

## Tim Edkins and Jon McKenzie

### The Making of *Perform or Else*

#### Introduction

Tim Edkins

*Perform or Else*'s (2001) disciplinary location is difficult to pin down. On the back cover only the discipline of performance studies is listed. However, opening the book reveals its Library of Congress classification code (BF481 .M395 2001), which means that in many academic and research libraries it can be found in psychology (subclass BF) under "Consciousness. Cognition" (BF309–499) in the "Work" subheading (BF481), slotted between "Time, space, causality, etc." (BF467) and "Fatigue. Mental fatigue" (BF482) (Library of Congress 2000, 150). Shannon Jackson (2011, 17) argues "that interdisciplinary artists have in fact been disciplined—and skilled—by deep involvement in distinct art forms, art histories, and contexts of professionalization and fiscal support." This insight can also help us situate the interdisciplinary scholar and their publications. Asking what histories and practices of making art and theory Jon McKenzie was trained in allows us to trace how this involvement in different disciplines informed the book's research gestation and design. When the training takes place over many years, the first substantive disciplinary engagement shapes the encounters with subsequent disciplines, modulating how these are stumbled upon, understood, and engaged with. Jackson (2011, 4) notes that the disciplinary training of the viewer shapes what they experience and valorize: "Our evaluations of work depend not only upon critical histories but also upon disciplinary perceptual habits that can make for drastically different understandings of what we are in fact encountering." This can also be the case when encountering another discipline.

As an undergraduate at the University of Florida, McKenzie trained as a studio-based painter. Signing up for a theory course in the English department, a film class with Robert Ray that turned out to be full, he was placed in Gregory Ulmer's section instead, where he found himself parachuted into a distinctive approach to Continental philosophy: "I'd studied the avant-garde 'art historically' (effectively, from a formalist perspective) but never as cases of experimental research informed by theories of relativity, psychoanalysis, Marxism, etc. Soon I was immersed in Barthes, Lacan, and most importantly, the deconstructive and grammatical projects of Derrida" (McKenzie 2007, 22).

After an abortive graduate experience at Madison in Fall 1984, McKenzie returned to Florida to do an MA in English. Commenting on his “Floridian immersion” in theory, he describes how he approached it having been trained as an artist first:

I later realized that elsewhere, most folks studied theory as exclusively concerned with critique, whereas I was also taught to approach theory creatively. One of the first “lessons” Ulmer taught me was that even the most critical of theories must first be invented: Marx, Freud, de Beauvoir—all had to first create their critical, analytical theories. Theory has thus become, for me, a form of applied conceptual art: theory creates concepts applicable to the critical problems of our time. (McKenzie 2007, 23)

I explore what disciplines follow this in the interview below. The cumulative effect of McKenzie’s engagements with different disciplines can be seen in both *Perform or Else*’s content and form, exemplified by how the analysis of different challenges and challengers build the argument in tandem with the design of the book: a duet that challenges the reader.

Across the front cover a flame cuts a trail diagonally from bottom left—reaching for, but not quite making it to, the top right. The object at its fore is out of focus, but its upward trajectory evokes a space mission of some sort. Beneath, and following the flame’s upward flight, the book’s title is spelt out in green, orange, and white raised vinyl lettering in the shape of, a curious reader will discover, an orbiter, *Perform*, its external tank (ET), *or Else*, and its Solid Rocket Boosters, *From Discipline to Performance*. Turning over, the credit for the cover image yields these clues: “STS 51L Investigation - time as of 73.201, Flash from region between orbiter and ET and LH2 tank. Roti/Melbourne Beach. Courtesy of NASA.” For now, what STS 51L denotes remains unexplained. The back cover is also unclear: an abstract murky turquoise with speckles of rust. Credited as an image, it does not seem to be of anything. However, if rotated by the reader under a light, the beginnings of the word Challenger appear from top left to bottom right, in transparent raised, not clean-cut but eroded, lettering. The back cover image credit offers further clues: “51-L Rescue and salvage operation. Courtesy of NASA.” On top lies text laying out the book’s synopsis in the tone of a film trailer.

This intersection of experimentation in its argument and design shapes what the book looks like when it arrives in the hands of readers. The question that follows on from what training underpinned the book’s realization is what it might provoke in its readers when discovered in libraries, bookshops, reading lists, reference chains, critical introductions, and internet search results. It may function as a guidebook, enabling migrations across disciplines.

Stephen Shukaitis and I interviewed McKenzie in person on 24 March 2013, when he was in London delivering a keynote paper (McKenzie 2013). We discussed *Perform or Else*, but I was curious to find out about its construction. To do so I arranged a follow-up interview, which took place online on 4 October 2013. I wove both interviews together for an issue of *ephemera* edited by Shukaitis. However, it became clear that the questions about the book’s construction had taken on a life of their own—there had been much more to discover than I had anticipated—and departed too far from the journal issue’s focus on workers’ inquiry. These questions were therefore cut, and the remaining interview was published (McKenzie, Edkins, and Shukaitis 2014). The story of the making of *Perform or Else*, which included some points from the first interview but mainly answers from the

second, therefore remained unpublished and stowed away. I am grateful to the editors of this special issue for allowing this story to be told now.

### **From master's thesis to doctoral dissertation**

Buried deep within the writing of this text there lies a paradox of sorts, one that came to my attention years ago. I had just discovered the performance art of Laurie Anderson and happened to read Jean-François Lyotard on the postmodern condition of performativity. What struck me then still resonates today: "performance" can be read as both experimentation and normativity. This paradox, if it is one, forms the kernel of *Perform or Else*. (McKenzie 2001, ix)

**Tim Edkins:** Can I begin by asking about the original research design that led to *Perform or Else*?

**Jon McKenzie:** Well, you should know that it was a rewriting of my doctoral dissertation. If you want to talk about the original research plan, I did a master's thesis on Laurie Anderson in 1987. That is when I first started thinking about performance. After graduating from painting at the University of Florida in '84 I went to Madison to study film theory, which led to my own Wisconsin death trip: formalist analysis presupposes a corpse. Seeking life support, I went back to do my master's with Ulmer in the English department in Florida. I wrote about Anderson and Jean-François Lyotard's (1984) performativity. And so I was already thinking about multimedia philosophy, that is what I was doing with Anderson and then mashing it up with all of the theory that I was doing. That had been an experimental thesis itself. The core of that was the notion of a normative performance as embodied in Lyotard and then the mutational as in Anderson, and how is it that this term performance could be used in this kind of experimental whacked out way and yet be this new mode of normativity. The subtitle was "La Parfumance" or something like that, so I was already plugged in.<sup>1</sup> I had seen Jacques Derrida talk at Florida, and he had done the paper "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce" (1992), and I had met him through one of my professors, John P. Leavey, Jr., and we had gone out for lunch with a bunch of graduate students. Looking back now, I think, "What are the odds that he would come to Gainesville, and I would see him, and he would talk about the performative in relationship to James Joyce, and that I would go on to do performance theory?" So I became a performance person and decided I wanted to go to New York, because a lot of my art school friends were there. At Florida, Robert D'Amico had told me that Michael Taussig was going to Tisch School of the Arts at New York University (NYU). I knew of Taussig, but I hadn't read his work. Mady Schutzman and Rebecca Schneider and other folks, we all got to study with Mick, as well as with Peggy Phelan, Richard Schechner, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and others. It was a very interesting crew there. When I got to NYU frankly no one had heard of Lyotard's performativity. That was the research project, trying to grasp this paradox or blur between this normativity and mutation. That was in the back of my head throughout graduate school, but at NYU we were focusing on the mutational performance.

**TE:** When you began your PhD dissertation at NYU, how were you thinking about structuring it?

**JM:** When I started thinking about doing the dissertation at first I thought about using the Elephant Man as the primary object. The film directed by David Lynch, *The Elephant Man* (1980), had come out, and so that was in my mind. I liked this science of the freak show component, so you had the normative and the transmutational. One of my area exams was the freak show, and I went out to Coney Island and Jersey to research there. I went to freak shows wherever I could find them travelling in the States. I focused in on that, which became the dissertation proposal that was approved. But how I got from Elephant Man to Challenger was at some point I decided I would organize my dissertation as a freak show, and I think I had already locked in on the number seven there. I can't cough up what all the seven freaks would have been. But it would have been the Elephant Man on one side and then on the other side Professor Challenger becoming lobster from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Those were the ends, and in between one of them was Linda Montano's Chicken Women. When I first arrived at NYU, Phelan, who'd later become my dissertation supervisor, was really into Montano, who had become a fairly big performance artist on the West Coast. Montano had actually done her graduate work at Madison and had invented the Chicken Woman as a line of flight out of the art department, which at the time was awash with monumental sculpture. It was her deterritorialization.<sup>2</sup> Another theory freak was the headless figure associated with the journal *Acéphale*, coedited by Georges Bataille. And so that is how I got from Elephant Man to Challenger.

**TE:** You had these seven instances slotted into the freak show, what were you hoping that the freak show as an overarching frame would allow you to do?

**JM:** The general purpose of what I have been doing for a long, long time is the displacement of Western concepts into other forms. And this comes from studying with Ulmer, Ray, Ellie Ragland, and Leavey at Florida. If you put it into traditional deconstructive terms, we were trying to displace the oppositions rather than just overturn them. Now, at this point my life, I would describe it that you need to shift to different architectures of knowledge and different media. So binaries, and the triangle, a circle, a missile are among the basic moves of Western philosophy. Could one introduce others? Like the number seven. Actually, there is a tradition of seven. But you'll notice in my work there is a supernumerary, there's always eight or nine or ten, and that is built in. As is Deleuze and Guattari: writing to the  $n$  minus one. I'm always adding one and subtracting the notion of oneness at the same time. This move connects right up with Antonin Artaud's notion of taking the script and displacing it into a larger *mise-en-scène* in the Theatre of Cruelty. It's a similar move to Joseph Beuys trying to take concepts and bring them back at first to a metaphorical basis and then displace them materially. And it escapes the notion of metaphor and metonymy at that point because you are going into the logic that is more like dream logic. It comes from Derrida's reading of the mystic writing pad in Sigmund Freud. You enter into a different space, a different logic. You can be completely logical in this crazy way. If you study the Wolf Man, there is a rigorous logic. The experiment is to displace these things into other forms, and the move is no longer that transcendental move. The whole notion of a general theory, and here I am following Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1976), is an impossible science. A general theory of performance is itself impossible, but that doesn't mean you can't mime and mine it and do interesting things with it. That's what I have been doing for a long while.

On the morning of 28 January 1986, I stood at a lectern teaching freshman writing at the University of Florida. I was a graduate student, and it was my first year teaching. One hundred and thirty-five miles to the southeast, at Kennedy Space Center, another teacher was about to give the lesson of her life. On this bitterly cold morning (there had been a freak Florida freeze the night before), Teacher-in-Space Christa McAuliffe sat aboard NASA's space shuttle *Challenger*, which had begun launch sequence for mission 51-L. The sky was clear, the airwaves open. That freezing morning at Kennedy, it was not one teacher going into space—if we make this judgment affirmatively, it was an entire world of teachers. (McKenzie 2001, 139)

**TE:** What drove your move from Elephant Man to Challenger?

**JM:** The dissertation was going to be organized around these figures but as I got working it evolved. I realized the Elephant Man, even though he was resurrected in the twentieth century, was still too nineteenth century. I needed an object that was much more twentieth century, and into the future. And I had been really affected by the *Challenger* explosion when I was at Florida. It was '86 when it exploded. I was in the midst of this master's thesis, and it was my first year of teaching, which I mention in the book. There are autobiographical aspects encrypted there which perhaps no one will find, not even myself. And any book has that. So that was in my head. I had already connected it to Anderson in particular ways because she had talked about the shuttle and these things in the *United States'* (1983) performance. And the idea of thinking about theory in relationship to the blasting off of rockets that came through missiles and Derrida's essay "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)" (1984, cited in McKenzie 2001, 238), and its reading of Martin Heidegger and destiny. You send up a theory, you send up a rocket and most theories can be thought of that way. They come crashing down and some of them maybe they go into orbit. It has to do with the notion of transcendence and moving away from the body to the mind, which is a very fundamental move in the philosophical tradition. So there was a parody but also a history, specifically military rocket history, key to technological performance research. Then, once I got going, I realized that there was so much in the *Challenger*. I jettisoned them all and went with the *Challenger*, because there was enough material in its cargo bay.

### From doctoral dissertation to book

**TE:** How did you approach moving from the dissertation to the book?

**JM:** We should contextualize this. When I finished my dissertation, I wasn't able to find a teaching position. Performance studies was just beginning to gain ground outside theater departments. Judith Butler's work was just beginning to have the impact that got English departments really interested in it. At the time I wasn't having any luck and came very close to not getting an academic job. I had just about accepted a position in the new media industry, in New York's Silicon Alley, because the web boom was happening in the '90s. I worked as a writer and an information architect in the web industry, first for a small four-person crew and then in a larger agency that had big corporate clients. While that was going on, I was also continuing to research.

The big transformation from the dissertation was I really went into the technological performance. When I had first started looking at this, I kind of had these two things in nice oppositions: the cultural performance and then this thing, I can't remember what I called it back then, but the technological and the organizational were collapsed together. But even in my dissertation I realized these are very different things: the engineers are doing something different. I realized that the technological was different from the organizational, but I had not done the research. This was in the analog days of research and I had not gone through the card catalogues and sat down with a bunch of engineering texts. I eventually did, combing through them and trying to figure out what performance meant for them. The challenge of both of those literatures is that folks use the term a lot and didn't really theorize it. Performance studies does a much better job, not surprisingly, of critically reflecting on what is this thing performance that we are talking about. Researchers in these other paradigms just deploy it all over the place, and only in a few places reflect on this thing that they are talking about. That took a lot of time and was not done in the dissertation. Afterwards I also discovered this wonderful book by Diane Vaughan, *The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance at NASA* (1996). That really confirmed a lot of things I was on to. It also allowed me to go somewhere else with them. And building up the technological side was important to see because a lot of the really big insights came from reading that research. If you study technology, you end up discovering Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Bruno Latour. So the big transformation was to expand the technological performance.

I was also fleshing out the experiment in the backend, which in the dissertation had been very small. The experience design I envisioned was very one, two, three steps and then you are in la-la land. The basic move is that you have got these figures that are performing post-conceptual or post-dramatic personae, and then off these figures theoretical events occur—or not. And again Ulmer, Leavey, and Ray at Florida had taught us—Craig Saper, Kathleen McHugh, Camilla Griggers, Bonnie Sparling—to look at theoretical texts that way. It is the only way you can understand what Derrida is doing in *Glas* (1986). It's experimental text, and if you only come at it for its argument or thesis then it's just mush. So you start reading the figures, you start reading a much more poetic structure.

The experiment in the backend of *Perform or Else* was how to shape those seven Challengers. And there is an articulation of the theory of resistance. I guess I would put it as resistance then. But anything that you put out there can be queered, so it could become a theory of normativity, depending on how it is picked up and plugged into things. That has to do with thinking displacement or the performative at the level of performances and performatives. I was drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's (1986) reading of Franz Kafka, and basically there is intensification within and between blocks of performances and performatives, jarring bits of subjectivity loose, deterritorializing the subject. And Deleuze and Guattari, while looking for an affirmative flight, also note that these things can crash, and that's again why *Challenger* makes a good case, as things can go into black holes.

At the level of paradigms of social organizations, I articulate perfumance in terms of activist cells, drawing on Critical Art Ensemble, this notion of these groups.<sup>3</sup> And there is also this figure of gay science, of research based in affective and cultural efficacies. These gay scientists are collaborators or networks of people that work across different disciplines and not even across but outside of disciplines, if I articulate it now, that would be the way that I would say it. And then at the level of onto-historical strata, and this is really the shift from

disciplinary to performance strata, and here I am channeling Deleuze's *Foucault* (1988), that the perfumative works in terms of time travel and spatial disruption. So *chora* or *khôra* would be one way to understand spatial disruption. *Khôra* is Plato's theory of a formless space/matrix, neither here nor there, being or non-being, from which all forms emerge. Ulmer mashes *khôra* with choral, choreography, and chorography to generate chorography, site-plan for what he's come to call avatar emergencies. Similarly, the seven or eight Challengers create a matrix, grid, or platform for events, encounters.

Thus, there is a different organization in the second half of the book than that laid out in the first half (McKenzie 2001, 25–26). There is a certain numerological thing happening. And it was really composed for people who have an ear or an eye for that, to see "Oh, this number seven appears in this weird way, what would it mean to organize knowledge around a number seven?" In the West we organize a lot of things around two and three. Those binary oppositions, we have like a two-bit mind. And Hegel and the Christian Trinity allow a third term to come in. But I knew I didn't want to write in a two or three. Because when it was cultural performance and whatever this other thing was—high performance or whatever—it becomes this is the good side and this is the bad side. I realized I needed to draw and quarter oppositions, and I was thinking of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of major and minor (McKenzie 2001, 224–28). There is a major and minor cultural, organizational, and technological performance. I didn't know of the minor of the organizational performance at the time, but the critical management studies you are engaging with was emerging back then. But the book's experience design was laid out that way. I wanted it to become completely crazy in the end but very rigorous at the same time. It calls for a certain reader, I suspect, to get that out of the backend, but that's what it's doing even now. And I do articulate it at several points, and I frame it by saying, "This is what is happening." And then the whole point is to try to demonstrate that in the text. That's how the backend works and doesn't work.

**TE:** Could you say a little more about how the numerological and the number seven functions?

**JM:** That has to do with displacing conceptual positions into other architectures. This is something that Derrida did many times, not just with the number seven. He did this in *The Truth in Painting* (1987)—there is a Gérard Titus-Carmel installation with 127 elements, so he writes a 127 micro-essays about the show. So you mime the object in a particular way. The number seven occurs in the *Challenger* explosion, the seven astronauts, and that has a long tradition in both philosophy and religion. And so you pick them up and you displace it. There was an attempt to organize knowledge and to frame the organization of knowledge in almost an absurd way. It plugs into Paul Feyerabend the philosopher of science. If you think of Thomas Kuhn as a crypto-structuralist, Feyerabend is a crypto-poststructuralist. He plugs into different epistemologies: anarchist, dada.... As a painter, discovering a world of theory driven by such possibilities, I found it really exciting.

## Designing the book

**TE:** How do the images at the beginning of each chapter function? I wondered if they are meant to be part of the architecture of the argument?

**JM:** In terms of the design, I wanted to use images that served as icons at the beginning of each chapter that told a story. I'm interested in thinking through these blocks composed of a visual or performance track and a textual or a performative track. Each chapter begins with an image-text montage which sets the tone for what is happening and is itself performative. If you look at, for instance, "Part III. Perfumance" (McKenzie 2001, 191), and this is before chapter seven begins, and given that this book has a numerological thing going on in it, that's an important chapter. There you find an image of a puzzle labelled "Ship Test with Pieces Arranged for Subject to Place in Frame" from an early twentieth century performance test given by the United States Army. The Army's adoption and use of performance tests was an important part of the emergence of normative performance because they hold up and legitimize French educator Alfred Binet's performance tests on a massive scale. This ship test is juxtaposed with the famous Mission Control report on the morning of the *Challenger* disaster: "Obviously a major malfunction" (McKenzie 2001, 191). The book tries to put the reader into the frame by saying, "Okay reader, you need to now try to put the pieces of this book, which is in your hands, into some kind of frame that you can do something with," which I then myself attempt to demonstrate using the *Challenger* as an exploding metamodel. I get this from Latour's *Aramis, or The Love of Technology* (1996), that what is needed is a theoretical apparatus able to expand and change shape depending upon the situation. This is what the *Challenger* deterritorialization attempts, because we should think about this whole thing in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's deterritorialization and the becoming lobster of Professor Challenger. What is it to become a spaceship, a lobster, an astronaut? What would your brain or your body need to do in order to make those leaps? The text becomes increasingly disjunctive but because of the layering and patterning, if you really take the thing in, it becomes more and more sensible. If you've got it tuned in right. That is how that architecture is working. There is an experience design, a performance design: some people will tune in and some will not; some people will struggle and get something out of it, and some will struggle and get nothing out of it. What work doesn't work like this, built as things are on the useless?

**TE:** Was there a particular way in which you were working on the images alongside the writing?

**JM:** Part of studying Montano and the art of everyday life with Phelan was, if you like, well, it's hard to even use the word ritual anymore without putting scare quotes on it, but I was drawn to the relationship between ritual and method, and to put it in shorthand, the way the literate world produces methods and the old oral world produces rituals, and this connection is something that Freud connected to when he noticed that his own methodological obsessions with psychoanalysis were not too different from some of the more famous paranoid obsessive patients. One thing Schechner did when he makes that move in the '60s was to ritualize theater. I was using, and I still do, it's almost like a personal sacred, and I got this from reading Bataille with Taussig.

This image (below) captures a little theory tableau or altar. The figures in that image are theoretical models. I can't remember where I drew that image of the john. It was in MacPaint in Florida or maybe NYU.

I have an old theory of jo(h)ntology that is based on my lifedeath and also plugged into Jean Genet and what Derrida does with all the genres in *Glas* (1986, 1, italics original), whose right column begins: "*What remained of a Rembrandt torn into small, very regular*

*squares and rammed down the shithole* is divided in two.” The theory comes from my early studies and readings of Derrida’s signature experiments and the displacement of subjectivity. Jo(h)ntology is to ontology what pataphysics is to physics: an idiosyncratic, at times idiotic, theory of being that passes through “Jon McKenzie”—body, mind, name, texts, images, etc. Friedrich Nietzsche claimed to have discovered the secret of the philosophers’ *names*, the punctum where material existence passed through a word toward the ideal, God, Truth, Nation, whatever transcendence they were pushing. Mimic Genet, I mapped all that on to a toilet, a john. It’s objective thinking via object thinking via objecthing. I mapped semiotics on to the toilet seat: the axes of paradigmatic and syntagmatic signification fit nicely on the seat, which swings up and down in culturally gendered ways, male and female (recall Jacques Lacan’s train station scene at “Hommes” and “Dames”). So a common john generates these identity- and sense-making axes, and then one can start playing around more, and you see you’ve got a tank of clean water and a bowl of shit—I’m full of it sometimes—so you get Heidegger’s notions of ex-appropriation and re-appropriation, and cleansing happens through this flushing or flashing mechanism, which I think Walter Benjamin’s plumber fixed after finding Marcel Duchamp a urinal.

And then there’s the vortex.... But who reenchants the world these days?



**Figure 1.** Jon McKenzie, *Prof. Challenger Theory Tableau*, 1992–98, mixed media. Image: Jon McKenzie.

These images are images, but it is not just a bunch of images, it is a world of images. I found the *Forbes* magazine cover (McKenzie 2001, 4), whose “Perform or Else” headline I stole, while working as a designer in a marketing department in an accounting firm. Or rather, it found or stole me: it was just sitting on the table outside the managing partner’s office and caught my eye. I am really interested in discovering things by chance encounters. It’s the performance of everyday life.

**TE:** How did you approach the publishing process?

**JM:** After I rewrote the manuscript, I went to visit Routledge when they were still based in London. I met with Talia Rodgers, my editor there, and brought along *The Telephone Book* (Ronell 1989): I asked, “Can we do something like this?” I then met with the designer, Matt Broughton. Design was an important part and not just fluff on the end, because grammatology is attacking the word at the letter and that means thinking about shapes, layout, materiality, and infrastructure. That is not add-on, although it is hard not to get the world to think that way, to sense this intervention in its material implications. This was part of the creative concept for *Perform or Else*. Talia was excited about the visual image track and experimental text, so she sent it out. The readers’ reports that came back were positive but had trouble with the backend. The readers all thought I needed to clean it up. One suggested that I break the backend up, because originally that whole experiment was one massive chapter. It was a great suggestion: I realized that cutting it up revealed the articulations and made those launches more visible.

The experimental aspects of the design meant that it had more expensive production costs. It was an expensive and laborious thing to produce. But if artists and scholars want to become more responsible for our own labor, we will learn how to layout and design, and not just simply ship it off and sign it away. We do not really know the means of production for our own books. We write and wait and finally get this beautiful, incredible fetish object but have little sense of its production.

**TE:** I have that question about the different components of the book. We have talked about images but were you thinking of any other forms like dictionaries, encyclopedias, and inventories?

**JM:** Part of that was miming the ancient tradition of generating lists, taking stock. Lists are an early literary form, and classicists such as Eric A. Havelock, Walter J. Ong, and Jack Goody trace the origin of our conceptual structures to Hesiod’s genealogical lists, that’s where we get the categories, the whole tree of genus and species, it’s Hesiod and these lists of “so and so beget so and so, who beget so and so....” So by listing performance products, centers, etc., I could provide genealogical evidence, if you like, of this or that research paradigm, while at the same time exposing them to rhizomatic drift, transpeciation, genredegeneration. There’s some thinking in that this kind of genealogical thing provided a structure for Aristotle to think about how do you create a conceptual architecture. And I’m demonstrating how much performance is out there, in these other realms. In terms of textual experiments, the models I was using come from a history of experimental theory which includes Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* (1999), Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore’s *The Medium is the Massage* (1967), and Avital Ronell’s *The Telephone Book* (1989). So I wouldn’t say dictionary or reference books in particular.

**TE:** In terms of the design, how were you hoping it would look alongside other books? How were you imagining that people would come across it in bookstores or libraries?

**JM:** When it first arrived, I was still at NYU, and I went to see where it was in the library, where I started it, to come full circle. And when I got the call number and started wandering around the stacks, I'm like, hey, I'm nowhere near the theater and performance section. It ended up slotted into industrial or organizational psychology. And I was thrilled. Because that means anybody who tries to come and get this book is going to have to come back here, and look and see what is the relationship of their research to this stuff. If they are coming to the book, their research is probably touching mine, and oh my god it's sitting in this space. I took a perverse pleasure in that. In the UK is it the same system?

**TE:** It is. It's nowhere near the theater and performance theory, which is interesting for both audiences who might arrive at it: the performance studies audiences who walk into a management section of the library and the management audiences that stumble across performance studies in the book. But the design makes it look quite distinct and difficult to place.

**JM:** In relationship to other performance studies books, there is a genre of them, and they often have performers, a body, on the cover. I wanted to put something on the cover that was not the traditional way of looking performance in terms of the human body, but in terms of one of the most complicated pieces of technology ever built, that exploded in front of everybody worldwide with a teacher on it. What is that object? It's not just a space shuttle; it was a series of transformations. What does it mean to study an object that is also a sailing ship, a professor, Heidegger's philosopheme of challenging-forth—that is all of these different things?

**TE:** Were you thinking of it in relation to fiction?

**JM:** I was citing Márcio Souza's *Lost World II: The End of the Third World* (1993). That fictional part was driven through the construction of these conceptual personae that are both real and fictive. There were particular works of fiction, but I am drawn more towards experimental theory. For example, Derek Pell's *Assassination Rhapsody* (1989), which came out of the Foreign Agent Semiotext(e) series. One of my first encounters with Deleuze and Guattari was with a book in this series called *On the Line* (1983), and it is a segment out of *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) which Semiotext(e) was translating and putting it out early. This book just blew my mind. *Assassination Rhapsody* was another Semiotext(e) book. It is a surrealist retake of the Warren Commission report on the assassination of JFK. If you have ever read the Warren Commission, it itself is surreal. Especially the magic bullet theory where the one bullet that they found, a pristine bullet, was supposedly the one that went through JFK, through the seat, into Governor John Connally, and got lost, and then somehow ended up on JFK's stretcher. It is so absurdist already Pell barely even had to write this book. He just brings up the high points. You have, for example, "A Bullet-Theory Poem" composed of images of bullets (Pell 1989). We need to explore doing theory and history in such ways, staging the staging of historical evidence. And the experimental text *Wisconsin Death Trip* (Lesy 1973) is a similar take on historical events. But that's another story. If you like there is a series of disasters that run through my life and work. One of my earliest memories is the JFK assassination, and my dad showing me the photo of John F.

Kennedy and a photo of Lee Harvey Oswald. It is my early photographic memory. That tonality runs through the performance of my theory. I am interested that your questions are focused on the book as an object, what is the angle?

**TE:** I was thinking that performance studies as a discipline has quite a lot to offer. *Perform or Else* is a good case study of where performance studies might go and what it might get up to when it arrived. If you follow the citations, it has been picked up by a range of disciplines. I think in part this is because of how the book functions as an object, one that is difficult to pigeonhole and pin down: it looks different from academic monographs and popular sociology and economics books.

**JM:** There are places that performance studies could go, but it may not want to go because it's tied to theater departments. I'm interested in the export economy: who was coming and getting our concepts and taking them into other places.

## Notes

1. See McKenzie (1997) for an earlier extended analysis of Anderson's work.
2. McKenzie discusses Montano's performance in detail, including its seven elements:
  1. She placed three chicken wire cages in a gallery and put three chickens in each, rotating them between the different cages over several days.
  2. Montano hung nine hand-tinted photos of chickens inside the building.
  3. Throughout the show, she played a chicken video.
  4. A month prior to the event, she posted a phone number around Madison and when people called in, they heard the sounds of chickens on the answering machine.
  5. During the show itself, Montano drove around the city playing chicken sounds on a loudspeaker.
  6. She distributed chicken posters and vacuum-formed chicken parts.
  7. At the end of the show, she gave the nine chickens to the art department's janitor, who in turn started a chicken farm. (McKenzie 2001, 217)
3. McKenzie draws on Critical Art Ensemble's manifesto to discuss the organizational form that they advocate:

We can take some guidance from Critical Art Ensemble, who calls for countering nomadic power mechanisms through acts of electronic civil disobedience, acts carried out by small cells that draw upon different knowledges and skills. "The cell must be organic; that is, it must consist of interrelated parts working together to form a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. To be effective, the schism between knowledge and technical ability in the cell must be closed. A shared political perspective should be the glue that binds the parts, rather than interdependence through need. Avoid consensus through similarity of skills, since in order to be useful, different skills must be represented. Activist, theorist, artist, hacker, and even a lawyer would be a good combination of talents—knowledge and practice should mix." And one shouldn't dismiss the bureaucrat either, for "the authoritarian fetish for efficiency is an ally that cannot be underestimated." It is precisely by mixing paradigms and juxtaposing performances and performatives that one distills a performance of minor test patterns, a joyful scientific fiction, *a gay sci fi*. (McKenzie 2001, 235–6, italics original)

See McKenzie, Schneider, and Critical Art Ensemble (2000) for an earlier discussion of this practice.

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