FOURTEEN

Genre Trouble:

(The) Butler Did It

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Nearing the crack of millennia, genre troubles the end(s) of performance. It's been a long time in coming, and its initiation is marked by machinating ends, genres, performances, and troubles. I'm writing now, while there's still time, to affirm once again that the butler did it . . .

The Liminal-Norm

The end(s) of performance come at a time when different genres of performance collide at high speeds across distant fields of research. Just five years ago, Peggy Phelan noted, "To date . . . there has been little attempt to bring together the specific epistemological and political possibilities of performance as it is enacted in what are still known, for better or worse, as 'theater events' and the epistemological and political openings enabled by the 'performative' invoked by contemporary theory" (15). The disciplinary guardrails between event and discourse have been surveyed by Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach, who describe "the history of the discipline of theater studies [as] one of fighting for autonomy from English and speech departments, insisting on a kind of separation from other areas of study." They argue for a more interdisciplinary approach focused on the "role of performance in the production of culture in its widest sense" (5). With Reinelt and Roach's anthology *Critical Theory and Performance* and other anthologies by Phelan and Lynda Hart, Elin Diamond, and Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a wide range of theorists have engaged performance in both its embodied and its discursive senses. Within the field of

performance studies, perhaps no theorist has had as wrenching an impact in this respect as Judith Butler, whose *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993) have troubled performance, its genres, and its end(s).

What follows is a close reading of Butler that focuses on the significance of her work for the future of the performance studies field. In particular, I am interested in her citation of two theorists, Victor Turner and Richard Schechner, whose closely related concepts of liminality have become, paradoxically perhaps, something of a norm within the field. That is, performance scholars have come to consistently define their object and their own research, if not exclusively, then *very* inclusively, in terms of liminality—a mode of embodied activity whose spatial, temporal, and symbolic "betweenness" allows for dominant social norms to be suspended, questioned, played with, transformed.

Turner developed his concept of liminality from a reading of Arnold van Gennep's *Rites de Passage* and from his own study of Ndembu rituals. Schechner in turn generalized the concept, displacing it across a wide range of cultural activities, from rituals to theatre and beyond. For two generations of performance scholars, liminality has also been a crucial concept for theorizing the politics of performance: as a mode of embodied activity that transgresses, resists, or challenges social structures, liminality has been theorized both in terms of the political demonstrations of the 1960s and 1970s and the political performance art of the 1980s and 1990s. Yet the concept has not simply been applied to performances; it has also helped *construct* objects of study by guiding the selection of activities to be studied, as well as their formal analysis and political evaluation. Indeed, the liminal rite of passage might function both as the exemplary case study in the field and as a striking emblem of the field itself, of its own initiation. In his introduction to the anthology *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals toward a Theory of Cultural Performance* (1984), John J. MacAloon suggests as much:

> Dell Hymes has coined the phrase "breakthrough into performance" to describe the passage of human agents into a distinctive "mode of existence and realization." "Breakthrough into performance" equally well configures certain initially independent intellectual developments in the 1950s that have served as a foundation for the now rapidly expanding and coalescing interests in the study of cultural forms exemplified by this volume. (2)

Performance studies has thus put liminality to several ends: to delimit its *field of objects*; to situate its own problematic passage into a field, a discipline, a *paradigm of research*;[1] and to articulate its own interdisciplinary,

intercultural *resistance* to the normative forces of institutionalization, forces installing themselves as the field sets up its reading machines in departments and programs across the United States and abroad.

In the beginning of performance studies was limen, and in its end(s) as well. Given the paradoxical norm of liminality, I have come to call this emblematic concept the *liminal-norm*. More generally, the liminal-norm refers to any situation wherein the valorization of transgression itself becomes normative—at which point theorization of such a norm may become subversive. I made up the term "liminal-norm" not long after reading another citation of rites of passage, this one by Michel Foucault. In an interview entitled "Rituals of Exclusion," Foucault discusses how capitalist norms are inscribed pedagogically: "the university is no doubt little different from those systems in so-called primitive societies in which the young men are kept outside the village during their adolescence, undergoing rituals of initiation which separate them and sever all contact between them and real, active society. At the end of the specified time, they can be entirely recuperated or reabsorbed" (*Foucault Live*, 66). In other words, the very same rituals that performance scholars have long cited in theorizing the subversiveness of performance, Foucault cites in terms of the university's normativity.

There's trouble at the limen of performance, and if Judith Butler isn't the only troublemaker, her *Gender Trouble* remains something of a script for coming to or getting at the end(s) of the liminal-norm. I have transcribed her title from English to French and back, reading it again and generating *genre* trouble, for *genre* translates as both gender and genre. I am gambling with the French that deconstructing the performativity of gender has everything to do with subverting not only the genders but also the genres, and indeed, the genealogies, generation(s), gens, and genus of performance. As Jacques Derrida shows in "The Law of Genre" (1980), marking genre involves a generalized citation *and* displacement of borders. The law or clause that genres cannot be mixed only emerges out of the law of the law of genre, the troubling clause that the mark of belonging does not belong, that property rights involve writs of impropriety. This citationality of borders, of limen, opens the gates to what might be called *genredegeneration:* genre of generation, genre degeneration. Derrida is at the gates, writing with this outlaw law of genre:

> The clause or floodgate [*écluse*] of genre declasses what it allows to be classed. It tolls the knell [*glas*] of genealogy or of genericity, which it however also brings forth to the light of day. Putting to death the very thing that it engen-

ders, it cuts a strange figure; a formless form, it remains nearly invisible, it neither sees the day nor brings itself to light. Without it, neither genre nor literature comes to light, but as soon as there is this blinking of the eye, this clause or this floodgate of genre, at the very moment that a genre or a literature is broached, at that very moment, degenerescence has begun, the end begins.

The end begins, this is a citation. Maybe a citation. (213)

Maybe the end(s) of performance will have been its initiation, its rites and writs of passage. By attempting here to resituate the borders of performance studies in relation to its liminal-norm, I am by no means suggesting that this paradigm only functions normatively. While I am interested in how the institutionalized study of performance involves normative processes, this is because I am even more interested in how researchers can better challenge these very processes. In citing some of the norms that guide the study of performance, I believe such challenges can become more diverse and concrete. There's still time, the end is initiating. Come, we must pick up speed.

What the Butler Did

I'll begin by cutting to the chase and defining what, *for me,* is Butler's most significant and singular contribution to the performance studies field. Not without parody, I'll try to distill it down to its essence and bottle it for distribution in small amounts. Although Butler has become recognized as a leading practitioner of queer and feminist theory, I would not single out these dimensions of her work in relation to performance studies. After all, issues of gender and sexuality have long been theorized in this paradigm. Nor would I single out her contribution as a critical genealogist or deconstructivist; again, such approaches are not so new to performance scholars. Rather, I would point to what Butler's critical genealogy of gender and sexuality *creates,* something that troubles the genres traditionally studied by performance studies. We have seen that both Turner and Schechner theorize performative genres as liminal, that is, as "in-between" times/spaces in which social norms are broken apart, turned upside down, and played with. What Butler creates in the time and space of several articles and two books is a theory of performativity not only as marginal, transgressive, or resistant, but also as a dominant and punitive form of power, one that both generates and constrains human subjects. To try to bottle

the essence of what Butler did—and continues to do: *she theorizes both the transgressivity and the normativity of performative genres.* If Turner's centrality lies in his theory of performative liminality, Butler's subversiveness lies in her theory of performative normativity.

Now we're going too fast. We need to brake down a bit and look more closely at the relation between the performance genres theorized by Turner and Schechner and the sense or direction in which Butler takes the performative. In the first section of her article "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (1990), she writes that "the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts" (272). While Turner and Schechner use theatrical action to theorize liminal and potentially transgressive performances, Butler takes another route, toward an analysis of compulsory heterosexual norms: "as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences. Discrete genders are part of what 'humanizes' individuals within contemporary culture: indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right" (273). This performance of gender is not expressive; its does not exteriorize an interior substance, identity, or essence; instead, gender emerges from performances that disguise their constitutive role. Butler's concept of gender constitution, which draws on existential phenomenology, challenges its presumption of individual subjectivity. Subjects do not expressively perform their genders; rather, gendered subjectivity is itself constituted through compulsory performances of social norms. Through repeated performances, these norms become sedimented *as* (and not in) gendered bodies. "From a feminist point of view, one might try to reconceive the gendered body as the legacy of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence or fact, whether natural, cultural, or linguistic" (274). For Butler, the personal is political because it always already involves socially normative performances.

In order to flesh out her performative reading of gender, Butler turns in the next section to anthropological discourse and—of particular interest here—to Turner's theory of ritual, but with a twist. Reiterating the importance for feminism of a theatrically based theory of social action, she asks,

In what senses, then, is gender an act? As anthropologist Victor Turner suggests in his studies of ritual social drama, social action requires a performance which is *repeated.* This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritual-

ized form of their legitimation. When this conception of social performance is applied to gender, it is clear that although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this "action" is immediately public as well. (277)[2]

Why do I say that Butler turns to Turner—*with a twist?* Because her reading explores gender issues recognized as important but not systematically pursued by him. The twist, however, comes not only in Butler's application of social drama to gender, but also in her reading of Turner's ritual. Ritual for him is sacred, not mundane or profane. Further, Butler writes that Turner's research "suggests . . . that social action requires a performance which is *repeated.*" Butler's emphasis on repetition is most suggestive, for while repetition is certainly implied in any ritual, Turner's theory does not explicitly focus on it. Indeed, Butler reads ritual performance in a manner from which he might turn away: as a compulsory routine. In his essay "Acting in Everyday Life and Everyday Life in Acting," he writes, "Ritual in [Central African] societies is seldom the rigid, obsessional behavior we think of as ritual after Freud" (*From Ritual to Theatre,* 109). Let us also note that Turner opposes ritual to "technological routine." He thus seems to minimalize the repetitive valencies of ritual, and these valencies are what most interest Butler. Rather than simply repeating the familiar reading of liminal ritual as transgressive, she reads Turner's theory of social drama as a theory of normativity. By stressing performative citationality, Butler allows us to see how his theory of ritual may be generalized to understand both transgressive and normative performance.

Shortly after her discussion of Turner, Butler cites Schechner while distilling the differences between theatrical and social acts. She cautiously suggests that "gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions" than those in theatrical contexts ("Performative Acts," 278). Her citation of Schechner then comes in a passage that could itself be read as a script:

> Indeed, the sight of a transvestite onstage can compel pleasure and applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence. . . . On the street or in the bus, the act becomes dangerous, if it does, precisely because there are no theatrical conventions to delimit the purely imaginary character of the act, indeed, on the street or in the bus, there is no presumption that the act is distinct from a reality; the disquieting effect of the act is that there are no conventions that facilitate making this separation. Clearly, there is theatre which attempts to

contest or, indeed, break down those conventions that demarcate the imaginary from the real (Richard Schechner brings this out quite clearly in *Between Theater and Anthropology*). (278)

A footnote placed at the citation of Schechner's text directs the reader to "See especially, 'News, Sex, and Performance,' 295–324." To perform the role of scholarly drag, I make this correction: the title is "News, Sex, and Performance Theory." In this essay, Schechner writes that the "world that was securely positional is becoming dizzyingly relational. There will be more 'in-between' performative genres. In-between is becoming the norm" (*Between Theater and Anthropology,* 322). This citation returns us to performance studies' liminal-norm, which Butler can help us rearticulate.

We've seen that Butler twists Turner's theory of ritual into a theory of normative performance. In citing Schechner, she theorizes the transgressive aspects of performance (writing that the transvestite in transit "challenges, at least implicitly, the distinction between appearance and reality" ("Performative Acts," 278). In light of these citations of Turner and Schechner, let me repose the paradox of the liminal-norm this way: liminality can be theorized not only in terms of a time/space of anti-structural play, but also in terms of a time/space of structural normalization. Further, the subjunctive "as if" mood, used by Schechner and others to theorize liminality, might be understood not in opposition to an indicative mood of "it is," but as intimately related to an *imperative* mood, which orders, "it must be." The liminal-norm thus entails a *command performance.*

Butler explains the political stakes of performative citation in *Gender Trouble*

> The subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through substantializing effects. In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; "agency," then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. (145)

Acts become sedimented precisely through the orbit of their historical repetition and desedimented through, shall we say, "exorbitant" variations on such repetitions, variations that nonetheless also involve repetition, citation, rehearsal, and parody. Thus, the "task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, *to displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition

itself" (148). Such displacement is the trickiest part of deconstruction's "two-step program" (the other step, too often made too quickly, is the reversal of binary terms), and Butler uses drag to theorize how parody can operate to repeat and displace performative gender norms.

> In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency. Indeed, part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary. (137–38)

Contra Fredric Jameson's dismissal of pastiche as a humorless and politically conservative parody that mocks its original, she finds in gender parody a "laughter [that] emerges in the realization that all along the original was derived" (139). However, since normative sedimentation and transgressive desedimentation both involve repetitive performances, Butler explicitly warns that "[p]arody by itself is not subversive, and there must be some way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetition effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony" (139). Drag thus may further sediment gender identities by repeating and reinforcing the orbit of hegemonic significations, while also destabilizing those very significations through exorbitant, hyperbolic repetitions that give rise to political resignifications.

Reciting Oneself Otherwise

Between the publication of Gender Trouble and Bodies That Matter, Butler offered some corrections to her readers, corrections that entail a certain rewriting of the relation between performance and performativity. The performance theory of Gender Trouble itself is first reread in her article "Critically Queer" (1993). Here Butler returns to the question of gender performativity and drag, now stressing the discursivity of performatives. "Performative acts are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements which, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power. . . . The power of discourse to produce what it names is linked with the question of performativity. The performative is thus one domain in which power acts as discourse" (17). In the second section, "Gender Performativity and Drag," she turns to the effects

of her own discourse, namely, the theory of subversive gender parody posed in Gender Trouble. Butler asks rhetorically, "If gender is a mimetic effect, is it therefore a choice or a dispensable artifice? If not, how did this reading of Gender Trouble emerge?" (21). She offers two reasons for this reading while also suggesting there may be others. First, she says that she herself cited "drag as an example of performativity (taken then, by some, to be exemplary, that is, the example of performativity)" (21). Second, with the "growing queer movement . . . the publicization of theatrical agency has become quite central" (21). If I may offer a third and closely related reason for the misreading of Butler's theory of performativity: given the numerous critical theories that articulate performance as transgressive and/or resistant cultural practices of marginalized subjects, many readers may have too quickly passed over Butler's stress on performativity as both normative and punitive and instead installed her work within more conventional, that is, radical, readings of performance. Another passage suggests that she may have sensed this third reason: "Performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted: it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self" (22).

The reading Butler gives in "Critically Queer" involves a certain breakup, or at least braking down, of the close alliance between theatrical performance and performativity that she forged in Gender Trouble. If there she sought to theorize performativity via performance, in this later essay she also emphasizes performativity contra performance. To reiterate her corrective reading of performativity, she now clearly distinguishes it from performance and does so in a paragraph entirely italicized.

> In no sense can it be concluded that the part of gender that is performed is therefore the "truth" of gender; performance as bounded "act" is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's "will" or "choice," further, what is "performed" works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, un-performable. The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake. (24)

This passage calls for comment. Butler is obviously not referring to the ritualized performance she reads in Turner, wherein performance always entails a citational process. Instead, she refers to performance as an act in the here-and-now, that is, as a presence, one bounded in the will of the performer. She has, in effect, resignified performance, from providing similarities with performativity to concealing and disavowing "what re-

mains opaque, unconscious, unperformable." This resignification of performance, in turn, involves a resignification of "performative": opening her essay by citing Sedgwick's reading of J. L. Austin, Butler makes it clear that she now wishes to distinguish embodied performances from discursive performatives, to transfer performance from theatrical to discursive contexts.

To follow Butler's rereading of performance and performative, let's ourselves make a transfer to *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993).[3] In the introduction, Butler again clarifies her emphasis on the discursive and its relation to the body:

> To claim that discourse is formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body. In this sense, the linguistic capacity to refer to sexed bodies is not denied, but the very meaning of referentiality is altered. In philosophical terms, the constative claim is always to some degree performative. (10–11)

(This last phrase echoes something suggested above: that is, the indicative mood always harbors an imperative.) Butler then distinguishes performativity and theatricality in this way:

> Performativity is thus not a singular "act," for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition. Moreover, *this act is not primarily theatrical*; indeed, its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated (and, conversely, its theatricality gains a certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of its historicity). (12–13, my emphasis)

The attempt to constatively refer to a pre-discursive sexed-body or, more generally, to a pure materiality presupposes a present act that would escape the citation of social norms. Such an act is produced only by a certain inevitable theatricality or dissimulation, a certain performance, namely, the concealing of performativity.

Recapping Butler's troubling of liminal norms: by theorizing performance as both normative and transgressive, she challenges the genres studied by performance studies. In "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" and *Gender Trouble,* she uses theories of anthropological and theat-

rical performance, specifically, Turner's theory of ritual, to construct a theory of performativity as the citation of social gender norms. In "Critically Queer" and in *Bodies That Matter,* however, Butler resignifies both performativity and performance: performativity now refers to a *discursive* compulsion to repeat norms of gender, sexuality, and race, while performance refers to an *embodied* theatricality that conceals its citational aspect under a dissimulating presence. Thus, in addition to stressing performance as both normative and transgressive, Butler also stresses both the discursive and the embodied dimensions of performativity. She even warns that the "*reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake.*"

However, in these later writings, Butler also contributes to what I have elsewhere outlined as a general theory of performance.[4] After clarifying the distinction between discursive performativity and embodied performance, she then suggests their convergence. "It may seem . . . that there is a difference between the embodying or performing of gender norms and the performative use of discourse. Are these two different senses of 'performativity,' or do they converge as modes of citationality in which the compulsory character of certain social imperatives becomes subject to a more promising deregulation?" (231). Here Butler's use of the term "performance," while it retains the sense of embodiment, also restores the repetition she found suggested in Turner's theory of social drama.

In the end(s) of performance coming out of Butler's twisted readings, the concepts developed by Turner and Schechner to theorize the transgressivity of rites of passage may paradoxically become crucial to understanding normative performance. Schechner's concept of performance as the restoration of behavior, for instance, has much affinity to Butler's own concept of performativity as the "reenactment" and "reexperiencing" of socially established meanings. Although she does not explicitly cite his essay "The Restoration of Behavior," this passage from "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" suggests that Butler has read more than one essay from *Between Theater and Anthropology:*

> [the] act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again. (277)

To do our own twist with Schechner: gender is a normative ensemble of restored behaviors and discourses, a mundane yet punitive regime of

performances and *performatives,* a sedimented stratum of performance always already repeated for the *n*th time.

How to *know* the difference between these citational performances? Butler raises this question as she closes *Bodies That Matter.* "Performativity," she writes, "describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a 'pure' opposition, a 'transcendence' of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure" (241). This implication, this turning of power against itself, forces a strange figure upon us here, one that turns itself inside and out, over and over: not a torus nor a mobius strip, but that fabulous Klein bottle whose neck turns back against its body and, twisting in on itself, opens back up outside. Could this become known as some queer parody of "woman-as-vessel"?

> How will we know the difference between the power we promote and the power we oppose? Is it, one might rejoin, a matter of "knowing?" For one is, as it were, in power even as one opposes it, formed by it as one reworks it, and it is this simultaneity that is at once the condition of our partiality, the measure of our political unknowingness, and also the condition of action itself. The incalculable effects of action are as much a part of their subversive promise as those that we plan in advance. (241)

Indeed, this last passage can also be read in relation to the incalculable Kleinsian twists of Butler's own work, specifically, the "misreadings" that *Gender Trouble* produced. Despite its subversive promise of theorizing a normative performativity, *Gender Trouble* was paradoxically normalized by those who read it as only theorizing a subversive performativity. And in light of Butler's rereading of herself, this normalization underlines perhaps the most subversive promise of *Bodies That Matter,* one relating to the paradox of what I've called the liminal-norm. What Butler did in rereading herself, in reciting herself otherwise, was to suggest that theories of subversive performance genres can be normative, and theories of normative performance genres subversive. What the incalculable effects of this may be, well, that must be uncorked at other times and places.

Before coming to our uncertain end or stop, I want to make one last pass at what Butler did—and does—with performance, this time reading her concepts of signification and resignification. In the version of "Critically Queer" published in *Bodies That Matter,* she takes up the term "queer" by citing another theatrical source, this time asking, "how is it that a

term that signaled degradation has been turned—'refunctioned' in the Brechtian sense—to signify a new and affirmative set of meanings?" (223). She then proceeds to analyze how the homophobic term "queer" has entered a process of collective contestation and resignification, one that, however, remains open to becoming stabilized in another proper usage, another signification. In doing so, Butler affirms her hand in the resignification of "queer" by shifting suddenly from its substantive to its verbal form (a shift that might be bottled as another essence of her performance):

> If the term "queer" is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imagings, it will have to remain that which it is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, *twisted, queered* from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes. (228, my emphasis)

Analyzing "queer," Butler not only theorizes how this term has been refunctioned, she also theorizes resignification as a queering or twisting of discourse, something she herself performs textually.

Shifting now to the term "performance," you can perhaps already sense my direction: within performance studies, Butler has in effect challenged the sedimented signification of "performative" as referring primarily to oppositional cultural practices and sought to queer the term so that it also refers to normative practices and discourses. One might protest that such queering amounts to a misuse of language. "Surely, Butler's performative refers to something else!" "It's linguistic rather than embodied!" "It means normativity as much as subversion!" "Couldn't she use another term!?" Rather than attempting to justify her use of this term by again citing *Gender Trouble's* alliance of theatrical performance and discursive performativity, I shall entertain the thought that it *is* a misuse, and that this misuse is itself a tactic of resignification, of queering.

Butler theorizes the political dimension of such misuse in "Arguing with the Real," another chapter of *Bodies That Matter,* which engages the discursive performativity of naming. Summarizing Sual Kripke and Slavoj Zizek's theories of referentiality, she writes, "It is Kripke's position to argue that the name fixes the referent, and Zizek's to say that the name promises a referent that can never arrive, foreclosed as the unattainable real" (217). Butler instead argues that the referent is neither fixed nor foreclosed, but produced through the differentiation of proper and improper usage. However, "the instability of that distinguishing border between the proper and the catachrestic calls into question the ostensive function of the

proper name" (217). If the referent emerges in the unstable limen of proper and catachrestic usage, then Butler's resignification involves a strategic use of catachresis, which Merriam-Webster defines as "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." Thus, while she commends Zizek's work on the politics of the sign because it connects the question of the unsymbolizable to minoritarian social groups, Butler seeks to theorize referentiality not in terms of negation, lack, and a universalized Real, but instead through an affirmation of the historic and symbolic possibilities uncorked by a politics of catachrestic naming.

> Here it seems that what is called "the referent" depends essentially on those catachrestic acts of speech that either fail to refer or refer in the wrong way. It is in this sense that political signifiers that fail to describe, fail to refer, indicate less the "loss" of the object—a position that nevertheless secures the referent even if as a lost referent—than the loss of the loss, to rework that Hegelian formulation. If referentiality is itself the effect of a policing of the linguistic constraints on proper usage, then the possibility of referentiality is contested by the catachrestic use of speech that insists on using proper names improperly, that expands or defiles the very domain of the proper. (217–18)

Catachresis troubles property rights and is crucial to the futural imagings that Butler calls for, the affirmative resignification of "queer," as well as "women," "race," "class," and, as I will really end up arguing, the "genus" of "performance."

Machinic End(s)

The future of the field is catachrestic, if not catastrophic. We're rehearsing its end(s) here and now, reciting its paradoxical liminal-norm in a twisted naming, a *catachristening* of performance. By helping introduce questions of discursivity and normativity into performance studies, Butler's performativity of gender troubles the genre of performance, its conceptualization as embodied liminality. As cited earlier, Derrida's "Law of Genre" situates the deconstruction of gender in a matrix composed of related concepts: genre, generation(s), gens, and genus. Troubling one troubles them all. Let's end this script by entertaining another thought: generalized

citationality challenges a certain genus of performance, its naming as a liminal passage of *human* agents.

Both Butler's theory of discursive performatives and Schechner's theory of embodied performances focus on human performativity. However, through their emphasis on the fundamental citationality or rehearsal process of discourses and practices, they raise the possibility of performatives and performances being mechanically and/or electronically cited, stored, played back, and transformed. Schechner himself addresses the impact twentieth-century technologies have had on performance traditions. "Almost everything we do these days is not only done but kept on film, tape, and disc. We have strong ways of getting, keeping, transmitting and recalling behavior. . . . We live in a time when traditions can die in life, be preserved archivally as behaviors, and later restored" (*Between Theater and Anthropology,* 78). Machines, however, can also be said to perform in their own right: in a wide variety of scientific fields, performance concepts function to evaluate existing technologies, to guide the design of new technologies, and even to market technologies to consumers. In the fields of engineering and computer science, especially, performance has emerged as a concept used to evaluate and design machinery, communication networks, and computer systems. Further, a highly specialized branch of technological performance research has been institutionalized in industrial, military, scientific, and commercial sites, as can be seen in this partial list of "high performance computing centers" found on the Internet:

> Army High Performance Computing Research Center
> High Performance Computing at NRaD (Naval Research and Development)
> Maui High Performance Computing Center
> Mississippi State Distributed and High Performance Scientific Computing
> NASA High Performance Computing and Communications Program
> National Consortium for High Performance Computing
> NOAA High Performance Computing and Communications
> University of Illinois at Urbana-Champagne Center for Reliable and High Performance Computing
> University of Texas at San Antonio High Performance Computing and Software Lab

These centers indicate that even if the concept of technological performance has not yet received critical reflection, the research that invented and continues to deploy it has become institutionalized across the United

States. Although additional investigation would have to test this hypothesis, a comprehensive study would, I suspect, show that a second paradigm of performance research, what I call "techno-performance," has developed since the 1950s, right alongside performance studies.[5]

And what of discursive performatives—how might emerging technologies interface with their border-crossing citationality? In their introduction to *Performativity and Performance* (1995), Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick cite "another range of usages" of the term "performativity," one associated with Jean-François Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition* (1984), which, they write, uses the term "to mean an extreme of something like *efficiency*—postmodern representation as a form of capitalist efficiency" (2). In a brief footnote, Lyotard connects efficient and discursive performativity: "The two meanings are not far apart. Austin's performative realizes the optimal performance" (*The Postmodern Condition*, 88n). More important for us, *Lyotard names the postmodern legitimation of knowledge and social bonds "performativity" and also defines this power as the "hegemony of computers."* Capitalist efficiency, for Lyotard, means technical efficiency, the calculation of "input/output matrices" (xxiv). In some sense, performativity *is* the postmodern condition: not simply a form of representation, it names a specific historical stratum of power/knowledge, and its lessons for the future are electronic.[6] In a section entitled "Education and Its Legitimation through Performativity," Lyotard writes, "To the extent that learning is translatable into computer language and the traditional teacher is replaceable by memory banks, didactics can be entrusted to machines linking traditional memory banks (libraries, etc.) and computer data banks to intelligent terminals placed at the students' disposal" (50).

I'm outta here. It's coming, the end(s) of strictly human performatives. You can sight it for yourself at <www.cs.umbc.edu/kse>, where you'll read of the Knowledge Sharing Effort, sponsored by the Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency. This alliance of research institutions, initially called ARPA,[7] developed a computer network in 1969 called the ARPANET, which would later become the Internet. Today, as part of the Knowledge Sharing Effort, the Department of Computer Science and Electrical Engineering of the University of Maryland Baltimore County is generating KQML—Knowledge Query and Manipulation Language—a high-level communication language for artificial intelligent agents. I just pulled this performative citation off the site:

> KQML is a language and protocol for exchanging information and knowledge. KQML can be used as a language for an application program to interact with an intelligent system or for two or more intelligent systems to share knowledge in support of cooperative problem solving. It focuses on an extensible set of performatives, which defines the permissible operations that agents may attempt on each other's knowledge and goal stores. The performatives comprise a substrate on which to develop higher-level models of inter-agent interaction such as contract nets and negotiation.

Informative performatives, database performatives, query performatives, effector performatives, generator performatives, capability-definition performatives, notification performatives, networking performatives, facilitation performatives: in this language game of a future already upon us, these performatives pass not primarily between humans and humans, nor even between humans and machines, but between machines and machines.

I end here, writing only that, in light of all these electronic performance sites, a certain *genre machinic* is already online, troubling the future of the field and pointing toward a performativity programmed by other agencies. It's coming, the end(s).

NOTES

1. MacAloon, whose text anthologizes the 1978 Burg Wartenstein Symposium, writes that "the study of cultural performance is in, as yet, a 'preparadigmatic' stage" (1). Schechner, for his part, writes in 1989 that the "performance studies paradigm came to the fore in the mid-'50s." "PAJ Distorts the Broad Spectrum," 7.

2. Another version of this passage appears in *Gender Trouble*. There the reference to Turner is downshifted from the text to a footnote.

3. *Bodies That Matter* also includes a revised version of "Critically Queer." I read from this version below.

4. See McKenzie, "Laurie Anderson for Dummies." I outline this general theory much more extensively in *Perform—or Else: Performance, Technology, and the Lecture Machine,* forthcoming from Wesleyan University Press. The reading proposed here of Butler is situated there in relation to Austin and Derrida.

5. Among the factors that have contributed to the emergence of techno-performance are (1) the extension of the American military-industrial complex beyond World War II and into the academy, giving rise to what Stuart Leslie has called the military-industrial-academic complex. The effects of this "MIA" complex reach far beyond departments of engineering and physics and incorporate themselves in psychology and sociology; (2) the political climate of Sputnik and the space race, the Viet Nam War, Star Wars—in short, the Cold War