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More-and-Less-Than: Liveness, Video Recording, and the Future of Performance

With the spread of digital and other modes of electronic recordings into the auditoria and lecture theatres where performance is studied, the debate about the video documentation of performance – already well rehearsed and in the pages of NTQ – is about to intensify. Rachel Fensham and Denise Varney have based the article which follows on their own work in videoing live theatre pieces for research into feminist performance. This article deliberates on their experience with the medium and examines the anxieties that surface at the point of implosion between live and mediatized performance. The first part locates these anxieties in the question of presence and absence in performance – especially that of the performer, whose body and self are both at stake in the recorded image. In the second part, the authors offer a description of viewing practices, which they present as a model of 'videocy'. Rachel Fensham is Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Drama and Theatre Studies, Monash University, and Denise Varney is Lecturer in the School of Studies in Creative Arts, Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne.

REFLECTING on the state of performance at the close of the twentieth-century show, in which actor/audience relations have collapsed and reconfigured, we might still say of the reified theatre that the audience performs an act of worship before the god of presence, the performance. And through the performance the author, the dramatist, the director, the great actor, and the state theatre are reincarnated. Derrida was right to call this stage a theological space – a space where performance serves the author-creator, and the spectator is mute: 'The theological stage comports a passive, seated public, a public of spectators, of consumers, of "enjoyers".'[1]

Not surprisingly, there are no well-aimed tomatoes, no chattering, no interjections, and no noisy demands for refunds. Seated in the velvet pews of the state theatres, the spectator worships silently, individually, respectfully. By way of contrast, the video recording of live performance is perceived as an entirely different matter – a threat to the sanctity of the live exchange between stage/altar and the auditorium. Video is a highly portable artefact bringing movies to small domestic spaces littered with food,

teenagers' trainers, cans of drink, and home-delivered pizzas.

In large educational institutions, video documentaries are enlarged onto cold white screens in lecture theatres where students watch, catcall, take notes, and make noise. If the video is a recording of a live performance, lecturers, with little respect for the performance's integrity, may stop and start, pause and rewind, inviting students to interrogate the images that play and rewind before them. With more than a little justification, video, it is said, flattens out performance and reflects badly on the aesthetics of theatre.

But the position against video is more than a complaint about poor reproduction standards and the dis-orderliness of spectatorship. Live performance and video are clearly two different modes of viewing, but they are often compared in terms which render video a threat to that essential 'ontology of performance', to use Peggy Phelan's phrase: its *liveness*. Phelan's influential definition of performance would set it against video and other modes of electronic reproduction: 'To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays

and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being . . . becomes itself through disappearance.'[2]

But to propose that performance can maintain its separateness from mediatized images is to perpetuate, unrealistically, a binary logic of the live and the recorded, the pure and the contaminated, the original and its encroachment. This binary logic cannot be maintained if we want to research performance. Phelan's research is enabled by the reproduced images she scrutinizes in her work – performance artists fail to disappear in the reproduced, mediatized images that support her discourse. Video is a necessary and unnecessarily maligned aid to research; without it, performance disappears and we lose our history and our capacity to think through performance.

The Binary of Presence and Absence

In 1996 we were invited by writer-director Jenny Kemp to make a videotape of her new work, *The Black Sequin Dress*, which had transferred from its premiere season at the Adelaide Festival of the Arts to the Malthouse Theatre, Melbourne. What began as an artist's request for the academy to record her work for the benefit of both parties (we would use the video for teaching and research, Kemp for publicity and promotion) became a complex series of negotiations involving artists' rights, industrial agreements, and contractual arrangements among an ever-expanding number of players.

Paradoxically, the least contentious issue was copyright: that clearly belonged to the writer–director of the theatre production. Making the video was also relatively straightforward under the supervision of postgraduate student Paul Hosking, who has videoed numerous indoor and outdoor performance events. Rather, the drama began over the determination of the right to show and view the video. Our account of the difficulties in making the video recording of *The Black Sequin Dress* and the negotiations over its use were presented at the National Symposium on Research into the Performing Arts in Melbourne in 1997.[3] The negotiations over

the viewing rights drew on industrial agreements and copyright law, as one would expect, but they also opened up a range of theoretical questions about the electronic media's impact on the practice of performance criticism, the fixing of the proper objects of study of university Theatre Studies departments, the nature of the relationship between the recording and live performance, and, finally, the practice of video literacy.

This paper contributes to the ongoing discussion, initiated in *New Theatre Quarterly* by Gay McAuley and Annabelle Melzer, of the issues surrounding video documentation. In doing this, we will draw into the discussion the quite considerable contribution of Philip Auslander, whose writings on the subject of 'liveness' and media on the one hand and the notion of presence in performance on the other, make for a productive new understanding of the 'ontology of performance'. We bring these theorists to the table to discuss our own investigations of video literacy as part of the case for the use of video for performance research. This case is set against the restrictive practices of those practitioners and theorists who would oppose it for the sake of preserving the right of disappearance.

Annabelle Melzer notes that video and other electronic arts have already created 'a revolution in teaching methods and research' which 'also provide a fertile locus for discussions in the theory of art'.[4] But she is also well aware of the opposition to video from practitioners such as Peter Brook. In Brook's view the video is subordinate to the performance, its production at best an aid to the betterment of the live event whose interests it serves. Melzer also revisits orthodox views of the video as documentation: that the video recording of live theatre is a useful form of notation or documentation, where the intention is to enable the study of the how-to of theatre production by practitioners.

This view reflects an increasing acceptance amongst practitioners, such as Brook, of the view that the video can act as an aid to the production of theatre documentation. This is, after all, merely an electronic extension of the Brechtian *Modelbuch*. On this model, the

video does not claim to reproduce the theatrical event on the basis of equivalence of aesthetic experience, pleasure, or entertainment. Filmed versions of plays usually fulfil this purpose. The Berliner Ensemble produced a 16mm version of *Mother Courage* with Helene Weigel, in which she reprised her stage role, and other more recent filmed plays have included the version of Peter Weiss's *Marat* directed by Peter Brook with members of the RSC. This was utilized by Patrice Pavis, for instance, as evidence of a relation between film and theatre.[5] In contrast to the live performance and the staged-for-film versions, the video is characterized in terms of a series of lacks – the live presence of the actor, the actor–audience dynamic, the atmosphere of the theatre, the filmic shots of the film – and the absence of pleasure and aesthetic value.

The primacy of the live event over the video is thus derived from several sources, affirming both its mystique and its essential liveness. We see in Brook's construction the endurance of the binary of presence and absence in performance, as it privileges the live event over its reduced, derivative other, the video recording. Philip Auslander has already problematized this binary, and the first part of this paper focuses on the anxieties that surface at this point of 'implosion' between the live and mediatized performance.[6] One anxiety concerns the status of individual memory as the legitimate and dynamic record of the performance. Another concerns the performer whose body and self is at stake in the recorded performance.

Legitimizing the Video Image

Gay McAuley, whose Centre for Performance Studies at the University of Sydney has experimented with a number of different recording techniques – from edited and multiple-image recording using three cameras to digital compression – places the onus on the users of such documents to interpret the information contained in them, mindful that what they see is neither 'theatrical performance or television drama'.[7] In other words, it is important for researchers to define their object of study, the video as 'artefact', and to set out the specificity of their viewing practices.

We need to understand the industry perception that the video is a threat to performers' moral rights. (What is it that is slightly shameful about appearing in the auditorium with cables and cameras? Why do we apologise about video?) And, more productively and affirmatively, we need to understand *how* we watch performance on video. What is a video recording of live performance? What does video generate for performance analysis and criticism? In the second part of this paper, we offer an eight-point description of our viewing practices as a response to McAuley's call for responsible viewing, and as a guide to reading the recording medium.

Our major provocation is for Theatre Studies to consider the video as an artefact in its own right that can be theorized outside the binary system into which it has been placed. We wish to free the video for the plurality of its practices and its capacity to produce meaning. We want to unpick the theatre's investment in presence, which rebounds across writers, directors, performers, and their agents, who seek to protect themselves from video, to argue that it is too late to be coy about electronic modes of representation. The future of performance lies in electronics and conduction.

In the meantime, Theatre Studies in Australia has no national archive in which videos can be located and made accessible to the public. At the Lincoln Center, New York, and the Theatre Museum, London, the study of live performance with video recordings has facilitated research by both academics and theatre professionals, and the commercial release of significant recordings from European and American companies has been marketed to the academy specifically for teaching purposes. The peculiarly Australian experience that drives this essay is one in which performance analysis relies upon memories of the performance event which are sometimes prompted by photographic stills (curiously, not the subject of contention).

Yet the video is a frequently used teaching tool across all art forms in Australia – except theatre. Not only do the state theatres deny public access to video documentation of live performances, but independent and small theatres – many of which incorporate video into their performances and which videotape the live event, as does the Melbourne-based company Not Yet Its Difficult – worry about the dissemination of video recordings. Others, who are more amenable to releasing their work on video, such as the Melbourne Workers Theatre, are restrained by industrial agreements. All these regulations constrain the use of video for performance analysis and delegitimize the act of viewing a video. (We make a distinction here between videos of the live performance, which is our own interest, and those manufactured by companies specifically for promotion purposes, where the company retains its artistic control of the images.)

The Memory of Performance

The history of performance analysis throws some light on the enduring prejudice against the video, as the desecration of memory. In the period before the semiotic study of theatre, the stage spectacle was 'considered too ephemeral a phenomenon for systematic study, [and] had been effectively staked off as the happy hunting ground of reviewers, reminiscing actors, historians, and prescriptive theorists'.[8]

A decade later Eugenio Barba, writing in *The Drama Review*, claimed that 'Film and electronics realize what was unthinkable until this century, performances that can be preserved practically unchanged. And thus they obscure the awareness that the essential dimension of the theatrical performance resists time not by being frozen in a recording but by transforming itself'[9] – through being able to transform itself into the 'individual memories' of the 'individual spectators'. Performance is not fixed in time but is changeable within spectatorial memory and remains therefore ephemeral.

There are two initial problems with this argument. On the one hand, it privileges the ephemeral nature of theatre and memory as somehow true to the form of theatre and, on the other, it relies upon individual memories to carry the truths of theatre through time. Surely the very ephemerality of individual memory should make it suspect as a reliable record for a performance truth?

The most obvious thing to be said is that Barba's emphasis on the ephemeral and transformative potential of performance and on the individual's individual memory positions performance within an elitist and bourgeois cultural sphere of the kind we have also described as theological. The most explicit denunciation of this position comes from Roger Copeland: 'The idea that the theatre's "liveness" is – in itself – a virtue, a source of automatic, unearned moral superiority to film and television, is sheer bourgeois sentimentality.'[10]

The more critical question for performance analysis is the status of memory. We are not opposed to memory or the way in which the memory of performance transforms over time, or the way in which the memory of a performance becomes the source for writing about it. But we do oppose a hierarchy of performance reception where memory is the only fit place for performance to be stored. Whose memories are privileged? Historically, it has been those of bourgeois gentlemen and their musings.

We must remember that memory, unless forgotten, is coded; it cannot be otherwise. What this means in terms of performance analysis is that we rely on the already coded narratives of individual memories (actors, directors, theatre critics, etc.), each of whose narratives retells the performance, historicizing it and representing it as discourse. Moreover, memory tends to be non-specific. It conflates different performers, different nights, different performances of the same play, and different settings in different countries. And it does so in the service of discourses such as theatre history or contemporary performance theory which would situate performance in histories of representation.

For this reason, memory is also highly selective: it tends to reconstruct the histor-

ically or politically significant performances. Knowing this, certain performances (and their authors and directors) are presented as historically available for memorializing. So Barba is wrong to privilege memory as a storehouse for performance because it protects it from the representational operations of the electronic media. Memory is representational, selective, and stimulated by the persuasive image. And, in analysis, memory is invested with projections and repressions that distort the very events they purport to recall. As Philip Auslander has said of the use of memory in a court of law, where the stakes are arguably higher than for the theatre, 'human memory is not [a] safe haven from regulation and control'.[11] Performance memory does not produce a purer form of truth.

Why is it that Performance Studies still attaches a greater degree of authenticity to individual accounts of performance and to recovered memories than to video recordings? The rhetorical question refers back to Theatre Studies, with its traditional reliance on biographical narratives, and is carried forward in Performance Studies, through the capacity of performance to authenticate the experience of the individual subject. Barba's individual spectator's individual memory is based on *his* experience of the performance which is necessarily subjective – indeed, many would argue that its uniqueness is its strength.

This is considered to be authentic and productive subjectivity because it leads us directly to the experience of the individual subject. But what this means for performance research is that 'recovered memories' of the live event remain unquestioned. The reconstitution of performance through individual and recovered memory is thus rarely referred to by the researcher and it results in generalizations such as 'Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach*', as if each performance is the self-same thing, existing autonomously and enduring across time and space without any context. Only the theatre reviewer covering the first night is direct about the situation of their reception and his/her experience of a particular performance.

We are not saying that the video is objective, but that different researchers can see the same record and produce different analyses, of which none is more authoritative than any other. And with the video, one is reminded of the social and historical context of the performance through costumes, hair-styles, and accents, as well as the laughter and noises of the audience. These details are often lost in the subtext of memory.

The Presence of Performance

Perhaps the real concern is the possibility that performance will be fragmented and degraded into codes and literal action, as in the worst performance analysis. This view represents an orthodoxy of contemporary performance – that the video displaces the live event and fixes it, as Barba complained, in time. On this view, the video is considered to be a heavily mediated, impoverished image which suffers from the loss of the multiple foci for the spectator. There is a loss of information about the *mise en scène*. It is more heavily framed and the gaze is constructed through the eye of the camera. The specificity accorded to the video appears as a poverty of representation, compared with the 'richness' attributed to the theatre. This poverty of representation is also attributed to the actor, whose presence on video is said to be frozen in time and 'lifeless'.

The actor persists as the powerful factor in this binary. Where Auslander notes 'the anxiety of critics',[12] video produces a major anxiety on the part of actors and those who wish to protect them, such as directors and industrial and legal bodies. Part of this anxiety is about the nature and the quality of substitution, but the predominant fear is that, without their presence, actors will lose control over their image and its distribution. Control over image is enshrined in debates about artists and their moral rights, but supporting that is a philosophical stance on presence which claims that the live body is the manifestation of self. As an agent of self, this body cannot, therefore, be reproduced without the presence of the actor who animates it.

The primary quality associated with live performance is the presence of the living, speaking actor. The live body is privileged – the voice delivered and received without mediation, the palpable energy of the actor and the simultaneity of actions – over its reproduced other, the image. Theatre's liveness and its ephemerality rest on this notion of performance as pure presence. Yet as the processes of deconstruction have shown, representation, on which the theatre relies, is based on absence rather than presence. As for Derrida, 'Presence, in order to be presence and self-presence, has always already begun to represent itself, has always already been penetrated.'[13]

Except during the period of realism, performance has always foregrounded its representational apparatus. Elinor Fuchs has argued that western representational theatre already has imitative and reproductive relations with the real. The notion of performance as a space of presence denies the mediation of linguistic and other semiotic systems that have already inserted themselves into the *mise en scène*, and which have created distance between the performance and the real. Throughout the twentieth century, video and other forms of visual and reproduced film or photographic texts have also 'intruded' upon the performance text, and this has contributed to the supposed de-authentication or 'absencing' in some sense of the speaking subject and pure presence.[14]

Auslander, in responding to Derrida's position on presence, notes that performance is constituted by difference. This discovery of difference, at what was once the site of origin and presence, is further cause for anxiety. The persistence of the notion of presence in performance is linked to the sense of loss experienced in a secularized society:

Having lost what we suspect is the only valid theatre of communal ritual we either rhapsodize about theatres of other times and places or attempt to ground theatrical activity in versions of presence which bear the stamp of secularism, psychology, or political analysis in the place of religion.[15]

The value placed on presence in performance is a form of nostalgia for participation in the communal ritual. It is crucially also a nostalgia for the wholeness of being. Since Schechner theorized performance as ritual, the notion of a community of celebrants (participants who include the actors and spectators in a relationship of faith/belief engaged in a suspension of disbelief) has been celebrated. And while this model of performance criticizes the separation between actor and spectator in the theological stage, it supplants it with an emphasis on the presence of the spectator as holy witness. This dual emphasis on presence, *communitas* and wholeness, had the added advantage of overcoming the perceived problems with representational theatre. A theatre of presence was to replace the theatre of representation.

The Layers of 'Difference'

The contemporary questioning of presence undoes the origin of – and dissolves – the theological stage and the ritual of the event. The writer is no longer the point of origin for the dramatic text, the actor a point of origin for the performance, nor the spectator the point of origin for memory. Indeed, the body and the voice of the actor have always represented presence rather than appearing as unmediated pure presence. This capacity to represent, to appear live, is grounded in the disappearance of the actor's self, and the difference between the actor and his or her self. Even the actor's body alone on the stage does not guarantee presence. As Auslander argues: 'Pure self-exposure is no more possible on a physical level than on a verbal level because of the mediation of difference.'[16] There are always several layers of difference between the actor and truth or pure presence.

A theory of difference refuses the notion of capture and arrival that actors associate with presence. To understand performance as built on difference is to work with a 'productive non-presence'[17] – that is, the multiplicities that flourish once the originary moment (the text, the body, or the self) is set aside. The play of difference in performance shifts authority and authenticity from the presence of the speaking subject to the net-

works of signification that circulate around stage and auditorium. The actor is no longer the centrepiece of the performance, the 'sign *par excellence*',[18] but, like meaning, is produced by the performance. From the perspective of contemporary deconstruction, the divisions between actor and self, actor and spectator, performance and not-performance are multiple, ambivalent, and dynamic, and occur within the play of differences that constitute performance.

If performance is not constituted by the presence of the actor, but by the actor's several differences from other actors, from his or her own self, from the spectator and so on, then we can no longer claim that performance's essence is its liveness. This is not to say that live performance cannot be said to exist, but that performance is *more-and-less-than* purely present. Theatre is more-and-less-than the *mise en scène* of the theological stage. The before and after of the performance, from rehearsal to critical analysis, are part of 'the play of difference' that makes performance multiple, ambiguous, and dynamic.

The Concept of Videocy

Performance Studies has reified the period between curtain up and down 'as if' it represents the whole: that is, the closure of performance signification. That period, as we know, is also the bourgeois face of theatre that conceals the negotiations and struggles of its production. To be so precious about this public, theological space that the videotape appears to diminish its presence is an affectation that is finally a denial of the obvious point that the actor's presence has 'always already been penetrated'. This more-and-less-than of performance also operates for the actor's presentness in the role and may vary from night to night and stage to stage. Presentness is the trace of the actor's difference in the performance of the role. This prospect is understandably disturbing for performers and their policing agents, and begins to explain their opposition to the video recording and its analysis.

But what is the video recording of the performance? One answer is that the video is

a check on the memory of performance. As Erika Fische-Lichte writes, the video is

an artefact [that] allows the recipient to attribute ever new meanings to its various elements, to their combinations and to the structure as a whole; and, whatever the meanings may be, it is possible for others to check them by direct reference to the artefact.[19]

But the video is more than the artefact: it is the agency which mediates a difference between presence and absence, and it does so on several levels. Video can never replace the performance because the one precedes the other. Deconstruction cannot exist without the word, independent of that which it deconstructs. The video retains the traces of the performance just as the performance retains traces of the written text, which itself is the trace of other texts and so on. But the video is not constituted only by the traces of the performance; it maps the viewing of the performance through the eye of the camera-person and by extension through the eyes of the searchers or researchers. The video is not simply a document or a replacement text either written or performative, and in this sense it is not an agent: it has agency.

This agency is what Gregory Ulmer calls the relay of 'mystory' in which the video structures articulations at three levels of invention: the personal, the popular, and the expert. For the spectator/researcher operating at the expert or disciplinary level, what is needed is 'videocy', or a theory of video viewing. Where Theatre Studies has well-developed methodologies for analyzing live performance, viewing and reading video requires its own articulated approach.

Ulmer adopts a deconstructive process for reading television, the relay of mystory, and asks: 'What are the consequences of difference at the more elaborated levels of discourse and logic?'[20] His work provides a theory for reading the video, in so far as he recognizes that logic (*logos*) is connected with words, and that we need more than logic to deal with video. He asks how we should conduct ourselves in the age of television. Electronically, he says, by reasoning through conduction. 'Reasoning by conduction involves,

then, the flow of energy through a circuit.'[21] Ulmer draws on electrical metaphors to posit a mode of reasoning that moves with the images transmitted through the video. Research then becomes a live and energetic circuit of exchange between the video and the viewing and reasoning subjects.

Our use of the *Black Sequin Dress* video enabled us to theorize our own spectatorship, which was active, discursive, visceral, and somatic. As we watched, we were talking, often in a highly animated fashion, and analyzing away from the constraints on the audience in the bourgeois theatre. Our talking was recorded onto cassette tapes, put through a transcription machine, typed into a word-processor, printed for further discussion. The mediation does not stop but it can be made more articulate. We and the performance were plugged into the machinery of reproduction and representation – the tape deck, the recording machine, the computer, the printer, and so on. We were subjects within a circuit of conduction.

Systematizing the Semiotics of Watching

Our experience of using the video recording to analyze performance leads us to a new sense of the signifying capacity of performance. We discovered the following semiotizing processes as specific to this medium.

1   The replay facility of the VCR allows for the repetition of the same as difference. Each time you look at the image in motion something different appears; there is a zoom effect in the looking.

2   The freeze frame. This hold is that which is absent in time: the image becomes like the photograph with a 'punctum' revealing the detail that has and has not been selected; dramaturgical decisions can be examined.

3   The pixellation of the relayed material creates an animation of the surface. The luminosity of skin, shadows, texture, and surface with all its hypnotic effects is apparent. The body of the actor is very much alive and the *mise en scène* is retransmitted.

4   The closeness of the viewer to the screen is highly charged and erotic. The illusion of, and desire for, intimacy with the actor is activated.

5   Surfing between scenes and intensities allows the viewer to read against the grain of the performance. The cutting up of the performance and the redistribution of moments of intensity interrupts the movement of 'ormance text towards the cathartic momen cally this enables a researcher to deconstruct the myths which structure the *mise en scène*.

6   The provocation of loud animated responses – viewers can interrupt vocally as much as they like and then interrogate the reasons for those energetic exclamations.

7   The performance is reactivated by the pushing of the stop and play buttons. The perverse (cruel but pleasurable) separation of viewer and video, video and performance, is asserted and intensified through the command of the stop–play.

8   A demand for further urgency and investigation – the immediacy of the exchange activates a desire to look again and again and to theorize the provocation of a particular performance.

This watching process also foregrounds our own formation as researchers. Videocy calls up elements of our daily lives, emotional memories, our personal experience, critical reading, political struggles, etc. Videocy is more-and-less than viewing and semiotizing. Just as all members of the creative team bring many elements to the rehearsal process, so the researchers bring many elements to the post-performance stage of the continuum. Their semiosis rehearses ideas – tries out and discards text – and produces a form of commentary which is like and unlike the recorded event, the performance. The commentary-making is itself alive and energized. The performance and its agents once again make for a very crowded space. There is the reappearance of the chattering spectators.

Critically and emphatically, we do not move out of the space of performance. We still have the reach of the actor, the *mise en scène* and the actor performing for a live audience. The researchers still have to ask, 'What does the performance want to say?' But this is not in order to authenticate any one subject's memory or construction of a live event. Performance is not, as McHoul and Lucy have said of film, just 'a proxy for

(or expression of) some person's wants or desires or intentions'.[22] Rather, the video, like performance, is 'an object' able to produce meanings. Both have signifying capacity.

The writing of the researchers is alive to the representations of the performance. The writer/director Jenny Kemp responded with great interest to our video-reading of her play.[23] 'I loved your reading particularly of the physical text of which one rarely gets a reading. . . . Good to be reminded of the power of the physical reading, that it equals or even at times surpasses or overwhelms the verbal text.'[24] Reading returns to the condition of performance as ultimately a circuit of conduction.

We argue that the relation between the video recording of live performance ought not to be an 'either/or' but a 'more-and-less-than' situation. We agree with McAuley that 'the theatrical event always escapes the recording medium',[25] and yet there is a need to develop reading skills – 'videocy' – that do not reduce performance to a network of semiotic systems. The video is like a tentacle of the performance – attached to the performance, but also reaching out for its own destination, pulsating and sucking into new points of connection. Its new spectators plug into its processes of conduction.

Rather than killing off or replacing live performance, as in the 'either/or' model, the video may fulfil an additional task, protecting theatre from redundancy. Discourses about the technologies of performance may ensure that performance is included in contemporary cultural discourse. Without that inclusion, performance may remain sacred, but it will also become increasingly absent from critical theory. As we move into the digital matrix of documentation and analysis,[26] performance cannot remain enclosed in a reactionary metaphysics of presence.

Critical thinking about *différance* – its implications for the notion of the presence of the actor and the deconstruction of the theological stage – occurs as new technologies invade the theatre. Together, theory and technology advance with some urgency – a powerful case for rethinking the ontology of performance.

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