



Using Performance in Human Geography: Conditions and Possibilities

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Introduction

Performance and performativity have regularly appeared as both a theoretical framework and an object of empirical investigation in the discipline of human geography over the past two decades. Although the interest in performance can be traced through work in the sub-discipline of cultural geography that was concerned with processes of identity formation, the broad function of the term as both theoretical tool and empirical object has seen its wider take-up across the discipline. For human geography, the concept of performance contributes to the wider disciplinary concern with the ways in which space is produced and enacted. This position challenges the notion that the spatial is significant primarily because it contains the spatial; it can “hold the world still”¹.

Space is not simply considered a measurable quantity to be represented and mapped, but rather it must be thought of together with time in order to actively configure the world. By understanding the spatial and the temporal as entwined, it becomes possible to avoid the “reduction of space to the a-political sphere of causal closure”². Within this context, the vocabulary and action of performance offers one means of exploring how space creates, conditions and is experienced at a variety of sites and scales. Whilst not attempting to do justice to the breadth and depth of work on performance, this article will try to elucidate some of the key areas where the term has been taken up, and examine the purposes of this use.

Through this review discussion, the intention is to articulate the vocabulary of the *future* in two ways. Firstly, the article will offer a temporal trajectory of the term *performance* in human geography that will tentatively signpost some directions to come. Secondly, through surveying work on performance events, it will touch on how the experience of performance can be considered one of uncertain potential, which is always bound up with a sense of what lies ahead. The article will proceed by delineating two broadly separate uses of performance in human geography: the first metaphorical and the second more literal, focusing on the action of specific performance (arts) events. After an exploration of the possibilities and limitations of these two terms, the article will conclude by arguing for a more explicit thinking across the two; focusing on the aesthetics of performance. Initially though, it is necessary to offer some further context on the delineations of human geography by turning to some of the ‘disciplinary’ conditions that set the stage for the term to be put into practice.

¹ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), 36.

² *Ibid.* 18.

Cultural Geography and Performance

The appearance of performance in human geography can be traced to the permeability of the boundaries of the discipline in the 1990s. In particular, this was influenced by transformations in the sub-discipline of cultural geography, which from the 1980s saw a broad critique of previous approaches associated with Carl Sauer and the 'Berkeley School'. This body of 'traditional' cultural geography scholarship positioned itself against environmental determinism by drawing out the role of different human groups in transforming the natural landscape. Such a focus on the historical impact of humans in shaping their environment was underpinned by notions of tradition and 'folk', which emphasised the material and physical as central to notions of culture.

In response to this, the 'new' cultural geography of the latter decades of the twentieth century argued for a rethinking of the understandings of both 'landscape' and 'culture'. Instead of being equated solely to the (once) natural environment, landscape became the simultaneous product and producer of signs and symbols. Culture in human geography was no longer concerned with static ideas of the customs of particular groups, but instead began to consider how forms of collective meaning emerged and were negotiated through representation, often in popular culture and everyday life. This shift reflected the influence of theories of the 'postmodern era' posited by those such as Lyotard and Baudrillard³. Here, the aesthetic of postmodernity gives rise to a number of broad strands of thought, each of which contributed to the interest in performance.

In particular, the central critique of the meta-narrative forwarded by Lyotard's prognosis of postmodernity fed into two associated shifts in cultural (and human) geography. As totalising explanations of knowledge and experience were undermined, an emphasis on difference and plurality emerged, particularly in work on identity. Rather than considering identities as overarching defining categories, an interest arose in the work of differences or intersections between the boundaries of race, gender, and sexuality⁴. This was combined with a second move that highlighted the importance of local narratives, and therefore individual and everyday experience as a means of exploring identities. Consequently, 'culture' became a realm in which 'power' was produced, spatialised and resisted, and work in human geography sort to uncover these processes of marginalisation and protest⁵.

A third element is in the influences of post-structural analyses of the text and language that aimed to destabilise meaning. This became highly significant in exposing the power relations through which both landscapes and subjectivities were produced⁶. Drawing on the post-structural critique of intended meaning, cultural geography began to explore how notions of stability and origin associated with place were constructed. Through its potential to be simultaneously in and beyond the 'real', performance provided both an empirical and theoretical space for approaching these three shifts towards uncertainty. By emphasising the role of 'acts' of repetition and deviation, place and identity were shown to be sedimentations of particular movements, empty of any essential solidity.

Using Performance as a Metaphor

Early notions of the use of performance employed these qualities through a primarily metaphorical register. This involved the application of the term figuratively to numerous social settings in order to make sense of situations that deviate from the 'real' in certain ways. Thus, it is

³ Jean Baudrillard, "Simulations," (New York: Semiotext, 1983); Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. George Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

⁴ Jon Binnie and Gill Valentine, "Geographies of Sexuality: A Review of Progress," *Progress in Human Geography* 23, no. 2 (1999); Alastair Bonnett, "Geography, 'Race' and Whiteness: Invisible Traditions and Current Challenges," *Area* 29, no. 3 (1997).

⁵ Joanne Sharp, "A Topology of Post Nationality: (Re)Mapping Identity in the Satanic Verses," *Ecumene* 1, no. 1 (1994); Gerry Pratt and Susan Hansen, "Geography and the Construction of Difference," *Gender Place and Culture* 1, no. 1 (1994); Audrey Kobayashi and Linda Peake, "Unnatural Discourse: 'Race' and Gender in Geography," *Gender Place and Culture* 1, no. 2 (1994).

⁶ James S. Duncan, *The City as Text: The Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandy Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); David Matless, "An Occasion for Geography - Landscape, Representation and Foucault Corpus," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 10, no. 1 (1992).

possible to define this 'metaphorical' form of performance as one in which the individuals involved would not primarily consider themselves as performers (or often as audience members). To expand on this use of performance, the below sections split the metaphorical application of the term into two forms, the first employing aspects of dramaturgy, and the second drawing upon theories of performativity.

Dramaturgy

One strand of this figurative use derives from Goffman⁷, and explores how certain forms of social interaction are site-specific. Manners of relating and positioning are understood to occur through the influencing activity of participants in particular scenes. The language of performance becomes a means of explaining how social interaction results in the adoption and delineation of roles that deviate from the 'backstage' reality of the situation; Crang's⁸ exploration of the different forms of display enacted by the waiter in the restaurant verses the kitchen being a key example. Whilst the use of performance here enables an examination of how any sense of self might arise from the immediateness of a given situation, it does not adequately explain the delineation of the bounds of performance. In Goffman's invocation of performance, the self retains a stability located at the backstage, but the question of where and why the limits of this essence are drawn is not properly considered. This can be demonstrated by returning to Crang's example: what makes the waiter in the kitchen more 'real' than the waiter in the restaurant? In addition, a second dramaturgical use of performance as metaphor can be discerned and like Goffman, applies dramaturgical metaphor, but in neither such a site-specific nor structured manner. Instead, the explanatory potential of the metaphor shifts from pinpointing confined localities of interaction to performance as a means of elucidating the experiential aspects of an activity that plays on the senses in a way that may exaggerate or undermine the reality of events. This use of the term has tended to be applied to forms of cultural display, particularly tourism⁹ and museums¹⁰ where performance is employed as a means of making sense of the realities of certain practices of showing. So rather than setting up certain situated actions as performances, specific forms of enhanced visibility are sharpened through the vocabulary of performance (such as staging, embodiment and encounter).

Permativity

Performativity draws upon but differs from the meaning of performance, often increasingly blurring the boundaries of reality. It incorporates the idea of situated 'acts' from performance, but suggests that these are constitutors rather than reflectors of reality. Numerous explorations of the processes of performativity in relation to space and identity¹¹ emerged in human geography in the 1990s, primarily deriving from Judith Butler's¹² argument for the social construction of sexuality and gender through a reworking of Austin's speech act theory. Butler's work can be understood as part of a broader post-structural movement (often driven by feminist and post-colonial scholars) that conceived of identity as non-essentialist, and thereby attempted to undermine the normative social placing and coherence of categories such as gender and race¹³. Contributing to this, Butler invoked

⁷ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1990).

⁸ Philip Crang, "It's Showtime: On the Workplace Geographies of Display in Southeast England," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 12(1994).

⁹ Simon Coleman and Mike Crang, eds., *Tourism: Between Place and Performance* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2002); Jane Desmond, *Staging Tourism: Bodies on Display from Waikiki to Sea World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Eric Wiley, "Wilderness Theatre - Environmental Tourism and Cajun Swamp Tours," *The Drama Review: TDR* 46, no. 3 (2002).

¹⁰ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

¹¹ David Bell et al., "All Hyped up and No Place to Go," *Gender, Place & Culture* 1, no. 1 (1994).

¹² Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits Of "Sex"* (New York; London: Routledge, 1993).

¹³ For example P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

the *performative* as a means of undermining the stability of the subject, as well as the certainty of self. Integrally, the meaning of an act was only given through the referential nature of its execution, which always connected it to previous acts. Through this individual and collective citation of previous meanings, normative conceptualisations of gender and sexuality are both produced and reproduced.

Although a crucial goal of Butler's project was to expose the operations of 'power' in the construction of identities, she also highlighted the importance of resistance. She argued that the force of the performative came not only through repetition, but also through deviation from this path¹⁴. Here, performance appears primarily as a scripting and constraining, a way of thinking about the conditions and conditioning of reality. Yet, consequently a sense of the art of performance is lost; particularly its creativity and possibility. Butler catches performance in a binary net of citation and resistance that relies on the repetition of that which already exists, avoiding the potential for experiment and improvisation. Equally, as a figurative invocation, her use of performativity and its particular genealogy in linguistics, means that (especially in scholarship that builds upon this theorisation) a gap has tended to open up between the discursivity of societal norms and the materiality of embodied acts of resistance and citation¹⁵.

However, the ability of both performance and performativity to highlight such interactions between matter and form continues to be central to the utility of the term. In particular, a more nuanced understanding of the operations of performativity is emerging, one that attempts to move beyond the simplicity of a material/discursive binary. Performativity (and performance) is increasingly being employed to emphasise the complex registers through which the constitution and negotiation of human subjects takes place. Such explorations demonstrate how the conditions and conditioning of subjectivity cannot be limited to an isolated (and often textual) social construction, but involve everyday practices of embodiment and emotion¹⁶.

Equally, there has also been a shift in focus onto the ethico-political implications of the performative process¹⁷, emphasising how this may operate beyond the constitution of an autonomous human subject. Thus, Bialasiewicz *et al*¹⁸ argue for an engagement with performativity in political geography on the grounds that the notion can enhance understanding of foreign and security policies by demonstrating that such activities of the state are both enabled by and productive of specific geographical imaginations. For them, the central role of the discursive in performativity neither denies nor separates the reality of the world; rather the focus is on how certain 'ontological effects', including the material, are stabilised over time. Therefore, discourse is not understood as a solely linguistic realm; instead its ideational effects may function through a variety of forms, many of which emphasise people and practices operating beyond the normative conception of an 'official' state. This concern with how performance might be used to deal with and negotiate the (invisibility of the) everyday feeds into the second broad invocation of performance in the discipline.

Using Performance as Action

In part emerging as a critique of performativity, a second more 'literal' appearance of performance can be discerned in human geography. Here, the term is invoked in relation to the action of specific performing arts events. Where the above metaphorical use stresses the boundaries

¹⁴ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁵ For critiques of performativity see Seyla Benhabib, "Sexual Difference and Collective Identities: The New Global Constellation," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 24(1999); Moya Lloyd, "Performativity, Parody and Politics," *Theory, Culture & Society* 16, no. 2 (1999); Lise Nelson, "Bodies (and Spaces) Do Matter: The Limits of Performativity," *Gender Place and Culture* 6, no. 4 (1999).

¹⁶ Paul Cloke, Jon May, and Sarah Johnsen, "Performativity and Affect in the Homeless City," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26, no. 2 (2008); Craig Jeffrey and Colin McFarlane, "Performing Cosmopolitanism," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26, no. 3 (2008).

¹⁷ Vikki Bell, *Culture and Performance: The Challenge of Ethics, Politics and Feminist Theory* (Oxford: Berg, 2007); Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

¹⁸ Luiza Bialasiewicz et al., "Performing Security: The Imaginative Geographies of Current US Strategy," *Political Geography* 26, no. 4 (2007).

of performance in certain ways by working with and through its definition, this second application draws more heavily on its constituting content or experience in relation to forms of politics. These more overt political applications are discussed in two parts below, the first exploring non-representational aspects of performance events and the second examining their role as acts of intervention in the everyday.

Non-representational politica

One element of non-representational politics seeks to outline and explore theories of non-representation¹⁹, or the manner in which the bodily acts of performance illustrate ways of being that elude capture²⁰. With a particular focus on non-linguistic forms of performance such as dance and music²¹, this work set itself against the prevailing location of knowledge in 'textual' forms in order to draw out how embodied practices might make up the explanation and content of experience. The motivation for this work has been to examine how the experiential aspects of these occasions might fit into a wider politics of the event²². Empirical vignettes become a means of elucidating the 'going on' of such performances, in which forms of liberation and control unfold politically in moments of potential and uncertainty. However, such a reworking of the notion of power through performance was accused of being celebratory and neglecting to engage with the conditions that might constrain the potential of acts of habituation²³. In this vein, both Revill's and Cresswell's²⁴ explorations of dance demonstrate the necessity to take into account wider normative structures that must be negotiated in order to open up the liberating possibilities of practice (in performance).

Despite these criticisms, the novelty of this exploration of performance events lies in the central emphasis on momentary experience as a means of understanding subjectivity. Here, there is a very separate understanding of difference from that offered in Butler's conception of performativity. As Bell²⁵ outlines, Butler's subject retains a certain stability through its constituting definition against that which lies outside of it. So, 'difference' is understood as outside or beyond the subject, even if it is constitutively bound up with it. In contrast to this, much of the work on performance events alluded to above has drawn on a more 'radical' location of difference, one that situates it *within* any process of subjectification. For this, difference is no longer a mode of relation through which being is given, but rather it is *being itself*. Consequently, as an ongoing "expression of this heterogeneity"²⁶, subjectivity becomes bound up with creativity.

A number of geographers have sort to engage with this through the experience of performance. Whilst some such as Morton²⁷ have used performance to focus on how this understanding subjectivity can (or cannot) be accessed or captured empirically, others have emphasised the micro-dynamics of the unfolding of experience in performance. Of particular

¹⁹ Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison, eds., *Taking-Place: Non-Representational Theories and Geography* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

²⁰ Nigel Thrift, "The Stillpoint: Resistance, Expressive Embodiment and Dance," in *Geographies of Resistance*, ed. S. Pile and M. Keith (London: Routledge, 1997).

²¹ Ben Anderson, Frances Morton, and George Revill, "Practices of Music and Sound," *Social and Cultural Geography* 6(2005); Paul Simpson, "Chronic Everyday Life: Rhythmanalysing Street Performance," *Social & Cultural Geography* 9, no. 7 (2008); Nichola Wood, Michelle Duffy, and Susan J. Smith, "The Art of Doing (Geographies of) Music," *Environment and Planning D-Society & Space* 25, no. 5 (2007).

²² Derek McCormack, "Thinking in Transition: The Affirmative Refrain of Experience/Experiment," in *Taking-Place: Non-Representational Theories and Geography*, ed. B. Anderson and P. Harrison (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

²³ Catherine Nash, "Performativity in Practice: Some Recent Work in Cultural Geography," *Progress in Human Geography* 24, no. 4 (2000).

²⁴ George Revill, "Cultural Geographies in Practice: Performing French Folk Music: Dance, Authenticity and Nonrepresentational Theory," *Cultural Geographies* 11(2004); Tim Cresswell, "You Cannot Shake That Shimmie Here': Producing Mobility on the Dance Floor," *Cultural Geographies* 13, no. 1 (2006).

²⁵ Bell, *Culture and Performance: The Challenge of Ethics, Politics and Feminist Theory*.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 104.

²⁷ Frances Morton, "Performing Ethnography: Irish Traditional Music Sessions and New Methodological Spaces," *Social & Cultural Geography* 6, no. 5 (2005).

significance here is McCormack's work²⁸ that draws on Guattari's²⁹ understanding of "processual creativity" in order to consider how being in performance engenders an attunement to the unpredictable potential of experience. By attending to the experience of performance through the lens of the generative 'thinking spaces' of experiment, McCormack explores how "moods of responsiveness"³⁰ temper the event through a series of minor interventions that produce differing degrees of control. This use of the performance event emphasises a subjectivity that is orientated towards the future, balancing intention and accident through the lens of not fully controlled experimentation.

Politics of Intervention

In contrast to this investigation of the action of performance to explore the politics of the event through processes of subjectification, another application in geography understands the event itself as a vehicle for change. Here performance operates as an intervention of a social and/or artistic nature. In some cases this intervention is one primarily aimed at disturbance, disrupting existing spatio-temporal orders through their occurrence in public space³¹. This rendering of the political potential of performance derives in part from the situationist desire to intervene in the 'spectacle' so as to gain immediate experience of the world and therefore transform the everyday. The politics here lie in the questions posed through exposure, particularly in why these happenings are often deemed out of place despite being within 'public' space. Such art tends to be acutely tuned to the dynamics of its particular site, picking up and reworking ordinary elements in a way that estranges them, thereby drawing attention to the processes of viewing³². In other cases, these forms of intervention are explored with a more creative (rather than disruptive) emphasis that sees performance as providing an arena for imagining alternative presents and futures. Within human geography, these ideas have often been elaborated through an engagement with forms of community theatre³³. Whilst the politics of such performance is in part based around notions of reclaiming theatre for the 'people'³⁴, geographers have tended to approach such notions critically, questioning both the ideas of community evoked³⁵ and the manner in which enacted changes may extend beyond the performance space³⁶.

²⁸ Derek McCormack, "Diagramming Practice and Performance," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23, no. 1 (2005); ———, "Geographies for Moving Bodies: Thinking, Dancing, Spaces," *Geography Compass* 2, no. 6 (2008); McCormack, "Thinking in Transition: The Affirmative Refrain of Experience/Experiment."

²⁹ Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Indiana University Press, 1992), 13.

³⁰ McCormack, "Thinking in Transition: The Affirmative Refrain of Experience/Experiment." 210.

³¹ David Pinder, "Urban Interventions: Art, Politics and Pedagogy," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32, no. 3 (2008).

³² Judith Rugg, *Exploring Site-Specific Art: Issues of Space and Internationalism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010).

³³ Donna Houston and Laura Pulido, "The Work of Performativity: Staging Social Justice at the University of Southern California," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20, no. 4 (2002); Erene Kaptani and Nira Yuval-Davis, "Participatory Theatre as a Research Methodology: Identity, Performance and Social Action among Refugees," *Sociological Research Online* 13, no. 5 (2008); Richa Nagar, "Women's Theater and the Redefinitions of Public, Private, and Politics in North India," *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 1(2002).

³⁴ Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 1979); Alan Read, "Theatre and Everyday Life," in *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance*, ed. Lizbeth Goodman and Jane De Gay (London: Routledge, 2000).

³⁵ Yvonne Natalie Robinson, "The Cultural Geographies of Community Theatre" (Unpublished PhD thesis, UCL, 2004).

³⁶ Gerry Pratt and Caleb Johnston, "Turning Theatre into Law, and Other Spaces of Politics," *Cultural Geographies* 14, no. 1 (2007).

One potentially fruitful direction for this interest in specific political interventions of performance may be what Pratt and Kirby³⁷ call the 'interspatiality' of performance. Although the forms of community theatre outlined above retain a strong element of stability through their performance in a specific location (e.g. community centres, pubs etc.), Pratt and Kirby argue that the multiple spaces that inform performance are integral to its potential as an object of study. Rather than placing all the emphasis on experience of/in the event, this is considered the practices and processes that enable and are enabled by performance.

Central to this is the composition of performance, or an exploration of the Brechtian interest in exposing the production of the production. For example, in forms of 'community theatre' the practices and conversations that precede the performance entirely shape experience and understanding of the event, particularly in terms of framing how questions of ownership and representation are played out³⁸. Equally, this interspatiality is also about the potential ways for performance to linger or impact after the 'event' has taken place. As Pratt and Johnston's foray into legislative theatre demonstrates, the potential of performance to bring about political and, specifically in their case, policy change must not be overestimated, particularly given the apparent incongruities between creative practice and bureaucratic operation. However, the notion of performance as social forum or laboratory for conducting practical experiments of everyday life³⁹ is an attractive one that begs certain questions, notably in terms of the forms and registers through which the 'results' of these experiments may be played out.

Conclusion

This article has offered an overview of the ways in which the term *performance* has been invoked in human geography. Although only a brief and inherently partial account of the term in the discipline, this attempt has been to situate the trajectory of performance within the shift in focus of cultural geography over the last two decades. I have demonstrated that from its early appearances in this sub-discipline, the use of performance has both broadened and deepened as its theoretical and empirical scope has been further explored across human geography as a whole. With the aim of synthesising these many invocations of performance, the article split the use of the term into the figurative and the literal. The purpose of this was to draw out the nuances in the application and function of the term, each of which has its own benefits and problems. In its metaphorical form, the use of performance has tended to focus on the delineation and operation of boundaries, such that it can highlight the processes through which subjects are given but may often overly constraint such subjectivities. With performance as event, the interest has resided in the ethico-political implications of the action of performance, either in terms of the unfolding of subjectivity or in the ways it might engender 'community' change, but generally with little discussion of the limits of these actions themselves. Although these two uses certainly overlap, the point that I wish to make in this conclusion is that an explicit thinking can enhance productivity of any theoretical or empirical engagement with performance across these metaphorical and literal dimensions. As the more recent scholarship cited above begins to show, the potential of the action of performance is always bound up with its figurative possibilities.

One-way of attending to these expressive movements might be to explore the aesthetics of performance. However, the work of aesthetics here would not be to contain performance for the purposes of critical judgement, reinforcing a distinction between representation and the world. Rather, this conceptualisation of the aesthetic derives from Ranciere⁴⁰ whose notion of a "distribution of the sensible" firmly defines the modes of engagement engendered by art as political and by arguing that they pertain simultaneously to forms of inclusion and exclusion. So, in outlining

³⁷ Gerry Pratt and Elia Kirby, "Performing Nursing: Bc Nurses' Union Theatre Project," *ACME* 2, no. 1 (2003).

³⁸ Shulamith Lev-Aladgem, "Whose Play Is It?: The Issue of Authorship/Ownership in Israeli Community-Based Theatre," *The Drama Review: TDR* 48, no. 3 (2004); Celina McEwen, "An Empowering Practice?: Urban Theatre Projects' Recent Work in Residence, Community Cultural Development and International Arts Festivals," *Australasian Drama Studies* (2007).

³⁹ Dan Friedman, "A Performance Community Onstage and on the Street: Castillo Theatre and Heiner Müller's "Germania 3"," *The Drama Review: TDR* 47, no. 3 (2003).

⁴⁰ Jacques Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 12.

the "aesthetic regime of art", Ranciere⁴¹ focuses neither on the content nor on the question of what defines a particular artistic form. Instead, the suggestion is that the aesthetic should combine the theoretical and the practical through an elucidation of "the conditions that produce both appearances and the reality they either conceal or disclose"⁴². The possibility of art as political force is not of the order of disruption wrought through the creative act. Rather, the politics of art lie in the assimilative operations of perception at work in both performance and the world that produces the possibility for rupture. Such an understanding of the aesthetic – as a process that both establishes the manner in which something is common and simultaneously the individual and exclusive parts of that commonality – opens a means of thinking through forms of subjectivity. In attending to the conditions of perception that are at work in performance and beyond, we might be able to explore how certain boundaries of visibility occur to delineate particular groups or 'objects', and equally importantly, the ways in which these divisions might be breached. This would be to interrogate the notion of subjectivity that Phelan⁴³ outlines through her theorisation of performance as disappearance, by asking how it is that both presence and absence coexist in the event.

Practically, such an aesthetic approach would attempt to identify how performance can be productive in the midst of the two different notions of subjectivity as outlined above. This might involve considering how the sensibilities produced in the numerous registers of a performance continue after the event in certain ways. Here, the notion of subjectivity as irreducible difference given through creative process would meet with the constraints beyond the 'romantic' possibilities of the performance space. Equally, when exploring actions that are both constitutive of and constituted by the subject, it might be fruitful to consider how and through which mediums these acts occur and may be perceived. Such an investigation might highlight the instability and mutability of acts as definers of constraint and resistance. Thus, through this aesthetic approach, the numerous stabilisations and destabilisations of the individual that are evoked by performance – the simultaneous being what you are but also not what you are, the being more or less than what you are, the potential to be something else – must be considered to be expressed across any apparent boundaries between the conceptual and the material. Instead of trying to locate the limits of performance in order to define its articulation, the project becomes one of working with and through these inseparable bounding/boundary activities so as to give shape to their expressive movements. In this way the simultaneously figurative and literal nature of performance becomes a means of exploring how and for what purpose subjects become visible both individually and collectively, thereby moving beyond some of the early attempts to destabilise normative coherence and location of identities. Consequently, whilst the purpose and position of performance in human geography continues as a theoretical and empirical contribution to post-structural debates aimed at undermining the subject, the utility of terms is being expanded in order to think through the various 'material returns' to the discipline.

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⁴¹ *Ibid.* 22.

⁴² G. Rockhill, "The Silent Revolution," *SubStance* 33, no. 1 (2004): 56.

⁴³ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked : The Politics of Performance* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1993).

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