



'If writing...'*

'Si... el Escribir'

'Se... o escrever'

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***Artículo de investigación:** This example of “performance writing” suggests the potentiality of writing, a different understanding of writing as embodied practice that the author tries to practice within the work itself.

Este ejemplo de ‘performance writing’ (escritura performática) busca sugerir la potencia de la escritura, esto es, de una concepción diferente de escritura en tanto práctica corporal que el autor trató de practicar con su propia forma de escribir.

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Abstract

This example of “performance writing” suggests the potentiality of writing, a different understanding of writing as embodied practice that the author tries to practice within the work itself. In doing so there is an investigation of the weight of conventional assumptions about the work and place of writing. The author implies a different relationship to writing, suggesting that *Writing If*, or in this case, *If Writing*, reflects the subjunctive conditional potential of performance itself in a way that is difficult to sustain. In English the proper conditional would be ‘Writing as if’ but the articulation without ‘as’ presents a more precarious and open concept.

Keywords: performance, writing, embodiment, recognition, impact.

Resumen

Este ejemplo de ‘performance writing’ (escritura performática) busca sugerir la potencia de la escritura, esto es, de una concepción diferente de escritura en tanto práctica corporal que el autor trató de practicar con su propia forma de escribir. Al hacerlo se vuelve notoria la investigación acerca del peso de los supuestos convencionales sobre el trabajo y el lugar de la escritura. El autor propone una relación diferente con la escritura, sugiriendo que *Escribir Si*, o en este caso, *Si Escribir*, refleja el potencial condicional subjuntivo del propio rendimiento de una manera que es difícil de mantener. En inglés el condicional sería ‘Writing as if’, pero la articulación sin el conector ‘as’ presenta un concepto más precario y abierto.

Palabras clave: performance, escritura, corporalización, reacomodamiento, repercusión.

Resumo

Este exemplo de ‘performance writing’ (escrita performativa) procura sugerir o poder da escrita, isto é, de uma concepção diferente de escrita como uma prática corporal que o autor tentou praticar com seu próprio modo de escrever. Ao fazê-lo, torna-se evidente a pesquisa sobre o peso das suposições convencionais sobre o trabalho e o local da escrita. O autor propõe uma relação diferente com a escrita, sugerindo que a *Escrita sim*, ou neste caso, *Se escrita*, reflète o potencial condicional subjuntivo do desempenho de uma forma que é difícil de manter. Em inglês a condicional seria ‘Escrevendo como se’, mas a articulação sem o conector ‘as’ apresenta um conceito mais precário e aberto.

Palavras-chave: performance, escrita, corporalização, reconfiguração, repercussão.

IF WRITING¹

NOTE: I begin with a betrayal of myself. A pulling back of the curtain to explain myself to you. This writing is an attempt to consider the possibility of writing performance as a mode of generating and sustaining potential that both enacts and questions social impact and the effect of affect. As such, it is an attempt to do something. It is ostensibly performative. Inevitably, it will fail. And yet...clearly something has already happened.

There is a false sense of us coming together in this moment, of you reading me and me sharing something with you. But you are not here as I write. And I am not here as you read. And between the two of us lingers a necessary assumption that something is being passed, conveyed, transferred.

And it is...isn't it?

But it is being done well? Is it effective? Does it have an impact?... Before you answer those questions consider the possibility that perhaps all that is necessary to change your answer is a bit of rehearsal.

But can you rehearse writing? You can practice writing, you can learn writing, you can improve writing and you can edit writing, but can you rehearse it? It seems to me, right or wrong, that in the moment of rehearsing writing you are doing something other than writing as a generative activity, you are repeating with a goal in which the action of writing is to produce the same writing: repetition not as an experience of artmaking, of a process of development, of idea, of skill, of concept, of the art of language, poetry and sonority, shape and structure, clarity and beauty, but as a movement toward consistency, fungibility, homogeneity. You rehearse in order to do the same. And that would be the reproduction of a set of words, or perhaps of a stylized or even of a natural action of producing language, with technology, whether using pen and paper or digital means.

But perhaps that is my first mistake. Thinking that the act of writing, the performance of writing, is limited to its product—the letters, words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs that emerge. Neither you nor I are naïve enough to presume the act of writing as a neutral one, as a mere medium for the communication of ideas. We know enough of rhetoric to know otherwise.

¹ This work exists next to a tradition of performance writing which can trace its histories to various forms of performative writing, experimental critical writing, and understandings that individual identities, subject positions, and conditions in situation require new forms. Other places to read and think with this might be, as in the References: Cixous, Deeny, Hall, Pelias, Ryle, Kosofsky Sedgwick.

My second mistake is in the implied definition of rehearsal—a reductive, conventional assumption of practice of a movement toward right, toward mastery, toward understanding or competence or fluidity.

And yet there is always a lingering sense, when thinking the very thought of rehearsal, and perhaps even practice, that there is a need to “get it right.”

Of course, the determination of right, and the self-imposed or external demand of getting it right presents its own set of problems. For what is right? How do we know when we see it, feel it, perceive and conceive it within or beyond the world? How can we be sure that we know what we are doing when we are writing? What if it is all just a performance?

Certainly, it is a performance you insist, and saying it is “just” a performance is symptomatic of the Cartesian conceptual split of mind and body that privileges the work of the mind, the concept, and not the body, forgetting that the act of writing, the performance of writing, like the act of thinking, the performance of thinking, is fully embodied or it does not take place.

And here is my body writing and here is your body reading and neither here quite makes sense in the same way. But there are bodies and perhaps, you must admit, a kind of impact. Two bodies not quite together and yet some contact is made. Is that a connection? Is that a social impact?

Remember that impact is contact, haptic or conceptual, improvisatory or intentional. Contact carries weight, has force, can be measured in intensity, in violence. But how? In US English we tend to say people have an impact or create an impact in expository description, which seems merely to suggest an effect, though certainly is it true that we impact.

So when thinking about impact you tend to focus on the effect, the affect, the change or shift, and not the collision itself. Perhaps this is why is it more comfortable to ruminate on how writing moves you, implicitly thinking about this is as a movement not in space, but in affective or psychological state, or in point of view.

We tend not to remember the physiological and spatial effects of an act of writing even when we claim is to change hearts and minds, to create physiological transformation. And perhaps it does, if a change in emotion, mood, or affect is integrally catalytic to physical transformation. Perhaps you are launched into motion, generate inertia. Perhaps it grabs you, enraptures you, holds you still.

Or perhaps this is all too much. The smaller point is perhaps more familiar—one is moved or touched by writing or perhaps through writing or next to writing or while reading or listening—wait...wait... wait...are you moving right now...breathing, eyes flickering, mild interest or annoyance at the interruption—did you recognize the movement from being touched by writing?

This a haptic event...even at this level... There is a potential for something. An emotion in situ. Between you and... me. Is that social?

If there is still something between...is that writing or...is the between precisely what makes this social?

Is this a performance of the social? Is this writing working? Or to put it another, can you feel the impact? Before jumping to..... no wait a moment...and another...and please, because it matters, one more...

breathe...

shift...

flicker...

adjust...

Is this writing performing in such a way as to maintain the possibility of...

Perhaps it becomes clear only if one is writing. Only if writing...or perhaps... If writing...

We need to think about writing not as a communicative activity per se, though there is nothing wrong with this conventionally presumed and hegemonic mode. Perhaps it is worth thinking about the difference between communicating and expressing one's self, a potential distinction negotiated in the relative weight attached to the real or imagined receiver. To you.

Do you imagine self-expression less clearly directed to a particular receiver or set of receivers beyond the self, that pleasure emerges in the doing that provisionally erases context and the perception of relationships, networks,

connectivity? Or is expression precisely the only means through which communication takes place?

Did you breathe? Is that an impact?

Which leaves us with the real and too often forgotten condition that writing is a form of art making with its own particular mediums and techniques. Of course, the writer knows this. You know this. But does that imaginary reader we are both conceptualizing? The listener? The audience? Even more so than representational painting or theater based in realism, writing is pressed into the service of representation, which leads too many (perhaps you?) too quickly to the presumption that there is no way of moving outside of representation, of discourse. And in the settled thingness of everyday life that is not entirely wrong.

But what if writing worked differently?.... What if writing....? What if writing? If writing...

I am talking about a different sensibility that must be maintained to keep ourselves poised to imagine otherwise. You might recognize the possibility of existing in solution, in potentiality, in the space of what Raymond Williams would call a structure of feeling, but for him this is a not quite emergent social order and set of relations that are gestured to in the work of literature and culture (Williams, 1978)

Lots of socially aware makers of performance insist that their work is a rehearsal for revolution, and more insistent practitioners insist the work is revolutionary and already doing the work, but the actual work being done is almost never as clear as you would like. The social change enacted in and through performance is less often a material change in the conditions of the physical world (though one could certainly imagine an embodied ecological performance that actually worked to transform the landscape, even though most merely gesture toward it) than it is a suggested, imagined, desired or real transformation of the people participating in the performance itself, the creators, performers, and witnesses to the event.

Where is the impact? When is the impact? What does it feel like?

Richard Schechner insists on the difference between transportation and transformation—with most performances resulting in a temporary change in the participants, sometimes limited temporally to the space and time of the formal interaction and occasionally extending beyond the temporal confines of the co-presence of the performance—and transformation—the putative ideal of ritual, in which the participants are fundamentally changed by the experience (Schechner, 1985), undergoing what van Gennep might call a rite of passage (1961).

It seems easy on the one hand to think about the embodied transformation of political agency as reaching its ideal

in the form of a performance that functions as a ritual of lasting change. But that begs the question—from what, to what? But these first questions can be answered in the ideal by referencing the current context and the desired context. The more difficult question is how to actually make this work. How do you create the change—move from the imagined and desired to the real?

Many practitioners are moving to an answer in which there is a desire to sustain the conditions of possibility of change and transformation, where the goal is sustaining a sense of openness to possibility.

I return to writing.

The presumption of a certain form of writing in relation to performance is that it functions as description, thick or thin, as a form of explication or analysis, or as an unnecessary or parasitic symbiote. Of course, it need not function as any of these and in fact the reality is that I need to think about the function of the writing in relation to the work of art on the one hand, but I also have to remember the function of writing as a work of art. And this idea of generating art as writing is not new, but keep in mind that writing as art is subject to marking—it is creative writing (and we rarely talk about creative acting, creative performance). As a practice it often has a definitional marker unless it is named within a specific literary genre—poetry, drama.

This matters because of the continued weight of distinguishing the action of creative and critical, of informational, analytic and poetic writing. And what seems most important to keep in the forefront within the framework of an idea of embodiment and context is that the body is *in* and *with* the practice of writing...mediated by technology, but rarely remembered as a physical presence as it could be thought of within the idea of body as body.

There is a practice of writing and it is not merely a question of time and temporality, of space and materiality, but thinking about the action of the body in the act of writing. And here writing can become an autoethnographic poetic thick description, but it can also become a form of creation that is doing more than the sequential communication of the word. It is an experience and a process that emerges as a necessary complement and not a mere supplement to the doing. A creative act that exists in the subjunctive potential of the processual moment and the challenge is to sustain a process of evading the closure of the thought, the action, the gesture, while offering a phrase that contains the gesture, the action, the thought. If writing.²

² Jacques Derrida and his reading of himself in the work *Limited, Inc.* (Northwestern University Press, 1988) is also hovering at the edges of these fingers pressing keys.

And yet the text is not quite right. And yet the body is writing. And yet the writing of the body is a physical act, tactile and mobile, but within a narrow range. The length of a finger, or finger tip between hands. And there is a rhythm, imprecise and irregular but nonetheless continuing on and on and.

The embodied action is already theory. It is relational and instantiates relation. Connectivity and connection. But it is not *sui generis*, or bringing into being. And the limits of the body can be a question of process and form and physical constraint and not, and the marks and scars of the body, and not.

Begin with the gesture. Beginning is a gesture. But in this case the action as it emerges is discrete, it is fingers and wrist articulation, and elbow and shoulder, and a slight shift in the hips and waist and the neck and face, the pupils move and there is saliva flowing.

And a pause. And another. Before there is narrative meaning there is action. And perhaps there is intention and attention. But one of the fundamental physical and psychological questions to be answered, which it cannot be, it can only be investigated, is the question of ambiguity and the not-quite at the level of intention. It is easy to understand corporeal work emerging from and through intention. It is feasible to understand corporeal work as a product of energy and attention. It is a practice of attention that allows awareness to create an ecology of being/doing that structures emergence.

But I want to think recognition. I don't necessarily want to think *through* recognition or *of* recognition, but I want to consider conceptualizing/doing recognition. Not as a sense of social being or political action per se, but as a means of thinking the start, incipient, immanent transition into presence.

Is it a question of noticing? In a sense within a more conversative and conservative conceptualization of making theater the question of anagnorisis emerges as a constellating moment of embodied transformation. To know is to change action, to recognize outcome and to think reasonably what the gesture will...³

But before the gesture is the intent. And temporally discrete is the recognition, which is not necessarily realized, and perhaps marked within the spatialization of an arc, a vector that steps between the possibility of the knowing and the unknown. In a sense the corporeal act is concurrent with a coming into knowing a recognition of specificity that the energy becomes as the gesture emerges.

³ And I pause before do...before the moment of future action.

In a sense this is an attempt to think next to the conditions of demarcation as a practice of understanding the realization of embodiment. But to do so we must wait.

Perhaps now you can begin to think about Identity as other than social practice. If we begin to think ecologically, environmentally, ethically and aesthetically about that which we call identity, then the practice of subjectification as an operation of other than power, of a relationality of within provides the terms of a set of questions to be considered.

To what extent is the recognition in the moment of the gesture as act a product of a pre-existing conception of identity as social form? Is recognition the moment of change and what constitutes moment and change. I open outward with my left arm, rotating slightly on a horizontal plane, and I smile. I flex my cheek muscles and my lips curve up. Or I curve up my lips. Which is happening? Which is doing?

I am less interested in that which is conscious, which is intentional, of which I am aware. I am less interested in sequence than in some sense of doing in the moment. The issue is that coming into being is something that happens as something with and other than performing

We can say simply that performing is not representation and there is an outside to writing. Any claim otherwise reduces the world to text, phallogocentric or otherwise...

Captivated by...

A writing that does what it should but not performing

Writing is not performing

Writing is performing

Writing is change

Writing is not change

But not writing is but rather *if writing...*

Writing if...

To be facile for a moment we can think about the ways that writing is framed and understood, conceived and conceptualized as a different starting point for thinking about body writing. The very concept of body writing, is deeply rooted, in European and North American context, in forms of feminist performance and experimental women's writing in which the body becomes an agent through which writing takes place.

But despite the writing of this writing we are also encountering the materiality and the affect of the possibility of change.

Rhythm is a space for openness. Rhythm is a means of open-ness. Rhythm shifts our relationality to others. Working in rhythm with others creates intimacy, connection, conformity, fascist authoritarian control, communal purpose, an understanding of breath. Rhythm is not quite spatial. And in language that means...

Think about a beginning that emerges from other than desire. Other than will. Sheer brutal necessity. Since desire is not escapable perhaps this is dark desire, or emptiness, depression without motivation but something that nonetheless must be done.

This *writing if* will fail to be anything other than that.

But that does not mean that it fails....*if writing*

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