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A User's Guide to *Perform or Else*

Perform or Else initiates a challenge, one that links the performances of artists and activists with those of workers and executives, as well as computers and missile systems.
— Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else*

Introduction

Following this user's guide, you can find an interview I conducted with Jon McKenzie about how he constructed *Perform or Else* (2001). I asked him how he conceived the monograph's form and content, and what shaped his decisions along the way—offering a behind the scenes look at his research process. When I returned to *Perform or Else* after the interview, I found a different book than the one I had left. I was surprised to find how much of the book's architecture I had missed on previous hikes through it, especially the ways in which the figure of the challenger, and its different incarnations, motors the argument. The argument moves quickly and having a sense of its form is helpful for keeping pace. This especially true for Part III, which contains invitations for experiments in theory and practice that could be missed. I therefore set out here to offer a schematic of the book's unusual structure by drawing together its signposting. Whilst I do not have space to summarize the entire theoretical apparatus—and prefer not to spoil all the surprises that await the intrepid reader—laying out the chapter structure provides a navigational aid to help readers venture further into the book.

Overall structure and function

Perform or Else has an unusual but deliberate and intricate structure. The practice of challenging and the figure of the challenger recur throughout: the first three chapters explore the challenges launched by three paradigms of performance research and the last seven chapters explore seven different but related Challengers. This realizes the book's overriding challenge: "*To rehearse a general theory of performance*" (4, italics original). In the introduction this is laid out schematically across three levels:
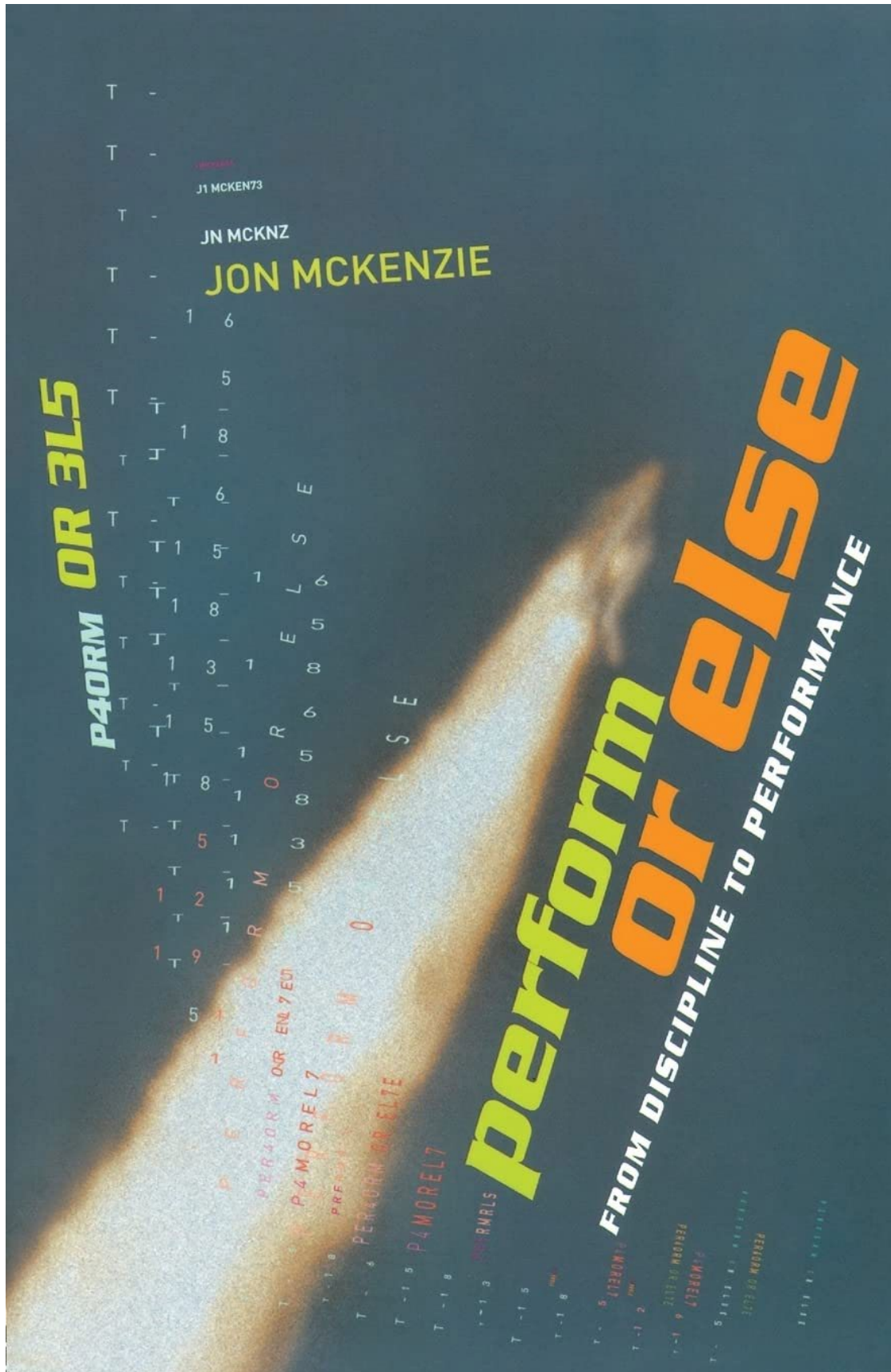
Figure 1. The paperback cover for the first edition of Jon McKenzie's *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance,* published in March 2001.

> Starting with the most abstract level, performance is a stratum of power/knowledge that emerges in the United States after the Second World War. Its emergence can be traced, in part, through at least three research paradigms which rest atop it: Performance Management (organizational performance), Performance Studies (cultural performance), and Techno-Performance (technological performance). At the most concrete level, the power of performance can be analyzed in terms of blocks of discursive performatives and embodied performances, audio and visual knowledge forms bound together by normative forces and unbound by mutational ones. These blocks make up the paradigms, yet their composition resonates with that of the stratum itself. (19–20)

To stage the rehearsal of this general theory, McKenzie frames his book as "an immanent performance," which he calls "the lecture machine" (20). As well as describing the performance of the book as a whole, lecture machine "will come to frame and embody a series of case studies introduced later in the book, performances that all involve lectures and scenes of instruction" (20). Here, lecture machine refers simultaneously to a lectern which "supports a body and a script" and "props"; "the university itself, with its books, its desks for reading and writing, its libraries and catalogues, its logocentric protocols of research and teaching"; "any system that processes discourses and practices, any assemblage that binds together words and acts or, alternatively, that works to disintegrate their bonds and erode their forms and functions. … Schools of thought, research paradigms, and disciplines can likewise be understood as reading machines, as sociotechnical systems that join together and break apart specific practices and discourses"; and "the performance stratum itself," which has entailed "a radical transformation of our reading machines, an epochal shift in the citational network of discourses and practices" (21).

This inventory offers a guidebook for entering the last seven chapters. Each throw the reader into the mise-en-scène of a lecture given by a Challenger: from a space shuttle to a ship, from a real professor to a fictional character. Each time the date is given, foregrounding how the chapters move back and forth in time as they delimit the relations between different Challengers. To sketch the argument, I will follow how each chapter parachutes the reader into a paradigm's textbooks or the audience of a Challenger's lecture. I include the chapter titles as they summarize the argument's twists and turns: the first three show the challenges of the performance paradigms, and the last seven denote a particular Challenger and the role they play in the argument.

Part I. Performance Paradigms

Part I traces how three paradigms of performance research developed in the United States since the 1950s and frames their conceptions of performance around different challenges. Beginning with cultural performance and Performance Studies' challenge of efficacy, it then moves onto organizational performance and Performance Management's challenge of efficiency, and finally technological performance and Techno-Performance's challenge of effectiveness.

Chapter 1, "The Efficacy of Cultural Performance," investigates Performance Studies. Formed in the 1950s, this paradigm "constructed cultural performance as an engagement

of social norms, as an ensemble of activities with the potential to uphold societal arrangements or, alternatively, to change people and societies" but significantly focused on the latter, on performance's "transgressive or resistant potential" (30). McKenzie notes Performance Studies' recourse to challenging, and that by framing his project as challenge his move is a familiar one (32). In this sense, this chapter doubles as an outline of the project's disciplinary home, even as it launches away from it. This is evident in how he begins to unpack the links between performance and challenging: "*Performance challenges*, it provokes, contests, stakes a claim," and "not only does performance challenge, challenges perform" (32, italics original). In this framing, he draws on J.L. Austin, noting that the linguist "includes 'challenge' in his list of performative speech acts, words that 'do something'" and that "challenges do something: they incite, demand, assert, accuse, and oppose" (32).

Citing the 1960s and 1970s dialogues between Richard Schechner from theatre and Victor Turner from anthropology, McKenzie argues that while theater provided a "*formal* model" for conceiving the field of cultural performance, "liminal rites of passage gave theater scholars a *functional* model for theorizing the transformational potential of theater and other performative genres" (36, italics original). Moreover, "liminality would become a pervasive model of cultural performance itself: separated from society both temporally and spatially, liminal activities allow participants to reflect, take apart, and reassemble symbols and behaviors and, possibly, to transform themselves and society" (36). From the mid-1970s, the influence of Continental philosophy reconfigured how the field understood efficacy, from transgression to resistance (39): "In the context of new struggles—revolving around gender, racial, sexual, ethnic, and class differences—new modes of social efficacy emerged, modeled on performance art and critical theory" (23). Performance art, often "a body and some stories," allowed "the mediated play of embodied practices and discursive statements" to be theorized (42).

McKenzie coins the term "liminal-norm" in part to argue that Performance Studies scholars have overlooked the normative potential of liminal performances (51), and moreover, by focusing on these, they "have overlooked the importance of *other* performances," which have also been formalized and studied in the United States and then worldwide (52, italics original). Challenging the limits of Performance Studies' challenging, he addresses readers from the discipline and calls for the study of performances whose "function is for the most part highly normative" (53), trying to persuade them to venture forth into the next chapter, where they will find themselves parachuted into mainstream management literature.

Chapter 2, "The Efficiency of Organizational Performance," tracks how performance is "deployed by managers and organizational theorists," deferring a critique of their claims for later chapters (279n71). Organizational performance, McKenzie explains, "is produced at the level of individuals, teams, departments, organizations, and industries, and it takes place across a wide variety of sectors, including business, nonprofit, educational, and government organizations" (59). He tracks organizational performance back to Frederick Taylor's Scientific Management, but notes that "contemporary organizational theorists use 'performance' in a much wider sense": since the Second World War "a paradigm shift has…occurred, one that challenges and moves away from Scientific Management" (61). McKenzie uses Performance Management to theorize how different schools, beginning with human relations, promised to remedy Scientific Management's problems, for example, by promising to empower workers "to improve efficiency using their own intuition,

creativity, and diversity" (63). US "organizational performance has been going global…through the worldwide influence of US firms and business schools,…the American style of management found in multinational corporations," and "the role the US plays in such organizations as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund" (82). He notes that whilst Performance Studies' "field of objects and subjects functions—or should function—as a mutational social force, whereas that of Performance Management operates normatively, we should also recognize that norms and mutations actually occur in *both* paradigms" (83, italics original).

Chapter 3, "The Effectiveness of Technological Performance," examines how "engineers, computer scientists, and other applied scientists employ the term 'performance'" (24). Naming this paradigm Techno-Performance (100), McKenzie argues "that it crystallizes in the military-industrial-academic complex that emerged in the US after the Second World War" (23–24). In this chapter we see how Bruno Latour's *Aramis, or The Love of Technology* (1996, vii quoted in 121), which investigates technology development through a "scientifiction," influences *Perform or Else*'s experimental form. Latour advocates creating "a fiction with 'variable geometry'" (1996, 24 quoted in 122), and "frames his research documents and interview transcripts within a fictive scene of research, crafting a tale that is part detective novel, part love story, part sociology textbook" (121). This method inflects McKenzie's overall argument and, within this chapter, his treatment of the missile, which serves as an object of study and a figure that makes up the general theory of performance: its role in the United States is tracked, including in spurring investment in education after the USSR's Sputnik success (125), and it is also selected as a metamodel for Techno-Performance (133–34). The missile therefore joins other metamodels for their respective performance paradigms: rites of passage for Performance Studies and feedback loops for Performance Management (134–35). These also serve as components of the metamodel of the general theory of performance (133), where the missile offers a way to describe the general theory's trajectory: "Things won't be as straightforward as sending up a missile and bringing it down on a predetermined target," there will be "blind flights," "queer characters," and "dramatic surprises" (135). Returning to *Perform or Else*'s challenges, he promises that now "we'll make use of a scientifictional craft, one whose mission is to scan the age of global performance" (135).

Part II. The Age of Global Performance

The number seven now enters and structures the argument. In an essay published subsequent to *Perform or Else,* McKenzie explains its significance:

> It is true that the number 7 acts as a strange attractor within *Perform or Else*: there were 7 Challenger astronauts; there are 7 chapters devoted to 7 Challengers; and a close reading will reveal that many crucial concepts (e.g., "the performance stratum") are defined as having 7 attributes, etc. It's almost as though the book was composed in the key of 7, rather than around a set of critical concepts. (McKenzie 2011, 25)

The first of the seven, Chapter 4, "Challenger Lecture Machine," begins on 28 January 1986 with the *Challenger* space shuttle explosion. The fateful mission labelled 51-L included a teacher going to space as part of the Teacher in Space program announced by Ronald

Reagan in 1984 (140). High-school teacher Christa McAuliffe was trained as an astronaut and was to give science lessons from space (141). McKenzie writes that:

> *Challenger* mission 51-L brought together cultural, organizational, and technological performances and did so in a highly publicized media campaign, one that highlighted the shuttle's performance as a teaching machine, a lecture machine. (140)

Ultimately, the mission was to become "a high performance disaster" (141) and the lessons delivered not at all the ones anticipated. Here, it is important to note that McKenzie is concerned "not with the shuttle disaster *per se*," but with "reading it as a metamodel of the general theory of performance, one that incorporates components of the metamodels of Performance Studies, Performance Management, and Techno-Performance, and, further, uses their respective movements of generalization as boosters for an even more general trajectory" (142). This analysis will begin the unpacking of "the diverse performances housed in a certain genealogy of Challengers that will henceforth guide our general theory," which "will transform our metamodel and our general theory, giving them a pronounced scientifictional character, one marked and unmarked by a certain variable geometry" (142).

Using Diane Vaughan's book on the disaster, *The Challenger Launch Decision* (1996), "*as an uncanny textbook for the general theory of performance*," McKenzie investigates the *Challenger* explosion as interdependent failed technological, organizational, and cultural performances (143, italics original). He notes that Vaughan's book studies challenges and is itself a self-defined challenge to readings of the *Challenger* disaster (152). This opens onto a discussion of the "uncanny affinity between performance and challenging," and his surprise at "all the challenges unearthed in performance—and all the performances stowed away in *Challenger*": "From the concrete and specific performances surrounding *Challenger* to the paradigms of Performance Studies, Performance Management, and Techno-Performance, to even higher levels of abstraction and generality, performance and challenging appear to be closely linked, gathered together, bound up in a sort of joint performance-challenge" (152). Concluding, he hints at "the dramaturgy of Challenger lecture machine" to follow (153): "Shuttling between theory and practice, between generalizations and specifications, our trajectory is marked by chance associations, idiosyncratic passages that connect disparate sites by reciting and displacing a singular performance-challenge" (152).

Chapter 5, "Challenging Forth: The Power of Performance," begins on 18 November 1955 with Martin Heidegger's lecture, which "connects the question concerning technology to a particular revealing of truth, an ordering of knowledge that challenges forth the world" (155): "Instead of channeling the authentic bringing-forth of sky and earth, gods and man, modern technology instead challenges forth nature's energies and orders them into reality as 'standing reserve,' as objects on call to subjects who are themselves called forth as challengers" (156). Connecting this "challenging forth" (156) not only to Techno-Performance, but also to Performance Management and cultural performance, McKenzie argues that "the spectacular development of performance concepts over the past half century, the movements of generalization in such divergent areas as technology, management, and culture, the patterns of joint performance-challenges—all these suggest that *the world is being challenged forth to perform—or else*" (158, italics original).

To theorize "a movement that at once incorporates and passes beyond all these paradigms"—"the *power of performance*" (159, italics original)—McKenzie draws together Jean-François Lyotard's "performativity," Herbert Marcuse's "performance principle," and Judith Butler's "punitive performatives" (25). Marcuse and Lyotard both theorize performance, using different methods, as a mode of power operating since the Second World War (164). However, McKenzie argues, cultural performance theorists have long neglected this dimension in their work (15, 16, 164–66). Likewise, Butler's conception of performativity had primarily been utilized for its radical potential, but its capacity for normativity underexamined (15). Interweaving the implications of each author's theorization of performance in relation to power, McKenzie "suggests that discursive performatives and embodied performances are the building blocks of an immense onto-historical production, one which we will soon explore as the *performance stratum*" (171, italics original). Significant here is his claim that "the age of the world picture is becoming *an age of global performance*" (171, italics original). Moreover, it is challenging that marks the affectivity of this age: "There is no performance," he writes, "without challenge" (171).

Chapter 6, "Professor Challenger and the Performance Stratum," begins by citing Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987, 40 cited in 173), parachuting us into a lecture given by Professor Challenger. The "scientifictional character" of the Professor comes from the science fiction stories of Arthur Conan Doyle, famous for creating Sherlock Holmes (173). Professor Challenger has been "recast" by Deleuze and Guattari, McKenzie explains, "to lecture within their own writing machine…to conduct a 'stratoanalysis,' a reading of stratification processes in rocks and organs and subjects" (173). For his part, McKenzie has "signed on to this lecture machine to initiate a stratoanalysis of performance," while "Professor Challenger performs here as an online metaguidance device" (173–4).

Principally, McKenzie uses Challenger, via Delueze and Guattari, to unfold his key concept of stratum, which he unfolds from the Professor's geological preoccupation. His interest is, McKenzie writes, "in much more than rocks" however, explaining that "his [the Professor's] theory of stratification is a general theory covering inorganic, organic, and human realms" (174). Significantly, the Professor describes "three general belts of strata: geological, biological, and anthropomorphic" (174). The "general theory of performance unfolds on [the] third stratum," McKenzie writes, "for it is here that performance must first be situated" (175). And to begin this situating, McKenzie follows the Professor's suggestion that we must follow Michel Foucault, which he does by turning to Deleuze's *Foucault* (1998), which frames discipline as a stratum. Deleuze (1988, 47 quoted in 175) defines strata as "historical formations, positivities or empiricities. As 'sedimentary beds' they are made from things and words, from seeing and speaking, from the visible and the sayable, from bands of visibility and fields of readability, from contents and expressions." Tracing Deleuze's (1992, cited in 175) argument that Foucault's discipline has been replaced by societies of control, McKenzie suggests something else—the performance stratum—and offers this "speculative analogy" that "performance will be to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth: an onto-historical formation of power and knowledge" (176). This "performance stratum coalesced in the United States in the wake of the Second World War, and its effects have been going global…expanding especially fast with the thaw of the Cold War…and the subsequent expansion of global capital markets

in a postcolonial world" (176). He notes that "performance is, in part, a displacement of discipline," but "though performance is displacing discipline, it has not replaced it" (179). It "is futural, still under construction, and discipline, though in decline, remains operational" (179). To offer "the geology of performance," he "differentiat[es] discipline and performance in terms of seven layers or belts of stratification": "*Subjects and objects*," "*Geopolitics*," "*Economics*," "*Knowledge production*," "*Media archives*," "*Desire*," and "*Power mechanisms*" (179–89). This completes the general theory of performance. Of Deleuze and Guattari's deployment of Professor Challenger, McKenzie notes: "Their reading is also a demonstration of destratification, the creative breakdown and erosion of systems and forms" (173). This cues up "Part III. Perfumance" (191).

Part III. Perfumance

Now the book shifts gear: "Beginning in Chapter 7, the reading of performance-challenge repeatedly tests the uncertain limits of theory and practice, generality and specificity, proper and common, gravity and levity" (25). Part III opens with a test: a picture of a ship broken into pieces, with an area to arrange them. This is paired with a quote from the *Challenger*'s Mission Control: "A major malfunction.…The vehicle has exploded.…We are looking at checking with the recovery forces to see what can be done at this point" (191). This can be read as signposting for the book's overall argument, which has encountered a malfunction, exploded and now the reader is tasked with seeing what can be done. Citation doubling as signposting continues throughout Part III.

In Chapter 7, "Professor Challenger and the Disintegration Machine," we go directly to Doyle's story to witness Professor Challenger's lecture firsthand. The audience's response to "his Assyrian beard and prodigious voice," "exorbitant remarks and gestures," preempt our potential impatience with *Perform or Else's* playful turn (193): "'"Get down to the facts!" "What are we here for?" "Is this a practical joke?"'" (Doyle 1990, 24 quoted in 193). The Professor is staging a public experiment that "seeks to contact the earth itself" by digging "into the earth's strata" (193). Just as he makes contact, we leave to "continue our dramaturgical reading of Challenger in order to approach *destratification*, the atmospheric disintegration of the performance stratum" and "with its digging of strata and its smell of earthy fumes, Professor Challenger's experiment gives us an opportunity to remount our lecture machine, even at the risk of it cracking apart at the seams" (195, italics original).

McKenzie notes "the variable geometry of Challenger lecture machine is produced by recursive patterns of stratification and destratification" (197):

> Destratification begins by boring deep into the performance stratum in order to follow the fissures, the disjunctive joints between performances and performatives, paradigm and paradigm, stratum and stratum. It is by eroding the seals between different belts and layers that the process of destratification unfolds, and by amplifying the cracks and flows that we begin to approach a nonstratified atmosphere. (199)

This atmosphere "comprises the fourth level of our general theory" (203). But "'level' is imprecise here, precisely because this atmosphere imbues and disorders the other three levels" (203). To name "this queer element of the general theory" (203), McKenzie borrows

and develops a term—*"perfumative"*—from Jacques Derrida's lecture "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce" (1992, 300, italics original, quoted in 231). Morphing this queer term into yet another neologism, "perfumance," he offers a multilayered evocation of this term's senses:

> ***Perfumance:*** the citational mist of any and all performances. ***Perfumance:*** the incessant (dis)embodying-(mis)naming of performance. ***Perfumance:*** passing through the liminautics of Performance Studies, Performance Management, and Techno-Performance. ***Perfumance:*** the (dis)integration of the performance stratum. ***Perfumance:*** the becoming-mutational of normative forces, the becoming-normative of mutant forces. ***Perfumance:*** the odor of things and words, the sweat of bodies, the perfume of discourse. ***Perfumance:*** the ruse of a general theory. (203, italics and bold original)

We now return to Doyle, to his story "The Disintegration Machine," where "Professor Challenger makes contact with the perfumative element" (203). The Professor meets with the inventor of the Disintegrator, a machine that can "create vibratory currents, currents capable of disintegrating forms into molecular mist and, if need be, reintegrating them again" (203). McKenzie situates the concerns of Doyle's science fiction, including "the politics of research," in the context "of the military-industrial-academic complex of post-First World War Europe" (204), and notes how this is addressed through the "contrasting styles of research" of his protagonists: "While Sherlock Holmes proceeds by detached logic, critical analysis, and orderly investigation, Professor Challenger's research is characterized by sensual affect, creative invention, and exuberant experimentation" (204). This contrast too can be sensed in the rhetorical structure of *Perform or Else*.

Chapter 8, "The Catachristening of HMS *Challenger*," begins "in December, 1872" with the setting sail of HMS *Challenger*, a warship converted "into a floating laboratory" and tasked with "collecting samples and cataloguing hundreds upon hundreds of species of underwater plants and animals" (205), "a nautical lecture machine" (206). We have gone back in time to HMS *Challenger* because NASA named their shuttle, and Doyle named his professor, after it—"as a medical student, Doyle studied with several of the *Challenger* scientists" at the University of Edinburgh (207).

This focus on naming begins an elaboration of perfumance:

> We are tracking the ways in which words and things come together, how performance-performative blocks are joined and jointed to one another, how, for instance, "Challenger" and a collection of challengers become bound up with one another at different times and places. We're thus tracking the ways in which words and things crack and break apart. Our lecture machine performs as a sometimes irreverent referencing device, one that processes different forms of reference.…The trajectory of *Challenger* from ocean to science fiction to hermeneutics to stratoanalysis to outer space, this itinerant passage suggests the effects of perfumance upon performance, of forces upon onto-historical forms. (207)

With Austin, Butler, and Derrida's help, McKenzie analyses catachresis, citing Merriam-Webster's definition: "'The misuse of words: as a: the use of the wrong word for

the context b: the use of a forced figure of speech, esp. one that involves or seems to involve strong paradox'" (210–11). He notes "the anagrammatical possibilities cracked open by generalized catachresis," which include "puns, acronyms, anagrams, numerologies, alliterations, rebuses" (212). He introduces a strategy of catachristening, which includes "antonomasia, the movement between proper and common names, the confusion of species and genus, generality and specificity" (212–13):

> Christa McAuliffe, christenings, Christ, crystallization, Christmas, catachresis—the catachristening of performatives and performances "takes place" across networks of iterability, alterability, citationality. At its limit, catachristening not only erodes the seals binding performatives and performances, it also breaks apart these forms themselves. (213)

McKenzie then attends to "the other end of the performative-performance block" (213) with Schechner's (1985, 35 quoted in 214) concept of "restored behavior," which "is living behavior treated as a film director treats a strip of film," strips that "can be rearranged or reconstructed" and "are independent of the causal systems (social, psychological, technological) that brought them into existence." This treatment "is to embodied performances what catachristening is to discursive performatives: a strategy of destratification" (215). McKenzie then "catachristen[s] the restoration of behavior…the *catastoration* of behavior," which "treats embodied processes as raw material for creating something else" (215, italics original). Linda Montano's totemic Chicken Woman performance of everyday life provides the chapter's central example of this catastoration of behavior (217–19). In reflecting on her doubly deterritorialized performance, McKenzie provides an important reiteration of the relationship between performance, performatives and perfumance, writing:

> On the level of performances and performatives, such two-sided, double-headed becomings [such as Montano's performances] characterize perfumative destratification. Again, performances are territorializations of flows and unformed matters into visible bodies, while performatives are the simultaneous encoding of these bodies into articulable subjects and objects. Catachristenings and catastorations alter the *sens* or direction of territorialization and encoding, displacing knowledge-forms into passages of multiple becoming. These becomings are machinic in nature and must be approached not so much in terms of a particular being or set of beings that enter into a process of becoming, nor as a becoming that culminates in one or several beings; rather being is an effect of becoming, just as strata are effects of atmospherics, forms effects of forces, and presence an effect of citational networking. (219)

McKenzie finally returns us to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987, 57 quoted in 219) Professor Challenger's lecture, where "most of the audience had left," and he is becoming lobster as his words and body morph and liquefy.

In Chapter 9, "Professor Rutherford and Gay Sci Fi," we meet Doyle's inspiration, William Rutherford, a professor of physiology at the University of Edinburgh. Rutherford's "behavioral displays," his beard, chest, voice, and manner, in the lectures that Doyle attended, inspired the Professor Challenger character (221). McKenzie notes: "If HMS

Challenger sets sail as the nominal source for the catachristening of Challenger, Professor Rutherford stands in as the primal body of its catastoration" (221). Rutherford was controversial in Victorian Britain for experimenting "on living organisms" (222). Moreover, as McKenzie notes, "chances are that the star lecturer's peculiarities were those of a gay scientist" (223), and he also became embroiled in "a sexual scandal": "That Rutherford's name has subsequently been passed over in the history of science while his gestures live on in sci-fi crypts, this breakdown and dispersion of word and body suggests the manner in which one passes into the atmosphere of forces and intensities" (224).

This introduction of Rutherford cues up exploration of "the scents of destratification, only now we're tracing them through paradigms of performance research and, more generally, at the level of sociotechnical systems.…Destratification here not only affects performances and performatives, but also sociotechnic assemblages—groups, collectivities, organizations, research paradigms, and all their various infrastructures" (224). Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's terms major and minor, McKenzie argues that "on the level of sociotechnical systems, destratification proceeds through the production of minor performances" (227): "A major art, a major science, a major language is one that dominates a given field or tradition.…The minor, however, works within but also against the major" (224). Doyle's move to science fiction offers an example of "a major performance gone minor" (227).

McKenzie then proceeds to a seven-point "'pocket checklist'" that synthesizes minor performances as perfumance (228): 1. "A perfumance is a displaced, disjointed performance, a minor performance that breaks with the sociotechnical system producing it and enters into recursive communication from other systems, thereby displacing their discourses and practices as well as their systemic limits" (228); 2. It "might best be characterized as what Nietzsche called 'gay science,' a certain alliance of thought and laughter, rigor and levity, the profound and the ridiculous.…In perfumance, laughter becomes a sensor for conducting multiparadigmatic research" (229); and 3. "If there's no nonsense in one's work, then one has not gone far enough in engaging the logic and common sense…underlying one's training and research" (230). Then 4. an active and reactive laughter (230–31); 5. "two tonalities of challenging" (231); 6. "the relation of gay science and the queer theory that has given so much to the study of cultural performance" (232); and 7. Avital Ronell's (1995 cited in 233–34) reading of Friedrich Nietzsche's gay science as concerned with testing. McKenzie writes:

> Seeping out from within the deepest, most obscure cracks of the performance stratum, perfumance "is" the test drive, "is" the performance principle, "is" the challenging-forth of the world to perform—or else. Or rather, it's all these things *read another way, read with a certain laughter, a certain joy, a certain gaiety.* (234, italics original)

This conclusion to the pocket guide is important, asking, as he notes, scholars of culture and the humanities to challenge their own resistance to testing paradigms, to embrace the challenge of putting their own critique, their own artistry, "to the test" (234).

Elaborating the challenges that the book lays down to performance researchers, McKenzie suggests "creat[ing] a perfumance using all the paradigms of performance research" (235), which "is one of the crypto-missions launched at the initiation of this text" (287n36). He

advocates "develop[ing] sensibilities with researchers from other paradigms": "Factory workers, information processors, middle managers, top executives, civil engineers, chemists, computer scientists, rocket scientists, doctors, trainers, athletes, stock brokers, financial analysts, teachers, administrators, school children—*anyone* who knows *anything* about *any performance*—these are potential allies" (235, italics original). Here we might note the ways that the book resonates with McKenzie's StudioLab pedagogy, captured in his recent publication, *Transmedia Knowledge for Liberal Arts and Community Engagement: A StudioLab Manifesto* (2019). The chapter finishes by acknowledging the challenges of this testing approach—the risks of failure, of crashing and burning. Despite the pain of these disasters, he urges us to face them, and indeed underscores the importance of this stance, writing that:

> The age of global performance emerges from innumerable stratifications and erosions, from trial runs and wrecked ruins, from bits of life and death that have come to serve as its substratum. It is built upon individuals and peoples, upon memories and dreams, on the crusts of shifting continents, atop the rubble of cities and cultures and the vestiges of defunct empires and failed revolutions. It is built upon the remnants of an Old World's disciplinary mechanisms, its outmoded modes of power/knowledge, its history of violent campaigns directed toward even older worlds. Taking all these sites as its launch pad, performance takes off with a new mission, a new world order, one of computerized experimentation, of optimizing and satisificing, of testing and exceeding limits and limen, of boldly going where no one's gone before: a world that faces tomorrow as yet another day to perform—or else. (240)

Chapter 10, "Jane Challenger, Disastronaut," is concerned with perfumative resistance at the level of the performance stratum, broached through Jane Challenger, a journalist in M6rcio Souza's novel, *Lost World II: The End of the Third World* (1993). "Disgusted by the Geneva conference on Third World debt" that she is reporting on, she books "a blind flight" (243). She lands "on a jungle plateau, a sweltering region populated with walking, talking anachronisms," having "flown to Amazonia, more precisely, to Manaus, Brazil" (244). McKenzie notes that "Professor Challenger traveled to the region in Doyle's 1911 sci-fi novel *The Lost World*," and Souza's novel functions as a sequel, "mixing elements of magical realism and Doyle's sci fi with the currents and undercurrents of postcolonial, postmodern reflexivity" (244). In his sequel, Souza "intertwines the story of Jane Challenger and global crises with tales of his own worldly travels, framing himself as a character at conferences and speaking engagements" (244). By "citing and displacing Doyle's novel, Souza reflects on the role of the Latin American writer in contemporary world literature and ruminates on the Third World's fate in an age of telecommunications, advanced capitalism, and ecological nightmares" (244).

Like her grandfather, Professor Challenger, who came across dinosaurs, and her father Dr. Challenger, Jr., who came across "authentic Amazons, tribal precursors to today's feminists" (Souza 1993, 71 quoted in 244), Jane Challenger discovers an anachronism living in Manaus: an entrepreneur, a "'*species of capitalists considered extinct in England since the eighteenth century*'" (Souza 1993, 9, italics original, quoted in 248), "'and not only one.…A whole economy. A lost world'" (Souza 1993, 71 quoted in 248). With the novel harboring a chapter titled "Never Risk Your Neck for an Economic Anachronism,"

McKenzie links Jane Challenger's discovery to the anachronism in Margaret Thatcher and Reagan's rhetoric and policies, underway at Souza's time of writing, with their nostalgic and selective reading of Adam Smith (248). Neoliberal economics appears here then as a major anachronism (249).

Given that "what's proper to the performance stratum is its heightened sense of temporal impropriety," McKenzie wants to "give some thought to the possibilities of major and minor histories, major and minor anachronisms, as well as the becomings and begoings of one and an other" (249). Expanding:

> As a mode of experimental resistance, perfumance engages the emerging performance stratum with minor histories and minor anachronisms. While major histories tell grand, linear, straight narratives of Great Men and Great Events, minor histories emit petite, nonlinear, gay stories (often told straightfaced) of the nobodies and nonevents crammed down in the cracks of onto-historical strata. And while major anachronisms nostalgiate upon some golden age and attempt to escape the present into a bright and shiny city, minor anachronisms recombine machinic elements from past and present, using them to tune in test patterns from the future.…Perfumances rehearse the future, or more precisely, cite it in anticipation with catachristenings, catastorations, and gay sci-fi projects, all of them performing as parts of a collective assemblage of annunciation, a minor lecture machine. (250)

I shall return to Chapter 10 shortly, after a quick rewind.

Tracing the different Challengers, I have sketched the structure of *Perform or Else*. In the interview I conducted in this issue, I ask McKenzie about how he experimented with other ways of structuring his argument, before settling on the challenger figure. We also discuss the back, Part III, and its playful composition. Part III complicates the ways Parts I and II can be read. The reader might leave with a different set of analytical tools depending on when they close the book. If they leave early, they might also leave with a circumscribed understanding of the book's ambitions.

The reader leaving at the end of Part I is invited to think further about why and how performance became prominent at the same time in the same place and developed in three paradigms of performance research; why these paradigms largely studied performance differently and isolated from one another; and what might be the implications of studying them together, especially for how they go looking for, find and valorize normative and resistant performances. After a further chapter, they will have seen this applied to the *Challenger* shuttle disaster and be invited to consider where else they could look for the intersection of technological, organizational, and cultural performances, whether at the same scale, a nation's performance on the global stage, or something smaller.

Continuing to the end of Part II, the reader will depart with a theory of performance "as an emergent stratum of power and knowledge" (18), perhaps looking beyond the three paradigms outlined to see other generalizations of performance in the same historical period. Exiting at this point there is a danger of leaving with a grand narrative. However, venturing into Part III the reader will find this danger noted, toyed with, and denatured,

since "even grand narratives may still have a role to play if inscribed and passed on with care—and a certain carefree air—as the stuff of minor history" (250). The way that Part III reinscribes Parts I and II is laid out telegraphically in the Introduction:

> Chapters 8, 9, and 10 engage strategies of perfumative resistance on three distinct levels. At the level of performatives and performances, it consists of catachrestic uses of language and catastrophic restorations of behavior. At the level of sociotechnical systems, it gives rise to multiparadigmatic, polytonal research experiments. At the level of onto-historical formations, perfumative resistance channels "minor" histories and "minor" anachronisms. (25–26)

Part III valorizes minor objects of study but also minor modes of study. The playful ending, and how it is arrived at by following Challengers back and forth in time, invites us to read McKenzie's book as a minor performance monograph or textbook: for Performance Studies, for other disciplines such as critical management studies, or more broadly, across disciplines and outside academia. This is exemplified by how Part III treats neoliberalism not as an omnipresent force to be approached by authoring a major history but, with Souza's help, as a major anachronism to be approached through minor anachronisms and minor histories (249–50).

And then, just as Chapter 10 is closing, another Challenger arrives, Sir Wallace Kxalendjer (250). In the sequel essay cited earlier, McKenzie (2011, 25) comments that "Kxalendjer's appearance in [*Perform or Else*] makes 8 Challengers, not 7." Thus the shadowy figure of a spectral character emerges: Dr. Kx4l3ndj3r—a version of Kxalendjer who has "escap[ed] the orbits of Souza's eccentric novel" (McKenzie 2011, 18). Through Dr. Kx4l3ndj3r's voice, McKenzie (2011, 25) then toys with the idea that the book and its discussers "'exist in a fractal dimension between 7 and 8….7.433'" and also plays with other calculations. Turning up in *Perform or Else's* closing moments, Kxalendjer "arrives from another millennium" (250). He is a "brilliant ethno-archaeologist" (Souza 1993, 242 quoted in 251), whose "research includes the geology of ancient ruins and past injustices" (251). He is, McKenzie writes, "what we would call a stratoanalyst, a boring expert" (251). Kxalendjer also visits Manaus and experiences a shock, but we do not know exactly what from (252). Appearing here, in the book's final stages, the figure of Kxalendjer serves to expand the time being traversed by the argument, encouraging the reader to do the same:

> At the level of onto-historical formations, perfumance pervades the contemporary landscape with temporal overload, chronochronic feedback and feedforward, the short-circuiting of past, present, and future. As an effect of iterability, the self-referential emergence of the performance stratum presupposes recursion with other strata. It is precisely such patterns that the strategy of disastronautics attempts to distill with its minor histories and minor anachronisms. Without reducing one formation to another, without posing a transcendence of history, the task becomes tuning in the rhythms and breaks that repeat themselves differently across various strata. The challenge: not only to recognize that one experiences history from the perspective of the present, but to plug into emergent forces in order to generate untimely perspectives on this very perspective, perspectives that multiply and divide the present, rattling it to and fro. (255)

Acknowledgements

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