

# Exploring Textual Action

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## Interaction and Framing in the Performance *Insideout* by Sasha Waltz

Mads Thygesen, AARHUS UNIVERSITY

*Insideout* is the title of a choreographic installation by German choreographer Sasha Waltz produced for *Graz 2003 – Cultural Capital of Europe*. Waltz developed this interdisciplinary piece together with twenty actors and ten musicians from Asia, Europe and North and South America. The performance was an exhibition on the topic of “lifestyles” in which the actors presented their own stories and interacted with the audience. It represented an amalgamation of the various biographies of the dancers and showed the influence of important theoretical works on the topic (Jean Baudrillard, Pierre Bourdieu, Ulrich Beck and Richard Sennett). The result was a multi-medial performance that combined elements from different art forms (*e.g.* dance, theatre, video, text, photography and music) in an attempt to transform the documentary material into a both complex and intriguing aesthetic experience.

I will examine how Waltz’s performance on the one hand iterates some relatively stable contextual frames of “same-

ness" (its *mise en scène*), while on the other hand playing more radically with different and alternating discursive framings or contexts, e.g. "this is theatre" or "this is a social or political situation", in order to create a space of interaction between actors and spectators. This challenges a more traditional notion of the theatrical frame (Goffman 1986: 124ff): given that the dividing line between performer and audience is blurred, the audience becomes involved in the production. Consequently, the performance, as Erika Fischer-Lichte's influential work of 2004 *Ästhetik des Performativen* informs us, emerges "as a result of the interaction between actors and audience".<sup>1</sup> This notion of performance as an event (*Ereignis*) occurring between actors and spectators holds many promising perspectives that can help shed new light on the aesthetics of performance art. The full scope of Waltz's performance, however, is not grasped if we follow that aspect of Fischer-Lichte's theory which reduces a performance to the question of co-presence, role-reversal or interaction. For her, a performance must be seen as a self-governing state of affairs due to the autopoietic feedback loop between actors and audience. This idea is based on the works of biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. Inspired by Maturana and Varela's concept of *autopoiesis* (from Greek *auto* for self and *poiesis* for creation or production), Fischer-Lichte describes performances as self-creating systems that are the

1 "Die Aufführung entsteht als Resultat der Interaktion zwischen Darstellern und Zuschauern" (Fischer-Lichte 2004: 47). Works in other languages than English are used in the original language, but citations are given from published translations as referred to in the bibliography. In the above example, however, I have chosen to include my own translation of Fischer-Lichte's *Ästhetik des Performativen* (2004), because this very important definition of performance (*Aufführung*) is omitted in the recent English translation of the book, *The Transformative Power of Performance* (2008). Cf. Sauter 2000, Gade and Jerslev 2005, Roselt 2008.

product of their own operations. In Fischer-Lichte's terms, then, *autopoiesis* would mean that the interactive aesthetics of Waltz's *Insideout* enables a fundamentally open, unpredictable process to emerge (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 39).<sup>2</sup> This is only partly the case in Waltz's production, as we shall see in my analysis.

To begin with, Waltz's *Insideout* makes it necessary for me to explore the starting point of Fischer-Lichte's theory, namely the distinction between "performativity" (*Der Begriff des Performativen*) and "performance" (*Der Begriff der Aufführung*). When she develops these concepts, Fischer-Lichte draws an intellectual lineage from J.L. Austin's lectures about *How to Do Things With Words* (1962), to Judith Butler's essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (1988).<sup>3</sup> In the course of my analysis, however, I will show why Fischer-Lichte's notion of performativity must be seen as a major departure from J.L. Austin's theories of speech acts. In fact, Fischer-Lichte's theory is based on an understanding of performativity that is pretty far from Austin's infamous remark about the theatre: "a performative utterance will, for example, be in a particular way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy" (Austin 1962: 21-22). It is exactly this idea of performance art as a "parasitic" or "pale" imitation of reality that Fischer-Lichte rightfully refuses. In many respects my analysis shares

2 According to Fischer-Lichte, the performative turn of the 1960s started when artists produced events that were not focused on the interpretation or representation of pre-existing works of art (e.g. the words written in the text by a playwright) but solely oriented towards interaction and participation. "The performance is regarded as art not because it enjoys the status of an artwork but because it takes place as an event" (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 35).

3 For a more thorough discussion of this lineage, see J. Hillis Miller's contribution to the present publication: "Performativity<sub>1</sub>/Performativity<sub>2</sub>".

this critical approach to Austin's theory, but I do not think that Fischer-Lichte's concept of performance as liminality solves the fundamental problem of the distinction between "normal" and "parasitic" performatives. In the light of the fundamental differences between Austin and Fischer-Lichte, I think that the complex aesthetics of Waltz's *Insideout* can be seen as an attempt to challenge the traditional frames of theatrical performance. But unlike Fischer-Lichte, who tends to underplay the role of discursive, contextual frames of performativity in a performance, and who therefore understands performance art as a liminal state that negates the ontological opposition between art and reality, I aim to show how the structure of Waltz's performance can be seen as a play with some stable, but first and foremost with a set of interchangeable contextualising frames of discursive (and not of ontological) nature. Such frames are e.g. globalisation, individualisation and detraditionalisation. This means that Waltz establishes and plays with contextualising frames that make a certain type of performance possible – one that is open for certain specifications in form and content, but is nevertheless subject to incessant change through the actual unfolding of the performance's interaction between actors and audience. This play with frames produces a state of oscillation between immersion and reflexivity – or to put it metaphorically: the audience has the productive experience of being "inside" and "outside" at one and the same time.

#### *Insideout – discursive frames*

*Insideout* was produced with financial support from *Graz 2003 – Cultural Capital of Europe*, making it possible for Sasha Waltz and her company to expand the production with a long phase of research. The production began in 2001 with a period of thorough research based on a 400-page reader

called "Theory" that was sampled from "the most important scientific works on the topic (Baudrillard, Bourdieu, Schultze, Beck)" (Stocker, Cusimano, Schurl: 7). These texts were made available to the dancers in both English and German, and then the process of collecting the material for the performance began with a series of interviews with the 13 dancers of the company conducted by the dramaturge of the production, Karl Stocker. On the basis of these interviews Stocker compiled a large textual material including the personal stories of the dancers, their social lives, their ethnic backgrounds, their perception of dance, love, family, work etc. In fact, the material was so comprehensive that it was later edited and published by Stocker in collaboration with two members of the company, Nadia Cusimano and Katia Schurl, in the book *Insideout* (2003).

In the introduction to the book, the premise is stated as follows:

The central topic of the investigation is the lifestyles of artists who come from different parts of the world and meet in Berlin in order to work together. Questions concerning the current importance of economic, cultural and symbolic capital as well as the individual adaptation of a "flexible" and "globalised" lifestyle constitute the focal point of the project; in short: what we are here concerned with is an analysis of the construction of "postmodern" identities. By looking at a specific group who work with their bodies in an aesthetically elaborated context we get interesting answers to social perspectives which soon may be considered universal (Stocker, Cusimano, Schurl: 9).

It is worth noting the distinction made between the singular and the universal, between the specific stories of the dancers and more universal social perspectives. The book itself shows how Sasha Waltz and her company of dancers explore these social perspectives on an autobiographical level, and thus attempt to make these perspectives more concrete and com-

elling (for both readers and audience). The textual montage of Stocker, Cusimano and Schurl shows us how the personal biographies of the dancers are tied to private questions about social and individual values, life-styles and status symbols. The photos of friends, family, cars, houses, jewellery and dogs can be regarded as a disclosure of the private. On the other hand, they show us that the private stories and photographs are connected to more complex and far-reaching social perspectives. In this respect, the montage of text and photos follows the thoughts of Ulrich Beck when it is stated that individualisation “means detraditionalisation, but also the opposite: the ‘invention of tradition’. Idyllic concepts – grandma’s apple tart, forget-me-nots and communitarianism – are highly en vogue” (Stocker, Cusimano, Schurl: 74). A sense of nostalgia is certainly invoked when one observes the many private photos in which the dancers have included short commentaries such as “my parents on holiday in Thailand. I love them very much. 1995” and “This is me with a shopping mall Santa Claus when I’m about 5 years old”, or handwritten notes such as “Dancing in the basement of my cousin’s house for the adults” and “I’m pregnant. 11th month. I’m very, very happy”. Here, as in many other sections of the book, the montage of text and images explores the longing for that idyllic place called “home”.<sup>4</sup>

Given the wide range of nationalities of the company of dancers and their working life, it seems only logical that the motif of a “flexible” and “globalised” identity is central to the discursive framing of the project. Interviews with the company’s dancers from Australia, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Canada, Lithuania, New Zealand, Sweden and Spain

4 These quotations are all found in the chapter about home entitled: “In Italy they would have understood that it was a joke” (Stocker, Cusimano, Schurl: 61-93).

form the textual basis of the performance. All of the dancers have similar stories, stories that in their own way deal with the consequences of modernity, e.g. individualisation, detraditionalisation, globalisation and reflexivity. It is, of course, problematic to generalise about the family life of the various dancers because of their differences in age, gender and nationality. The discourse of their stories, however, revolves around a series of binary oppositions, e.g. family vs. individuality, tradition vs. artistic freedom, and ethnicity vs. globalisation, which is also explored in the performance.

In the book, the biographies of the dancers are placed side by side with fragments of the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, Jean Baudrillard, Ulrich Beck and others, and in many respects the themes of the interviews echo the sociological theories that inspired them. However, this juxtaposition of interviews and theory pays little attention to the differences between the theoretical positions; rather the editors use fragments of sociological and philosophical observations to frame different aspects of the life world of the dancers, e.g. consequences of work in the new capitalism (Sennett), floating signs (Baudrillard), the pulse of fashion (Roland Barthes). One of the most important influences, I think, is Ulrich Beck’s observations on modernity and globalisation. This becomes apparent when the editors inform us that: “The new ‘homelessness’, which was established by Ulrich Beck as an essential phenomenon of the globalisation of the individual, promotes the mutual influence of local and global issues” (Stocker, Cusimano, Schurl: 61). Globalisation, we are told, “means: actions over distances – a new ‘placelessness’, which emerges through a transformation of time and space as a consequence of global communication and facilities of mass transportation” (Stocker, Cusimano, Schurl: 66). This transformation of time and space also means that local and personal horizons of experience are broken up – a state of experience that is certainly invoked in the individual

accounts of the lives of the dancers. Many of them have broken with the more traditional cultural identity of their roots only to find themselves in a state of homelessness: living in a suitcase, missing friends and family, longing for home etc. This is an important leitmotif in *Insideout*, and the question of homelessness – the sense of being out of place – comes up in many shapes and sizes during the performance.

We are given some sort of insight into precisely what social perspectives are involved when the Chinese-Canadian dancer Laurie Young talks about her roots:

Well, I would never identify myself as a Hong Kong Chinese. I am first generation Chinese Canadian. Think Diaspora. I mean, I've only been to Hong Kong twice, and both times were for work purposes. [...] I grew up in the suburbs of Ottawa. Though Ottawa is the capital of Canada, and supports multiculturalism, it is still very white, especially in the suburbs. Aside from us, there were two or three other Asian families in the entire neighbourhood. One was 3rd generation Chinese Canadian, the others first generation. So I didn't grow up with Chinese friends. I find it very difficult to pinpoint myself to an "essentialist" notion of Chinese. By essentialist I suppose I mean what others may identify as "Chinese", mannerisms, language, culture, food etc. (Stocker, Cusimano, Schurl: 67).

The term diaspora (Greek for *scattering*) refers to a displaced and relocated collective of people. Young and her family share ethnic identity with the other Asian families who were either forced to leave or voluntarily left their native countries, and became residents of Ottawa. Her parents emigrated from Hong Kong independently of each other. They met in Canada. Thus, Laurie defines herself as first generation Chinese Canadian. Due to the permanent displacement experienced by Young and her family, she finds it very difficult to relate to an "essentialist" notion of Chinese. What follows is that Young's identity is more tied to her personal horizon of experience

than to her Chinese roots. If Young's personal account of her background is taken together with the other interviews, it becomes clear that the text explores the relationship between identity and roots on a very personal level. Indeed, most of the company seem to be in a permanent state of diaspora, given that they have moved away from their native countries to live and work in Berlin.

The textual montage establishes the leitmotifs of *Insideout* which through the aesthetic and discursive framing strategies of the performance become part of the dynamics of its performative actions. The textual montage, however, is not a mere "mimetic" representation or mirroring of the performative event. Its themes are relatively delimited and stable, but their constant iteration and refraction through the alternating theoretical frames of a series of modern thinkers open up their horizons and turn them "inside out" in multiple ways. Thus the themes are productively disseminated onto incessantly different contexts, pointing towards a past, a now and a future that will have to be made – and remade. The textual montage, then, is a strategically integral and actional component of the event that aesthetically and discursively keeps framing the production. I hope to show in the following sections that in this way the performance explores the relationship between art and life, the private and the public, in a way that both relies on and transcends Fischer-Lichte's notion of the performative turn and Judith Butler's theories of gender and identity. This relationship between identity and performative actions is explored in the different thematic sections of the performance based on the biographies of the 13 dancers, who were members of the dance ensemble of the Schaubühne at the time when the interviews took place.

### *The performance – mise en scène vs. autopoiesis*

In the performance of *Insideout* (as performed in Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz in Berlin in 2003), Waltz turns things – *i.e.* the discursive, contextualising frames – inside out in two ways: firstly, she transforms the halls of the theatre into an art exhibition in which the audience is forced to make choices. Secondly, she allows the dancers to interact with the audience in order to blur the distinction between them. There are no seats placed conveniently in front of a stage. In fact, one could say that the whole space of the installation is transformed into a stage, where many small pieces are performed simultaneously. The audience has to stroll through the installation, but they cannot see everything in this exhibition. They are – more or less – free to choose what sections they would like to see.

The space is built like a labyrinth that calls for a “moving” gaze, *i.e.* one in which the audience moves through the space of the installation. This opens certain possibilities for observation and makes others void. The architecture of the installations leaves little hope of a unified perspective, but presents the audience with a wide range of observational possibilities that they will have to explore in the space of the performance. The difference in audience positions, which follows from the structure of the space of the installation, also means that they will experience the performance very differently. Because of the construction of the space, the audience changes their perspective many times during the performance.

The structure of *Insideout* is based on meticulous and elaborate rehearsals that have shaped the staging of the material into a plan, the *mise en scène* (in German: *Inszenierung*): “the process of planning [...], testing, and determining strategies which aim at bringing forth the performance’s materiality” (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 188). According to Fischer-Lichte, this process is most accurately captured in Martin Seel’s recent

definition of the term *mise en scène* as developed in the essay “Inszenieren als Erscheinenlassen” (2001). In this essay, Seel defines *mise en scène* as “the staging of presence. It is the conspicuous creation and emphasis of the presence of something which occurs here and now” (Seel 2001: 53; Fischer-Lichte 2008: 187). For Seel, the staging constitutes an intentional act, *i.e.* it is initiated and executed by someone who wants to present something for an audience. Moreover, it is a presentation that gives rise to a conspicuous spatial and temporal arrangement of elements that could have appeared in a different way.

The concept of *mise en scène* (to be distinguished from Fischer-Lichte’s use of the term performance) which Seel explores is similar to the notion of an event that takes place here and now, except that Seel’s concept of presentation is tied not to *autopoiesis* (self-creation) but to intentionality. That is to say, someone (Waltz) has arranged the presentation of the material with specific purposes in mind. Fischer-Lichte, on the other hand, sees the performance as a self-governing event (*Ereignis*) that transcends the intentions of the director. It is not viable, she argues, that what is planned and decided should repeat itself in every performance. Consequently, her concept of the performance (*Aufführung*) proceeds from a very useful distinction between staging (*Inszenierung*) and event (*Ereignis*), but it also seems to hold the latter in the highest regard as she primarily observes structure and planning as attempts to restrict the autopoietic feedback loop between actors and audience. The interaction, in other words, produces or transforms a situation that involves contingency.

On the one hand, Waltz’s *mise en scène* is followed very closely by the performers. On the other hand, however, it allows them to engage and interact with the audience. This basically means that there is no way of knowing how the audience will react to the performance; but the actions of the dancers, nevertheless, follow a structure that allows certain

sequences and scenes to be repeated every night. Although Waltz's *mise en scène* allows open, experimental spaces and unplanned behaviour, actions and events to occur during the performance, it also follows a carefully planned structure. Of course, no two evenings and no two audiences are ever exactly the same, but the material is nevertheless arranged and presented in a structure that is repeated in every performance. Although the material is based on improvisation, the actions of the performers follow a very tight schedule. For instance, the presence of digital clocks in all the rooms of the installation allows the dancers to follow the progression of the performance in accordance with the plan. They all follow specific routes in accordance with a clear-cut plan of actions, scenes, meetings and choreographies – like ants in an ant hill, with the entire collective seeming to know exactly what to do as they constantly move within the space of the installation.

At the beginning of the performance, one of the dancers authoritatively announces a series of prescriptive utterances in a megaphone: “No eating! No talking! No sitting! No singing! No waiting! No dancing! No smiling! No music! No interpreting!” These utterances are performative because the dancer is declaring that certain activities are prohibited (in the sense of “I prohibit any interpreting of the performance”) (Austin 1962; Benveniste 1971). The long chain of prescriptions, however, is brought to the point of absurdity. How, for example, can we avoid interpretation? Given that the audience is anticipating that someone will perform something, whether they will be singing or dancing, playing music or playing roles etc., the audience already suspects that most of the prescriptions will necessarily have to be broken. If – as Austin proposes – felicitous performatives rely on the intention and commitment of the speaker, it is quite obvious that these prescriptions are not to be taken too literally.

At first, then, the members of the audience are waiting for

something to happen, and as they start to wander in the vast space of the performance a sense of disorientation and anxiety starts to build. Eventually, two male dancers start a slow duet of lifts and rolls in the central “square” of the installation. In different sections of the installation, we find some of the dancers involved in long monologues about their childhood and families. At the same time, there is an Asian couple deeply involved in a tango-like *pas de deux* that they execute in different parts of the installation space. Here, as in many of the choreographies performed, the movements of the dancers are a *mélange* of modern dance and more traditional forms that embody different cultural styles (e.g. Argentinian tango and Chinese traditional dance). Each space offers a new tale, scene or meeting, where dancers and audience discover or pass each other by. Inside the refrigerator, for instance, one of the male dancers (Luc Dunberry) is dressed up for heavy winter as he talks about his homeland: “I’m from Canada,” he explains, “Ask people to come in. It’s nice and cold in here”.

In this particular episode, the dancer tries to seduce the audience into participation. However, the nature of the relationship between performers and audience changes many times during the performance: in some sequences the performers provoke and assault the audience with questions like “are you rich?” In other sequences they retreat into their own, private spaces where they perform personal actions (they comfort each other, engage in dialogues in their native tongue, dance, write, argue etc.) without any visible regard for the audience. At the climax of the performance, however, some of the dancers convince most of the audience to sit down in front of the display cases where other dancers are putting on a show about consumer culture. In other words: the performance changes from “theatre with the audience” to “theatre for the audience”, with the performers shouting brand names, presenting their personal belongings, and undressing in front of the audience.

A consistent feature of these scenes and encounters, as we have already surmised, is a discursive framing of the relationship between cultural roots and personal identity. Throughout the performance the audience can observe – or even immerse themselves in – the exploration of this theme. At one point, for example, members of the audience are framed by one of the dancers (Sasa Queliz) using sticky tape to create a small “stage” on the floor. In this situation the theatrical frames are inverted as she invites members of the audience to step onto the small stage and starts to interview them about their personal backgrounds. What emerges in these episodes is an intimate and private dialogue that is staged in front of other members of the audience.

Having tried this awkward situation myself, I can say that these dialogues involve an oscillation between immersion and reflexivity. On the one hand, I was soon immersed in the dialogue trying to talk about my roots without feeling too self-conscious. On the other hand, however, I was only too aware that other members of the audience were watching the whole episode. That is to say, in this dialogue the performer chooses to communicate about a specific theme (in this case: “home”), and chooses to do so in a manner that invites members of the audience to engage in a special way. You can either choose to understand the episode as an invitation to talk about your personal life. Or, and this is perhaps more likely, you can choose to understand it as an invitation to perform something in front of the audience.

### *Performative actions*

“I was born in Toronto, Canada, in September 1973,” says Laurie Young. As the Chinese Canadian dancer Young performs her personal choreography in front of the audience, her voice sounds a little nervous and strained. We are at the

beginning of the performance, in a small space where Young is performing her own choreography. Meanwhile, in other parts of the installation, other dancers are performing similar scenes for different parts of the audience. In this assemblage section, entitled “15 minutes”, each member of the company of dancers presents their own story in a mixture of dance and dialogue.

The central theme of Young’s piece, which brings to mind Judith Butler’s influential work on “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” (1988) and *Gender Trouble* (1990), explores the notion of a personal identity that is not based on a fixed set of categories such as race, gender, nationality etc. “I am Chinese but not from China. It sounds simple, but to me it’s a very complex identity. One that is always shifting,” Young explains. This is exactly the kind of actions and utterances that, according to Butler’s work, constitute performative actions: “Such acts, gestures, enactments,” Butler explains, “are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (Butler 2008: 185). If the gendered body, as Butler suggests, is performative, it basically means that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. In other words: through these performative actions and utterances Young might be said to present and produce her own identity in front of the audience. These actions and utterances, however, are questioned and problematised at the same time because they are all conditioned by the constantly changeable frames of the performance.

In the middle of Young’s short choreography, for instance, she suddenly stops to dance and starts to talk about her costume: “This dress used to belong to my mother, but it makes me look small,” she says. On the one hand, this utterance draws our attention to Young’s body: it is quite obvious that

her feathery figure doesn't fit the traditional Chinese dress (the programme tells us that she is 156 cm tall and weighs 45 kg). On the other hand, however, it also draws our attention to the performative nature of the scene, as the words, acts, gestures and enactments are staged as an expression of Young's own attempt to come to terms with her Chinese Canadian heritage. Her movements, for instance, are an elegant mixture of modern dance and gestures that one could easily associate with traditional Chinese dance. Young's movements, in other words, can be identified as *conforming* to certain iterable models (Derrida 1988: 18; Butler 2008: 185). In the view of Butler's concept of performativity, we could say that the choreography is staged as a struggle between Young's body and the dress of tradition that embodies her personal struggle with the family heirloom and the essentialist notion of being Chinese. A sense of uncertainty is thereby invoked: does this represent a conflict with her roots? Is this an honest confession by the dancer? Or is it just a conscious act to create a specific emotional response in the observer?

Young's sudden utterance about her dress heightens, I think, our awareness of the autobiographical nature of the material presented here. The dress takes on a more symbolic meaning: it is presented as a family heirloom that represents a nostalgic notion of "Chinese" mannerisms, language, culture, food etc. that does not suit Young's longing for personal and artistic freedom. Although the dress is too big for her figure, it is also too tight for her personal identity. Given her background and her work as a dancer who travels around the globe with a company that signifies cultural diversity and difference, it is easy for the audience to understand why she finds it so hard to identify herself with an "essentialist" notion of the Chinese. Nonetheless, one cannot help noticing a certain sense of ambivalence as the dress also represents something much more positive: family and home.

For Fischer-Lichte, following Butler, identity is closely tied to the question of performativity:

Performative acts (as bodily acts) are "non"-referential because they do not refer to pre-existing conditions, such as an inner essence, substance, or being supposedly expressed in these acts; no fixed stable identity exists that they could express. Expressivity thus stands in an oppositional relation to performativity. Bodily, performative acts do not express a pre-existing identity but engender identity through these very acts (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 27).

This is the basic insight into the nature of identity upon which Fischer-Lichte establishes her concepts of performativity and embodiment: "This specific materiality of the body emerges out of the repetition of certain gestures and movements; these acts generate the body as individually, sexually, ethnically and culturally marked" (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 27; Butler 2008: 185). Young's short choreography, for example, constitutes such an embodiment through her repetition of certain "Chinese" gestures and movements (e.g. the archetypical bow to the audience). In the choreography the dress is used in a similar fashion: in the iterative movements of Young's dance the dress represents family, tradition and values.

What this implies is that her body and movements function as a medium of performative actions as she engenders her identity through these very acts. However, the underlying assumption that human beings have no inner essence, substance or being but become what they are through performative acts represents a major departure from Austin's linguistic theory of performatives. Following J. Hillis Miller's "Performativity<sub>1</sub>/Performativity<sub>2</sub>", I think it is crucial that we draw a firm distinction between Butler's ideas about gender as constructed by the repetition of social gender roles and Austin's theory of performatives as a mode of speech act that is a way of

using words (and by extension, more widely: texts) to make something happen.

The difference between these theoretical approaches to performativity, as Miller convincingly suggests, has to do with the questions of subjectivity and contexts. Indeed, Austin's theory of speech acts presupposes a more stable kind of subjectivity than the one professed by Butler and Fischer-Lichte. Performatives, as we know, only have the feature of "doing-by-saying" when they are explicitly or implicitly expressed by verbs in the first-person singular.<sup>5</sup> The initial examples in Austin's book all point to this: "I name this ship the Queen Elisabeth", "I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow", "I now pronounce you man and wife" (Austin 1962: 5). For Austin, then, the performative act consists in what the speaker does in the utterance, but the act is also a question of context – in fact, Jacques Derrida has pointed out that Austin's analyses "at all times require a value of *context*, and even of a context exhaustively determined" (Derrida 1988: 14).

Following Austin's line of thought – but without reference to Derrida's critique – Fischer-Lichte also claims that other non-linguistic conditions must be satisfied if we are to speak of a "happy" or "successful" performative:

If, for example, the phrase "I now pronounce you man and wife" is not spoken by a registrar or a priest or any other explicitly authorized

<sup>5</sup> According to Austin's first observations, performative statements are characterized by certain verbs spoken in the first person and the present tense, such as "I promise" or "I swear". Subsequently, however, he suggests that expressions such as "Go away" function in the same manner as "I order you to go away". Austin labels such expression as "implicit" performatives. This, however, creates a new problem, for almost any utterance can be seen as an implicit performative: for instance, a constative utterance such as "this is art" could easily be "performatively" recast to begin with "I swear" or "I declare".

person, then it does not constitute a real marriage (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 24-25).

The reason for this claim, I believe, is to be found in her idea about performance as a social act: "A performative utterance always addresses a community, represented by the people present in a given situation – it can therefore be regarded as a social act" (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 25). Unlike Austin, who declares the performative utterance hollow or void if it is said by an actor on the stage, Fischer-Lichte bases her concepts of performativity and performance on the idea that "the collapse of the opposition between art and reality and of all binaries resulting from this opposition transfers the participants into a liminal state" (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 176).

It appears to me, however, that this concept of a liminal state that occurs when one can no longer distinguish between art and reality does not solve the basic problem of Austin's unjustified distinction between "normal" and "parasitic" performatives. It only replaces it with an equally problematic assumption about the emergence of "the real" in contemporary performance art. The stress given to this collapse, I think, has to do with her interest in one particular theme, namely the ethics of performance arts: "In the performances, then, aesthetics cannot be grasped without ethics. The ethical turns into a constitutive dimension of aesthetics" (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 171). This claim is consistent with her advocacy for the transformative power of performance, which is tied closely to a preference for the politically and ethically engaged kinds of performance art. The difference between Austin and Fischer-Lichte can therefore be regarded as a struggle about the legitimacy of performative acts in theatre and performance art. For Fischer-Lichte, who views the performative turn as a significant departure from a conventional notion of the theatrical performance as a space of pretence, all performances are

inherently performative as they are embodiments of authentic and concrete actions. When, for instance, Laurie Young performs a short scene about her roots, she is not pretending to be someone else. For Fischer-Lichte, Young is “actually” performing her own biography – consequently, embodying her personal identity.<sup>6</sup> But even beyond that – something which I hold to be crucial – *Insideout* at the same time questions the notions of identity and sameness by constantly changing the contextual frames of the performing embodiment.

### *Conclusions and perspectives*

Waltz’s work teaches us a valuable lesson about the distinction between the performance (the event as it unfolds in the interaction between actors and audience) and the performative actions of the dancers (performers). In its attempt to explore the individual adaptation of a “flexible” and “globalised” lifestyle, *Insideout* establishes a series of discursive frames that is put to the test in the performance. Although the performance challenges the traditional notion of theatrical frames, and allows for open, experimental spaces and unplanned behaviour, actions and events to occur during the performance, the event is still governed by the dialectics of structure and contingency. On the one hand the performance is shaped by the *mise en scène* of the director. On the other hand, however, the autopoietic feedback loop between actors

<sup>6</sup> Notice, for example, the very important claim in Fischer-Lichte’s reflections about the performance as event: “All performances are self-referential and constitute reality. When an actor playing Hamlet walks across the stage it primarily signifies the reality of the actor walking across the stage. The actor is not just pretending to walk. He is actually walking and changing reality through his act. The context alone allows the walk to acquire another meaning – for example Hamlet walking to Gertrude’s chamber” (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 170).

and audience is an integral part of the performance – without interaction the installation does not attract the same attention from the audience and it would not have the same aesthetic effect – that shapes the singularity of each performance.

As a conclusion to my investigation, we are also able to recognise that the crucial difference between Fischer-Lichte’s theory of performativity and J.L. Austin’s theory of speech acts rests on two issues: for one thing, Fischer-Lichte assigns far more importance and validity to the theatrical utterance than Austin does. His theory stages the “I” and “you” of the speech situation and provides us with a comprehensive theory of linguistic utterances, but – for Fischer-Lichte – it lacks a more thorough examination of the non-linguistic conditions of the performative utterance.

In many respects, however, Fischer-Lichte’s critique resembles that of French linguist Émile Benveniste, who supported Austin’s theory in the essay “Analytical Philosophy and Language”, but argued that a performative statement is nothing outside the circumstances that make it performative. A performative utterance, as Benveniste puts it, is an act of authority. Anybody, says Benveniste, can shout, “I declare a general mobilisation,” but if the proper authority is lacking such an utterance is no more than words. Without authority, then, the performative utterance “reduces itself to futile clamor, childishness, or lunacy” (Benveniste 1971: 236). A meeting of an official nature, for instance, begins when the chairman declares that “the meeting is open”. When this statement is uttered under the appropriate conditions (*e.g.* a situation where the audience knows that it is spoken by the chairman) it creates a new situation. The performative utterance, Benveniste continues, has the property of being unique: “It cannot be produced except in special circumstances, at one and only one time, at a definite date and place” (Benveniste 1971: 236). But despite his critical approach to Austin’s theory, Benveniste sees no

reason for abandoning the distinction between performative and constative utterances. In fact, he finds that it is “justified and necessary,” as long as we maintain it within “the strict conditions of use that sanction it” (Benveniste 1971: 238).

However, in his essay “Signature Événement Contexte” from 1972 Jacques Derrida reveals a fundamental problem with this line of thought, when he subjects Austin’s distinction between “normal” and “parasitic” performatives to meticulous deconstruction. For one thing, Derrida argues that one essential aspect of the performative utterance seems to pass unnoticed in Austin’s theory, namely the question of repeatability: “Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a ‘coded’ or iterable utterance,” Derrida asks (Derrida 1988: 18). A performative utterance could not open a meeting, launch a ship or seal a marriage if it is not identifiable as something that conforms to an “iterable model”. It must be “identifiable in some way as a ‘citation’,” Derrida explains (Derrida 1988: 18). This argument, as Marvin Carlson remarks in *Performance – A Critical Introduction*, “moves the concept of linguistic performance back into the realm of repeated (or restored) and contextualised activity that is so basic for performance theory” (Carlson 2004: 76).

Waltz’s *Insideout* shows us that the play with different contextualising frames (e.g. globalisation, individualisation and detraditionalisation) is an integral part of the performance. Its attempt to explore the individual adaptation of a “flexible” and “globalised” lifestyle can be seen in relation to Butler’s concept of performative acts and the concept of performativity in Fischer-Lichte’s *Ästhetik des Performativen*. For Fischer-Lichte, following Butler, performative actions do not express a pre-existing identity but engender identity through the bodily actions of the performers. In the view of the subsequent development of the concept of performativity by Butler and Derrida, however, it is perhaps somewhat

surprising that Fischer-Lichte does not pay more attention to the contextual discursive qualities – or the never saturated contextual frames – of performativity. Derrida’s critical reading of Austin’s theory, for instance, draws attention to the fact that performative utterances (and more widely: actions) must follow an iterable model – but also, and more importantly, that they also change their “use value” when they are iterated at different times and in different contexts. My analysis of *Insideout* confirms the importance of iterability and framing, and it shows that *Insideout* is a playful blend of relatively stable frames of sameness (the *mise en scène*) and (a limited set of) interchangeable discursive contextual frames that open up for a never closed or finalised *différance*, which is productively open both to the now and to the future, and that must be countersigned by the other, by the audience, to take performative effect. Consequently, the aesthetic strength of Waltz’s performance does not lie in the collapse in itself of the distinction between art and reality or its theoretical grounding. It emerges out of the sophisticated play with specific discursive frames that constantly redefines the otherwise static and ontological opposition between art and reality, and proves the ability of Waltz’s performance to engage the audience in the dynamic, aesthetic and performative investigation of lifestyles and identity which never gets closed off into sheer sameness, but is iterated as well as redirected as productive difference in every performance.

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