space for their future making through ensuring at least minimal recruitment to surfacing within the flow.

Although, on a minuscule scale in comparison with the global post-industrial production of mass popular cultural forms (teevee, pop and ‘light’ music, film, radio, popular fiction and publishing, the web – all serviced by the vast resources devoted to programme-maintenance and technical innovation), each of the traditionally separated ‘fine’ arts develops its own celebrity- and reputational-hierarchies; they participate in and are used as material and recruiting resources by the mass-representing machinery. Category boundaries collapse under the pressures of such recruitment and arts’ organisations’ felt need to participate in and represent their gests (as products) through the organs of mass representation. At every level, from school to post-doctoral research, the academy too is drawn as a participant into the machinery’s flow. The academy mediates visions of the arts, their performance and the subjectivities they are represented as demanding; it does this in ways that are compatible with and use the same technologies as the media that surround and permeate their daily activities.

None of this is to suggest that the machinery of spectacular representation is determinative in any way of any performance’s specific ‘content’ or shape. But, despite operating according to quite different concerns and interests to those defining performers’ immersion in their performing, the entire organisational apparatus representing the arts controls the terms on which they – makers and things – appear and are shaped and the pathways to which they are allocated. This organisational work sets up the appearance (and disappearance) of art and, crucially how it is related to both the popular cultural ‘forms’ dominating their routine flows and the global information network (particularly important in the construction and distribution of ‘values’). If performers and their gests do surface in the flow they do so only as constructs of the representers’ interests. Their subsequent social life, if any, is constituted

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<sup>22</sup> To quote Philip Roth, in discussion with the Czech writer Ivan Klima, on art’s ‘adversary... the all-powerful, archenemy of literature, literacy and language’ and the ‘fatuity into which this adversary reduces virtually all of human discourse’ - ‘Welcome to the World of Total Entertainment!’ Op. cit., p. 75.



by, in, and through the multi-media ‘stories’ by which their passages are floated and charted. Both respondents and performers thus come to the gestic, to how and where art is made to appear, through these identifying permeating image-texts which offer the kind of phantasms needed for the flow’s sustenance. This multi-media mediation of art’s appearance is both its frame (its perceived limits and significance) and the means for its generalised interpretation and valuation. But if the context of such textualising-imaging is always that of popular culture, if art and its things are represented and thus approached as if they were no different to the things of entertainment, as offering the same kind of ‘satisfactions’, then both art-making and the kinds of relation we can have with its things are in the throes of that earlier mentioned forced mutation and hybridisation of art into ‘art-lite’.

Held and holed up in culture’s organising machine, art’s gestic appear, are represented, as minor diversions from, but are unequivocally set up within and alongside the info-entertainment that seeks to seduce most of our restless attention beyond work. Nevertheless, in the face of this representation many makers do insist on struggling to hold to and revivify something of the moderns’ legacy. Touched by art’s transformative possibilities they commit themselves to trying to offer gestic that are ‘other’ than ‘what is’, that seek precisely to perform their difference to the permeating culture. But in doing this they condemn themselves to trying to perform, as the performance of their own (and art’s) survival, on sites of irreconcilable disjunctions. For their very performing, their developing charged conversation with past and contemporary art (and artists), unavoidably has to engage with art’s contemporary representation; they can only engage with others and their own performing through the terms on which art is sent on its way, is made (allowed) to appear. Performing is an endless, sometimes silent sometimes explicit, conversation with the organisational interests and requirements that mount and control art’s spectacular appearance. Emergent gestic are outcomes of these practical ‘negotiations’ (they occur in the performing) about what constitutes an art gestic, right now under these very conditions, and the terms on which, disappearing (recalling Josephine...), art might still just about appear.

Subordinated to and positioned within the productive apparatus of popular culture, the arts are gathered up within a boundary-dissolving dynamic that eliminates the value of discrimination (between art and whatever else) because it cannot stomach or comprehend either otherness or the in-folding questioning that Art undertakes on its own (but now appropriated) Body. Thus the fate of performing-for-art as ‘s’*exposer*’, the necessity of making the questions of art’s and one’s own possibility coincide in the performing leap towards otherness, is to put itself absolutely at risk, to always be hanging (itself) in the balance.

For performing the s’*exposer* of *poiesis*, requiring the self to bare itself to art as its potential bearer, in the course of its very suspension, risks not merely being ignored as irrelevant to the apparatus’s productive needs, but being held to account, prosecuted, and flayed by the critical machine for being simultaneously responsible and irresponsible. At the other extreme to indifference is the risk of seduction by the rewards of publicity through which one may be whisked away into the fantasy-ether of celebrity. All the more striking in the arts for its comparative rarity, it transforms performing into documentary evidence for the construction of celebrity’s exoticism.

It is in this context that the collective character of the improvisation project exemplifies and acts as a reminder of the founding condition of contemporary art-making – that it is inescapably collaborative and necessitates continuous complex relations and negotiations

with ‘friends’ and ‘foes’; performing becomes a permanent tactical struggle requiring often instantly improvised responses to challenges to its ‘otherness’ drive. Quite aside from the popular cultural stereotypes playing off post-romantic rhetorics and continuing to represent art-makers as ‘lone’ subjects whose things are taken to be ‘expressions’ of inner (quasi-pathological) psychic states and processes, we can see that performing-toward-art, and the emergence (exposure) of its gests, are through and through collaborative performances. Across the arts performing is engaged in multiple negotiations which are partially constitutive of its performances, of what it does. Its gests are socially generated in, represented through, and circulated around networks within which the terms of their exposure are put in place and enacted. Having their own dynamic sustained in the meshing together and working out of interests and power, their representing discourses incorporate and position the gests according to the interests’ pressing demands. Such positioning is done without reference to the plight of makers. Though of course performers have to collaborate with the professional technicians in order that they and their gests may be positioned and circulated within the flow. The performances that do emerge into the transforming light of cultural representation, are thus through and through collaborative, even though they are attributed to ‘single’ named subjects and used to enhance or diminish their reputation. Only a few are chosen, and only one is to be held responsible, though many have collaborated in mounting the machinery of exposure, and thus the appearance and trajectory of every performance. And, as noted earlier, it is not only at the point of reception – contact with organisational requirements – that performer and gest enter into and are re-formed in collaborative networks for the purposes of representation.

From the ‘beginning’, from the earliest vague sensings and feelings that turn one towards tentative forays into trying to make for art, the nascent art-maker moves ‘into’ art through relations with others and institutions in which their placing and valuing of art-things set up the terms on which performers commit themselves to a life of performing. The point of this life-commitment is to try to elide itself with, lose itself to, the performer’s understanding of and feelings for art’s trajectory; it is to try to this end to turn the life, one’s becoming, into a resource for and a question about the exploration of art’s possibility, knowing now that this requires the finally impossible attempt to suspend and leap out of culture’s conventions. This is what potential performers still derive from their relations with art’s gests; it is the latter which transform them into seekers after otherness.

But the paradox of the art-committed life is that the relations and institutions through which one tries to negotiate, to find, a way of performing on art’s behalf, are utterly conventional. They embody, enact, the very culture which is anathema to art’s quest for otherness. Everyday understanding and experience of art operates through the reassurances of a machinised aesthetic of representation that works through the necessity (for its own preservation) of the construction of an absolute distance between itself and the things represented. Further, culture’s entire thrust, its productive drive, seeks to turn everything into convention; it has to represent things on its own terms, to make everything appear in ways that reconcile it to the taken-for-granted world of daily life. The security of the latter depends on either transforming the other into the comprehended, or sealing it off, hiding it, destroying it even. Under techno-representation, latter-day modernity, art is condemned to appear alongside all other cultural forms and products as just one element in a generalised aestheticisation: ‘the world’ is simultaneously constituted and judged according to the comforts (reassurances) that its appearance can be made to induce. Such comfort is precisely what is contested where the gests are able to offer some glimpse, however minuscule, secreted, or obscure, of the other which is their *telos*. But to sustain performing as a performance on behalf of the outside involves the performer in collaborations which seek to

keep her/him in the vice of the conventional. This is the pathos of the maker's necessary collaboration with many others in the staging of art's performance. At the same time it is also the joy arising from art's final inseparability from life.

Thus art's possibility as a real course of action can only emerge from involvement with represented art-things, with other makers, and with conversationally and textually mediated negotiations with representatives of the art-controlling institutions (with the academy as the now crucial shaping medium through which the reproduction of art-making has been drawn and secured. For the arts have been used simultaneously as means both for ensuring the essential base of literacy necessary for the technically specific functions required for cultural continuity and for inculcating the terms of 'citizenship' (national belonging) through the construction of a common heritage. The formalisation and technicising of art's representation within the academy's different levels, through the inculcation of 'how to' processes ('how to' read, write, paint, sing, compose, play, perform...) is now the common collaborative resource for potential performers. This is where the arts are given sustained exposure according to the terms of national interests (the curricula across the levels of state-mounted education).

But in our very belated modernity this educational experience is complemented by and perhaps re-directed and disturbed, thrown into disarray even, in the course of quite ordinary relations with the mass media's management of cultural representation. The mass media set up art's relation to culture in ways quite aside from the academy's formal concerns with the functioning of both knowledge and systems of social control (the academy, as noted, as social controller at every level of apprenticeship, *in loco parentis*...). Within the media info-spectacle the arts are diffused and thus transformed through their inter-mixing with and dispersal within popular cultural forms, with the production of total entertainment as both back- and fore-ground. Within this setting art-things only emerge 'as such' through the collaborative work fixing relations between makers, the technical controllers of art's representation, and, eventually, respondents. The arts' things are sent forth as fragile hybrids always prone to fall apart because constituted out of the play of irreconcilable interests. Above all they have to meet the needs of and be fitted into the generalised planning of culture's distribution which is performed utterly routinely as 'programming' – setting the times and places of art's occasional emergence (as 'art' – seen and experienced, that is, on the terms of the activities and values of the programme producers).

Within the academy, as a function of its models for the authoritative mediation of 'knowledges' and the assessment of student performance, the peer group, as noted in the earlier discussion of 'relational aesthetics', emerges as a significant focus. As 'other' to the authority network in which they are embedded, peer relations offer shifting and often intense zones of support, contestation, and evaluation. They maintain a certain independence of and invisibility from the responsible authority structures. They may also be crucial resources as sites of mutual support and exchange in the post-academic experience of those trying to commit themselves to art-making. Even in those arts most obviously identified with 'lone' authorship (writing, object-making, composing), peer group support can often generate the emergence, however temporary, of shared visions of making. Such collaboration at the level of performing itself can be crucial supports in the attempt to maintain making beyond the academy.

Significantly, during the period, coinciding with the emergence of Total Entertainment and the rule of digitised information, in which the arts have been ever more firmly fixed within

the academy (the proliferation of post-graduate courses in the practices of the different arts attests to this) as technically distinct specialisms and as topics for critical dissection ('research'), the dynamic and flow of performing in the arts and its representation in the wider culture has undergone a seismic shift. The rise of the academy as both a technicising and a homogenising force in the arts has coincided with the apparent expiry of 'modernism' (not the moderns, only an institutionalised modernism explained and thus guaranteed by aesthetic criticism and art histories) as a 'sequence' of both contestatory and overlapping but singularly focussed movements ('-isms'). In the aftermath of minimalism's (least-matter) and conceptualism's (more-thought) appropriate termination of the supposed modernist drive-through of movements, performing's blank site, though briefly host to short-life retro-constructions (for example, in the visual arts – neo-expressionism, neo-dada, neo-geo...), soon became a zone for the experimental play of apparently detached differences. The past of hoarded and now represented, thoroughly mediatised, art (modern and pre-modern without distinction), viewed through the enlightenment-tinted (modernist) lenses of art's 'progress', became a trove of fragments to be selectively recovered, referenced, collaged, further fragmented, according to makers' obsessions, tastes, and contextual demands in each project. Freed from the 'constraints' of '-ism' manifestoes, performing now faces the awe-full challenge of indexical differentiation – to find-make the difference specific to the performer-occasion combine. But the context was, is, that of systematically controlled representation. And what the system demands is performance-without-end (the transformation of performing into 'work') in order that programming can fulfill its necessary function of ensuring cultural continuity at all costs.

To make the required difference, the difference that draws and holds the attention of representers to itself, requires the development and mounting of a gesture that, before anything else (the panoply of emotable questions, satisfactions and troubles through which a gest might seduce one, including dropping one 'in it' by dumping one out of culture), is the simultaneous performance of its own difference and the referential allusion to its own affiliations, to syntactic conventions, and to the already interpreted and complexly theorised (as 'knowledge') tradition. This is what it has to register with the representers to be given a place and be circulated within and by the representing machine. If representation is its unavoidable destiny, performing has to subordinate and submit everything to this end. For the machine only understands and wants gests whose congealed energies effectively exhaust themselves in making the point of their own difference-within-affiliation. For with the difference made 'clear', placed within pre-interpreted networks (histories), the machine can get on with the work of elaborating the interpretive web within which the difference (as potential 'reputation') can be sealed and developed.

Thus, under representation, the blank space of performing is entirely horizontal, spreading out in all directions, but without any one thing being raisable above another. *For difference within coherence is value.* It is the infinitely open series of  $1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + \dots n$ . Lacking any ground for raising one performance over another, but needing to generate a lively interest in performing amongst audiences traditionally accustomed precisely to hierarchical evaluation and the possibility of some gests achieving transcendental values (truth, beauty...), the machine invents its own ways of generating 'local' taste hierarchies to stimulate and ensure consumer (mediatised) interest (and thus, real, hopefully, demand). Would-be-art-gests have to be placed within a cultural market on terms that affiliate them with other consumables by showing them as responses to the same kind of tastes (pleasure, comforts, stimulations) as the latter. Representers have to fit them in to this taste-scene by offering them as meeting the same needs (fundamentally that of entertaining diversion), but in very slightly different ways.

They have to be shown as complementary *but nothing out of the ordinary*. Though slight, their represented difference needs to be just enough to establish a stable market niche, stable enough, that is, to contribute to long-term survival in a culture-market dominated by the very institutions responsible for the day-to-day life, the competitive drives, of the info-spectacle. That is why affiliation with, reconciliation to, and confirmation of the latter are defining attributes of the arts' representation. For, from being positioned as disturbing boundary-threateners performing along trajectories marking the dissolution of work and place as we know them, the arts are represented now as fully assimilated exemplars of cultural development.

This irresistible cooptation and assimilation enforced under representation's rule is exemplified and strengthened by the previously mentioned concomitant proliferation of simulated competitions across the arts. The prize-rewarded competition is an institutionally developed mechanism for converting differences into a celebrity spectator sport of winners and losers. By simulating the production of little local value-hierarchies, it produces an arbitrarily generated ranking of gests and performers (some of whom may even acquire short-term celebrity status via media exposure). The value criteria generated (and thus the things and performers rewarded) are always utterly indexical to the occasion of the competition and thus have to be re-invented each time a competition is mounted. Nothing is carried over except the name of the competition and, perhaps, some of the prestige that attaches to the brand name of its sponsoring organisation. In addition the competition helps the machine to re-locate art-as-popular-performance (and thus planable and programmable), and, through giving it different affiliations confirms and expands its hybridity. For, by representing the generation of each competition ranking (the local hierarchy of winners and losers) as if it were the outcome of a contest between the performances themselves, *rather than between the members of the ad hoc judging panel*, the art-competition allies itself with popular sport and thus the gambling industry. In lining up the performers another kind of book is opened and the performance becomes a contest between favourites and outsiders, with suspense generated and upped by media attention and speculation. With no way of assessing the odds ('form') we might expect even odds among the competitors. But neither this nor even the occasional dead heat ever happens, for the machine insists on winners. Thus, while competition seems to combine and reinforce the play of differences by finding for the unique qualities of the winners that raise them above the now remaindered following pack, it nevertheless positions art as a very peculiar spectator sport within and essentially no different from a multiplicity of other entertaining activities. Further, it has to treat the performances entered as essentially members of the same object-category/species (novels, poetry collections, piano performances, visual art objects and so on), while such categories might be precisely what some of the performers/gests themselves were calling into question.

The kind of difference required by the competition may thus have little to do with either the processes of differentiation explored in the performing of gests, or the criteria for difference used in conventional forms of aesthetic response (under the values of scholarship for example, and defining traditions of academic analysis and critique). But across the representation of the arts the emergence of (the) competition confirms the centrality of a particular conception of art-as-performing. The competition subordinates performing to the demands of a specific kind of collaboration. Under the spell of the prize, art is re-constituted as a collaborative project for the production of competition, of competitiveness. Drawn inexorably into the possibility, the necessity even, of competition, all performers are joined, inter-related, by their tacit agreement to participate (for they have already been entered...) as competitive performers. Moreover, to get to the point where one is entered into a

competition's lists requires participation in extensive representation networks (gallery/publishing/publicity/agencies/performance sites/academy); participation within these networks provides preparatory training in competitiveness and is a pre-condition and facilitator for selection (by self or other) into particular competitions. The machinery of representation imposes the terms on which exposure occurs. But this reconstruction of performing, as a particular kind of performance under the rule of competition, rides roughshod over performers' attempts to generate gestures that open onto, expose, culture's outside – a zone where competition is an irrelevance. To eliminate this threat the agents of representation perform esemplastic surgery on the ailing (mortally wounded?) gestures, appropriating them in order to remodel them for effective circulation within the global One with its endlessly self-proliferating networks.

Performing's contemporary fate is thus to be trapped between two irreconcilable tasks. It has to try to live up to its promise to be the other of competition (its outside), whilst locked firmly into the constrictions of the latter's dominance of the field of performance. Culturally, making-toward-art is just one scene of competitive work, a moment subsumed within generalised production. If, under the requirements of representation, even 'lone' performing is an unavoidably collaborative performance project, the context for this is provided by late-capitalism's channelling of technoscience in the constitution of modernity and its afterward. The specific means of representation that dominate the construction and dissemination of global culture technically intertwines every specialist performance site (politics, economics, war, entertainment, aesthetics and so on). They appear through and as exemplars of the highly integrated, though necessarily never closed, system of post-industrial consumption-production. The dynamic of the global economy, the directions of its accelerations and decelerations, is shaped by the overlapping transformations in the process and machinery of representation and, in turn, their embodiment in accessible consumer products. The transition to absolute electricity-dependency across all forms of media representation and transmission, exemplified now in the continuing revolution in digital information-processing, has ensured both the mass media's dominance in the engineered 'design' of culture (how it 'appears') and its micro-level infiltration of all areas of personal relation. Thus the placing and relations of the traditionally distinct art-media are now absolutely subordinated to the transformations rendered through the digital revolution.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Further aspects of the digitising of all forms of cultural mediation are discussed in 'To Leap'.