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## NOTE DE L'ÉDITEUR

Entretien réalisé le 17 Septembre 2013 au Jackson Diner, New York

Cet entretien propose un dialogue entre Christian Biet et Richard Schechner, deux figures de la recherche sur la performance, chacune appartenant à un champ de pensée aux histoires spécifiques, afin de penser la reprise dans le cas particulier du "performance art" ou forme-performance, forme qui revendique la présence de l'artiste et l'unicité de son geste et se place du côté de la disparition. Ainsi, reprendre le "performance art" serait doublement paradoxal, à la fois parce que cette forme semble s'y opposer dans son essence même et parce que les performances des années 60 et 70, clairement rattachées à l'avant-garde, avaient pour but que de détruire les traditions et de s'attaquer à toute forme de mémoire et d'héritage. Ces questions, soulevées par Ariane Zaytzeff avec Christian Biet et Richard Schechner dans un restaurant indien new yorkais sont restituées dans la liberté de passage du français à l'anglais, aussi naturellement que se fit la conversation.

## Définir la performance comme forme artistique ou le « performance art » : présence contre représentation

Ariane ZAYTZEFF : Christian, vous faites la distinction dans votre article « Pour une extension du domaine de la performance (XVII<sup>e</sup>-XXI<sup>e</sup> siècles) »<sup>1</sup> entre, d'un côté, la notion de performance, et de l'autre, la forme artistique de la performance. Dans le vocabulaire

français, cette distinction-là existe peu : la forme artistique de la performance recouvre tout de suite l'outil théorique.

Christian BIET : Je tiens absolument à ce qu'on dissocie d'un côté la « forme performance », c'est-à-dire une proposition scénique qui est, qui s'assume comme une performance agissant le corps et mettant en présence des regardants et la vie du performer, et qui ne souhaite pas être du côté de la représentation, et de l'autre, le concept de performance en général (*showing doing*), qui inclut la représentation et le théâtre mimétique. Je me reconnais dans la définition de performance de Richard, que j'ai même tendance à étendre, alors que j'ai du mal à me reconnaître dans, ou à me limiter à l'idée étroite qu'en donne Abramović, c'est-à-dire la performance contre le théâtre. Pour moi et dans l'optique d'une extension du concept, le théâtre est inclus à l'intérieur de la question de la performance. Il n'y est pas opposé.

Il y a quelque chose d'extrêmement précieux et rare à être en présence de corps dans un temps limité et qui ne va pas recommencer. Après on peut le rejouer, "re-enact", "play again". Mais ce moment est très précieux, "l'éphémère". (...) During that very moment, the moment of the éphémère, you are in the middle of people who are judging you and you are judging them at the same time in a sort of social scene. Everybody is in the theater and act. Dans ce lieu-là, préservé, toutes les actions des spectateurs et des acteurs sont uniques, dans un lieu où l'on est vu avec les autres... Et, alors que les spectateurs et les acteurs sont présents, pour un moment, dans un espace où l'ensemble de leurs actions sont « gratuites », sans implication directe sur le monde (l'art par définition diffère son action) et préservées de l'extérieur, ce même théâtre ou cette même performance cherche à avoir néanmoins un impact sur l'extérieur. En d'autres termes, le théâtre, est à la fois préservé de l'extérieur et en même temps, exactement en même temps, en état de penser l'extérieur. Et quand on sort du théâtre, on sent que quelque chose s'est passé à la fois dans le bâtiment et que ce jeu a changé l'extérieur tel qu'on le rencontre au sortir du théâtre : après une séance de théâtre, il faudrait, idéalement que je ne voie plus l'extérieur de la même manière.

Mais quand dernièrement je vois non seulement qu'Abramović décide de reperformer ses performances<sup>2</sup>, contrairement à ce qu'elle proposait avant, et en plus de faire quasiment une école de reprise de performances<sup>3</sup>, je ne comprends plus du tout la cohérence de son art, ou plutôt j'ai l'impression qu'on va vers quelque chose qui est un moyen commercial de vendre de la performance. Si bien que du point de vue théorique comme du point de vue pratique, j'ai un peu de mal à suivre le travail d'Abramović. Alors que du point de vue théorique, j'ai énormément de points de contact — puisqu'on en parle<sup>4</sup>... — avec les théories et avec le travail de Richard.

Richard SCHECHNER: For me the place to start when you're talking about Marina Abramović (...) is that, for me, all behavior is performative. At the basic ontological level. What happens with somebody like Abramović and, say, for *Dionysus in 69*<sup>5</sup>, is that Abramović, and performance art, are attempting to perform themselves. In other words, they're not representing but they're using certain conventions of representation and performance and trying to be themselves. When Hans-Thies Lehmann says post-dramatic<sup>6</sup>, he should really say post-narratological. In a certain sense, what Abramović and artists like her want to do is to substitute her body and her life for a story.

C.B.: Absolument.

R.S.: So instead of telling a story, she's presenting herself. "The Artist is Present<sup>7</sup>." That immediately puts her, and I think performance art theoretically, in the realms of religion and justice. Where the body is offered as a kind of evidence of existence: "ecce homo" and "habeas corpus." And she especially, because she often puts herself through bodily ordeals. So the problem with the reperformance of her work at MoMA<sup>8</sup>, that particular show, is: how can someone else, someone not Marina, go through her ordeals? Christian saints, by definition, when they imitate Christ, basically undertake a Jesus-like sacrifice in a different but parallel or analogous way. Saint Sebastian is shot through by arrows. Saint Catherine is strapped to a wheel, Joan of Arc burns at the stake when she tries to save the Dauphin and the French kingdom. They don't imitate Christ by being crucified and then rising from the dead in three days. They imitate Christ "in essence" and "in process," rather than "in fact."

C.B.: Some tried but they failed.

R.S.: Yes, there are untold numbers of failed saints. History's mouth is closed about most of them. I suppose Dostoïevksy's *Grand Inquisitor* is speaking not to the "real Jesus" but to one of these failures.

## Reprendre le performance art : le paradoxe de représenter la présence

A.Z.: I was particularly interested in the reperformance in the avant-garde because of this idea, a distinction you also draw, Christian, that performance art refuses representation and is trying to give this illusion of immediate presence. So reperforming the avant-garde is a contradiction. Or if you reperform it, you have to take into account the fact that the audience has changed and ask yourself what you are trying to achieve. If you're doing exactly a reperformance of this performance, then the switch between being avant-garde and falling into tradition, changes the meaning and the effect on the audience.

R.S.: There is, for me, a problem. I saw the Abramović MoMa performances, and not me alone, a lot of people saw as being sabotaged by being professionalized. In other words, the actors who performed Abramović's works were required by actor's equity to take a break after a certain number of minutes. These performers are professionals, not artists whose very life is on the line. (Of course, one can be a professional and an artist too, but that's not what I am driving at.) Putting her life on the line, on display, is exactly what Abramović, in her ordeal performance, did. How could she have taken a break from her twelve-day performance<sup>9</sup>? And when she herself was sitting downstairs in the MoMa atrium, she didn't take a break. But the actors who were doing her work were obeying work rules of professional actors. In doing so they were changing Abramović's performances into a representation of the performances. I wouldn't say they were "reperformances." I would say they were representations of Abramović's performances. They had the shape of her performances, but the underlying impetus was: these actors and dancers were doing professional work for which they were paid professional wages. Abramović's underlying impetus in first doing the pieces, and in sitting downstairs, was and is to present her body. If she wants to reperform her own work, Abramovic would have to do the works herself. Paradoxically, she couldn't reperform her work. She is not the same woman now that she was "then". Nor can she clone herself so that she can

perform multiple works in a retrospective. Finally, she is not a "works of art" but a person who makes works of art. Or, and this is more interesting, if she is "works of art" these works vanish as soon as she stops performing them. She can only reperform them one at a time. What Abramović can do, what she did do, is to apply the principles that generated the works the first time and apply those same principles again. What results is a classic "restoration of behavior" – but with the added layer of being doubly restored. And at least in one instance in the MoMa show, Abramović betrayed her piece. There's a performance that Ulay and Abramović did in an Italian museum, where they stood in the doorway, face to face with only a few inches separating them<sup>10</sup>.

C.B.: Naked.

R.S.: Naked. Close enough together that you had to walk in sideways in order to enter the exhibition. Each spectator had to decide whether to face her breast and vagina, or his penis. Or decide not to enter the gallery and miss the exhibition. And when someone entered, s/he went by close enough to brush her breasts or his penis. So when they decided to reperform this very famous piece in MoMA what did they do? They changed two absolutely crucial things. They moved the actors further apart. Not much, but far enough so that a person could go through without brushing. Even more important, there were two entrances to the room. So you could choose to go between the naked performers or avoid that altogether. These changes sabotaged the performance.

C.B.: Which is corresponding to the way people are thinking, the moral way to act and to make performances now; it's completely different from what it was in the late 60s and in the 70s.

R.S.: I think Abramović's work at that time, when she was working with Ulay, always had the edge of a testimony to, paradoxically, her physical frailty and her physical toughness. At MoMa they showed the movie of her making love to the ground in Yugoslavia or Albania<sup>11</sup>. Do you know the film I'm talking about? She's naked in the rain. So there are these pieces that are impossible to redo and very hard to even represent. That's why for me at least the MoMa show was interesting as a kind of catalogue of her past work but not a reperformance of it.

A.Z.: So for you the difference between re-representation and re-performance is that representation is mimetic, in the sense that it is reproducing the form, while re-performance would reperform the spirit of the performance, what the artist was trying to achieve in the first place?

R.S.: Yes. In a certain way, I haven't seen any reperformances, even *Dionysus*<sup>12</sup>, which I thought fully reproduced the effect of the original. *The Dionysus of the Rude Mechanicals* (2009), which I liked very much, but that liking probably involved my ego, was an exact gestural replication of Brian de Palma's 1970 film of my production. The film itself was a freezing of something that was very fluid. In other words, the film was made from two performances, the last two performances of *Dionysus* in the Performing Garage, SoHo, NYC. That film has become really the public memory of the performance. But in many ways, on many different occasions, the performance was much different than what it was in the film. So the question for me, the theoretical question of reperformance is yes, all performance is restored behavior, and then we have these two branches of theatrical performance. The scattered, representational

theatrical performance, such as of a drama, where the staged behavior is “restored restored behavior<sup>13</sup>” if you will, double “not me, not not me<sup>14</sup>”. And then performance art, which attempts in its first performance to deny representation, to just say: here I am. It still is reperformance because you can't have a behavior that is made of original gestures, so you only have the behavior that reconstitutes the gestures that have been there at a certain point. But then when you consciously reperform, like with the Judson<sup>15</sup> retrospectives or Abramović, you are turning the non-representational performance into a representational performance.

C.B. : Exactement. Il y a donc un problème de cohérence. Soit on introduit une sorte de shift théorique et à ce moment-là on dit : je fais autre chose qu'une performance, autrement dit, on représente une performance passée, soit on produit une forme-performance à part entière, nécessairement originale. On ne peut pas se trahir comme ça, je suis tout à fait d'accord avec toi. Mais il y a une chose qui m'intéresse beaucoup en ce moment, ce sont tous les *re-enactments*, les reprises « fidèles » d'un spectacle passé. Spécialement, pour mon propre travail, le reenactment d'*Atys*<sup>16</sup>. C'est la mise en scène de l'opéra de Lully par Jean-Marie Villégier, qui est une très belle histoire parce qu'*Atys* avait été monté dans les années 1980 par Villégier<sup>17</sup>, et avait considérablement marqué la scène lyrique française parce que c'était le premier opéra baroque monté ainsi. Et monté intelligemment parce que ce n'était pas une reproduction à l'ancienne, vaguement historique, mais au contraire une vraie lecture historicisée avec une dramaturgie qui travaillait sur la manière dont on jouait l'opéra baroque, la tragédie lyrique à ce moment-là, et qui jouait avec tout cela. Et il y a quelques années, Jean-Marie Villégier a reçu un coup de téléphone d'un Texan qui lui a dit : je veux revoir *Atys*, je vous donne tout l'argent que vous voulez, mais pour que ce soit exactement le même spectacle. Villégier a donc repris les costumes, la musique, la mise en scène, mais évidemment, pas les acteurs. On était dans un vrai *re-enactment*. Et là ça devient passionnant parce rien, en principe, ne change, sauf les corps et les voix, et en même temps, tout a changé.

R.S. : Et aussi l'Histoire change, le choc. Pour *Dionysus in 69*, c'était la première fois dans le théâtre new-yorkais qu'il y avait deux choses: first, two men really kissing, and second, total, full nakedness of both men and women in a non burlesque fashion. Sexy but not burlesque.

C.B.: But not in the film.

R.S.: No, because we wanted to pass the censorship. Now when the Rudes did it, they did it naked. That was the only change they did from the film. So they did it the way I did it most of the time in the theater, but not when we made the film. With the Rudes' production no one was shocked, everyone was delighted. Two men kissing, what does that mean today? It's nothing.

## L'importance du contexte sur le sens de la performance et de sa reprise

A.Z.: I have this quote from you, Richard, talking about the Rude Mechs, and you said: « It was historically the same, physically the same, but not socially the same. » So somehow

that moment that Christian mentioned of getting out of the theater and seeing the world differently did not happen.

R.S.: Could not happen. It could not be socially the same because we bring to those experiences the knowledge of what happened before. The people who came to see the reperformance of *Dionysus*, at least fifty per cent of them had heard of it, or seen the movie, or something. They were not naive. Another fifty per cent was kind of naive, and for them it might have been a different experience. But those who knew, they were measuring what they saw with what they had recalled and, for some few, what they actually had experienced. But the whole world has changed, so it cannot be socially the same.

C.B.: Exactly. And in France, the "baroque theater", with the baroque pronunciation and the baroque candles (which is not what Villegier is doing), is made for people who think that it-was-better-before: better when it was baroque, and so beautiful then. As you cannot have an audience like it was in the 17th century, the reconstitution, the recreation of the baroque system is a pure dream, a pure illusion, and at the same time it is very reactionary.

R.S.: Yes. In my essay<sup>18</sup>, it [the avant-garde] is conservative in both senses of the word. I think, to repeat the main theme in that essay, that progressive people are told to renew, reduce, recycle... so this is part of a worldwide ecology movement. We know we have to do that if we want to survive as a species. So if we're going to recycle our garbage, we also have to recycle our art. We don't want to do recycle in the classical way of preserving a repertory, we want to do it in a different kind of way. But I think it's connected to that notion that to reduce, to reuse and recycle is not bad but good. While the classic avant garde was « destroy, be anarchistic, apocalyptic and start a whole new world », because there's plenty of world out there to start over in. Plenty of spaces. And now we know that's not true. The world is full, overfull. And, paradoxically, it is being emptied out of resources and species.

## Nostalgie du performance art : désir d'archive et conservation

R.S.: In these reperformances, there is a certain kind of nostalgia.

C.B.: Bien sûr.

R.S.: And the feeling that the 60s, 70s, whatever years these were in the imaginary, they were "the good old days." We're not there now, so we can get there, or « like » there, by these reperformances. And identify with that epoch of... Now I think it's a mistaken nostalgia, that we can live both then and now, but the wish to live that double life is really a drive that's very important. (...) The very fact that you're interviewing me. When I was your age, I would never have interviewed me. I would want me to be gone. In fact, I wrote a review for *The New York Times* of Harold Clurman's book *On Directing* that was very hurtful to Clurman. Clurman was a great man of the 30s, a co-founder of the Group Theatre, the director of the leftist plays of Clifford Odets. Well, I totally trashed Clurman. He was very personally hurt. I probably shouldn't have done it. He was in his 70s, I was in my 30s. Earlier, in my very first book, *Public Domain*, I had an essay, "Exit Thirties, Enter Sixties"<sup>19</sup>, where I wrote that although the decade of the 30s were a period of great creativity in the American

theatre now a new generation's arrived on the scene and the older people should get off the stage. So the question I would ask back to Ariane, and people who are younger than me: why are you talking to me? What has happened? Of course, on my individual ego level, I'm glad you're talking to me. But historically, structurally... I think the reason we have this nostalgia, with people your age entertaining it, beside the fact that we're very charming, is the existence of digital media. It's very hard to forget. Where it used to be hard to remember and easy to forget, now it's easy to remember and hard to forget. I just type in a performance in Google and I'll get at least a YouTube clip of it, I'll probably get the whole thing. It's very easy to get our past, especially the past of the last 40 or 50 years. Don't you think that makes a difference?

A.Z.: I do. One exception to the rule would be Allan Kaprow. It's impossible to find a video of Allan Kaprow on YouTube. [... It may be] possible, but it takes more research than others. Marina Abramović is all over the place; you can find a lot of things on YouTube, etc. I'm sure it is part of it, and yet reperformance is not new. It's been happening for centuries.

R.S.: Well, we have to distinguish the kind of reperformances you get in classical opera, or in ballet, where something stays in repertory for a long time, and the different kind of reperformance like the Abramović show, or the *Dionysus*, or Trisha Brown<sup>20</sup>. I haven't really theorized exactly what the difference is except that the traditional reperformance of a ballet repertory, or an orchestra repertory, or an opera repertory is that we have a good product and we want to keep issuing it. There is no question of homage or sense of pastness coming back. In fact, the marketing of such things is: it's just as new now as it was then. Or there is some slight change, now we have new sets for our *Swan Lake*. The whole idea is to take something old and to make it appear new. While the reperformance thing is the opposite. It is to take something that really is in a certain sense new, because they're re-doing it, because the context has changed, the actors have changed, the actors' bodies have changed, the audience has changed; and to say: this is really like the original. And in a certain sense it is challenging the film. When the Rudes did *Dionysus* they were saying: we are giving you the living body, we are giving you Brian de Palma's film in a live way. We're challenging it; we're taking you really back to the performance while the film is flat and can't do that. And I think Abramović also thought, when she supervised the staging, that she was doing that at MoMA. But she also has a great appetite for success, so I think she made certain compromises, like in that pass between the bodies to get into the room, and agreeing to the rules of Actor's Equity so that the performers had a 10mn break every hour, as an acknowledgement that these pieces were not the same as at first. But if MoMa really wanted to give the audience the experience of the "originals" (is anything truly original?), they would have to keep the museum open 24 hours a day, they would have to let people come and go as they please, they would move the bodies closer together and shut the second entrance to that room ... I mean there are ways within our physical reach that would be much more exciting, closer to what it was, without accommodating the rules of 2010. But MoMa and Abramović made all the "necessary adjustments," so again, it was a representation of the performances, but not a reperformance. (...) When the Rude Mechs did *Dionysus*, I said to them: why not use your names and not the names of the performers of The Performance Group? They were using the names from the film. Occasionally they would slip back and forth between these two sets of names: their names and the names from the film. But they didn't want to go away from their model, and take the chance that the performance would go where they didn't know it



was going to go. And when I went to speak to them, because I liked them very much, I said: but one of the main points of the production was that we didn't know if it would finish; it could go in a different direction. And on several nights it did go in unexpected directions. On one night it didn't finish. We had to send the audience home early because Dionysus lost, Pentheus escaped, which is a possibility within *Dionysus in 69*, not within Euripides' *The Bacchae*.

C.B. : Je te suis. C'est pour ça qu'il ne faut pas reproduire. L'idée n'est pas de reproduire mais de rejouer, de remettre en jeu, de recycler le répertoire et non de préserver un patrimoine. En conservant, on ne conserve finalement rien du tout puisqu'on conserve du souvenir, et du faux souvenir. Et tout cela devient précisément un travail de nostalgie. Et la nostalgie, ça amène à la pire des choses, à regretter le passé. Il s'agit donc de ne pas reproduire exactement mais de rejouer, recréer, remettre en cause, remettre en question avec les instruments de pensée qu'on trouve dans le passé et dans le présent... c'est précisément ça, me semble-t-il, le théâtre : le refus du patrimoine, pour que vive le répertoire, pour un re-enactment vivant, mais au sens d'action, re-action, de remise en acte.

## Constituer un répertoire, s'inscrire dans l'histoire

C.B. : Mais j'ai l'impression qu'il y a un autre problème, dans cette question de répertoire. Richard, tu disais tout à l'heure : « Pourquoi est-ce que vous ne me rejetez pas ? ». Un certain nombre de spectacles qui sont pour l'instant en re-enactment, comme celui de Anna Halprin, *Parades and Changes*<sup>21</sup>, comme *Dionysus in 69*, m'intriguent. Leur re-enactment signifie qu'ils feraient maintenant partie d'un répertoire alors que lorsqu'ils ont été créés, c'était pour aller contre l'idée même de reproduction et pour endosser la question de l'éphémère, au sens où l'événement doit disparaître juste après avoir été produit. Si bien que reprendre ces spectacles, c'est les rendre classiques. Et là, on passe du re-enactment *a priori* fidèle, à la dramaturgie car à partir des documents et des traces qu'on peut avoir des événements on va pouvoir les actualiser, les modifier, les recycler pour qu'ils deviennent actuels. C'est ça le travail sur répertoire et ça me plaît bien, c'est mon boulot, mais en même temps la radicalité des formes-performances éphémères disparaît. L'événement devient de l'histoire, et en même temps une proposition reproductible autant que modifiable. Et c'est intéressant. Je n'avais pas vu les spectacles d'Anna Halprin et j'ai assisté à un re-enactment de *Parades and Changes*. J'étais ravi parce que tout ce que je connaissais auparavant de ce spectacle n'était que quelques images en noir et blanc de gens nus qui jouaient avec du papier kraft, et en même temps, j'avais la sensation d'assister à une sorte de passé en tant que spectateur contemporain, au milieu de spectateurs contemporains, et de voir un spectacle présent, moderne, qu'il fallait donc évaluer dans un entre-deux temporel tout à fait ambigu.

R.S.: She just restaged *Parades and Changes*. She is amazing, she's almost ninety... If I can turn the conversation in a slightly different direction, connected to reperformance. There are, at least in the United States, certain avant-garde groups who are now doing old texts in certain ways. Again, prior to them, with the exception of the Wooster Group, the avant-garde has been defined as fully devised work, so-called devised work. Now you have Elevator Repair Service starting with these

readings of Faulkner<sup>22</sup> and of F. Scott Fitzgerald<sup>23</sup> where they literally turn to the book, reading the texts and enacting them as they are reading, reading every "and," "he said," and "she said"... going to such an extreme grasp of the text as a physical thing, as if reality is going away and you have to grasp it in its absolute detail. Or Builders Association's *House/Divided*<sup>24</sup>. It was about the 2008 USA mortgage crisis and collapse of banks, but it was also a redoing of both John Steinbeck's novel *Grapes of Wrath* and the film with Henry Fonda, *Grapes of Wrath*. So they restaged Tom of the Joad family as Fonda performed it in the movie and they read from the Steinbeck's text. So I think, again, it's this question, in the age of hypermedia, in the age of twitter, in the age of YouTube and Facebook, there is a feeling by avant-garde people that there's a substance to these old texts, an ontological "realness" that we need to have and hold as a physical thing, the way the Bible used to be clutched, not to be read but to hold the physical book next to you. I feel that they're taking some of these classics, whether they are film classics or novel classics... and they are not doing these things in the way that one does adaptations. Take another example from a brilliant young group, the Assembly<sup>25</sup> – their *Great Expectations* is staged in a subway car, with subway riders, and a mix of playing Dickens' story and reading his book. Elevator Repair Service serves as a model, when you act out some of it and read some of it. The weight of the book – physical-ontological and historical – is always there.

C.B. : Ce qui me paraît très intéressant, c'est ce que tu viens de dire à propos de l'idée qu'on a besoin de ré-corporéiser le texte.

R.S. : Oui, ré-corporéiser, exactement.

C.B. : C'est ce que je vois du côté d'un certain nombre de Flamands, je pense par exemple, à Tg STAN. Et contrairement à ce qu'on croit, le théâtre flamand n'est pas un théâtre sans texte. C'est un théâtre souvent avec du texte, mais très peu de textes flamands parce qu'ils ont peu de répertoire et peu de tradition littéraire. Donc ils s'emparent de tout et jouent avec. Quant un acteur de Tg STAN lit ou « interprète » un texte, il le corporéise, il le prend dans son corps pour le dire, et on voit que ça passe par là. C'est une vraie performance, c'est-à-dire que l'acteur est en même temps dans le texte, dans le personnage, mais que c'est toujours lui-même qui dit le texte tout en étant le personnage et le texte. On a donc une sorte de corps qui est à la fois un corps abstrait et textuel, c'est-à-dire les pages, un corps de comédien, et un corps dramatique, de personnage, dans le même temps<sup>26</sup>.

R.S.: The physical text becomes another body, a body on stage.

A.Z.: [...] Somehow, in the examples you give of using literary texts, I think it still plays on the idea of the repertoire, it still plays on those classical texts; it inserts itself in a tradition, a history...

R.S.: I think increasingly the avant garde has grasped these classical texts, while prior to that the avant garde devised their own, the exception being my work with *Dionysus*, and *Makbeth*<sup>27</sup>, *Commune*<sup>28</sup> etc., and the Wooster Group picked up on that. But most of the avant garde was doing new things. Now they return to... so many in the avant garde are doing these classical texts but not in a classical way, they do them in a totally different way in which the text as text becomes important, not the text as the words characters speak. That combines performance art with theater (...), honoring this text as if it was a body on stage.

## L'illusion de la reprise : faire l'expérience de l'original

R.S.: Here is an interesting question, we should do a survey in the Performance Studies department. You should ask people a simple question: pick whatever you want – a Cage concert or something. You have a chance to listen to an hour-long lecture by powerpoint reproduction, we don't have any film of it – a deep scholarly reconstruction of what this event was; or an hour-long reperformance of the same event. Ask the students/scholars: you cannot go to both, which would you go to? And I bet that most of them will choose the second.

A.Z.: The reperformance?

R.S.: They would go to the reperformance before they'll go to the scholarly lecture, even in a scholarly department. Because the lure of the so-called « actual » is very strong, and also their whole life, in a certain sense, has been mediatized, reduced, and interpreted. If they go to the reperformance, the freedom of interpretation remains with the audience, even if it's a different audience. If they go to the lecture, they're bound to get an opinion about what they're seeing, and they're bound to get overtly historical context. If they go to the second, of course covertly that historical context is there but if the person tries to stage it exactly, they have that sense of « I can be there, I can almost be there » which is better than listening to someone tell me what it would have been like to have been there. You should take a poll, in your magazine, and say: you have a choice, you can hear an extraordinary detailed historical account of a performance, delivered by people who know about it, maybe even people who were there, participated; or you can see a very accurate reperformance of the same performance. You can't do both, which would you choose?

A.Z.: Why don't you add a third possibility?

R.S.: Which is?

A.Z.: Which is an actual reperformance, in the sense of reperforming not the exact form but reperforming the purpose. And try to see how... what would you do, what would you actually perform to reperform...

R.S.: The purpose, yes. That would be a third alternative if you can define what reperforming the purpose is. The other two are very clear. One is exactly what Lepecki did with Kaprow's happenings<sup>29</sup> or Rude Mechs did with *Dionysus* or what someone did with Trisha Brown, and the other is scholarship that we know about, so that's defined. The reperforming the purpose is harder to define.

A.Z.: It is harder, because there are more choices.

R.S.: Because it is subjective, what the purpose is.

A.Z.: You can choose to say I'm going to reperform something just to get the same reaction in the audience, or...

C.B.: Or the same provocation.

R.S.: The reason that I'm saying this is because I do feel that... It's not nostalgia, or more than just nostalgia, it's a desire for experience. And the feeling that, in our world today, we're deprived of experience, to some degree.

A.Z.: Yes. If you hear a lecture about a performance, you can say: I heard someone talk about this. If you see a reperformance, you can say I saw this performance. So there is a sense of « I was there, » a sense of positioning yourself in history. Honestly, the

reenactment of Marina Abramović's performances, that's what it did. Now people talk about it in terms of « I was there ».

R.S.: Right. "I was there, I saw her performances." And as cyber and hyper reality becomes more "real" and pervasive the distinction between performance and reperformance will blur. Once digital technology makes it possible to "get" a performance, almost clone it, well...

A.Z.: It's the difference that you make... this idea of repertoire. If you're going to reperform *The Ring Cycle* by Wagner, you're going to take the text and score and respect them, but then all the rest, it's accepted that it's going to be new. What people come to see is to see how you're making it new, what you bring to it. Whereas in the reperformance, the reenactment of performances – or rather representation of performances – they are really sticking to it, see Marina Abramović, the *Rude Mechs*. Everything has to be exactly the same. Why is there such a different approach?

R.S.: The difference is that these three dimensional reperformances are better than reading and better than seeing a video. And they are easier than reading. (...) There is a desire to say « how was it really? » And these reperformances give the illusion that it's the way it was really. It is an illusion, of course, but a thrilling illusion. The illusion of physically entering another time, a time warp. People enjoy that time warp because with so much media, everything can change in an instant and cannot be grasped, nothing seems really for real. These reperformances are like Luddite<sup>30</sup>; they use the machine to destroy the machine. They are against mediatization, they're saying: we use the media to find out what was « really done » and we really re-do it and bring you into that, which a media cannot do, you cannot get this on YouTube, you cannot get that in the Brian de Palma's film. We're using the film as a lens to get through to what they really were doing in the Performing Garage. Abramović is using MoMA to say: this is really what we were doing in 1968 or 1972 in Yugoslavia. The fact is that it is not that, it is a representation – but that's the critique of a performance theorist, it's not the experience of a spectator.

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## NOTES

1. Christian Biet, « Pour une extension du domaine de la performance (XVIIe-XXIe siècles) » (in *Communications* n° 92, 2013/1, pp. 21-35).
2. *Marina Abramović : The Artist is Present*, MoMA New York, 14 Mars – 31 Mai 2010.
3. Voir l'institut Marina Abramović : <https://mai.art/>.
4. Titre d'un article de R. Schechner, « Points de contact entre le théâtre et l'anthropologie ».
5. The Performance Group, *Dionysus in 69*, Performing Garage, New York, 1968.
6. Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theater*, New York: Routledge, 2006.
7. C'est le titre de la rétrospective de Marina Abramović au MoMA (cf. note 5).
8. *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*, MoMA New York, 14 Mars – 31 Mai 2010.
9. *House With the Ocean View* Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, 2002.
10. Marina Abramović et Ulay, *Imponderabilia*, 1977.
11. *Balkan Erotic Epic*, Offhollywood Digital, 2006.
12. Rude Mechanicals, *Dionysus in 69*, The Off Center, Austin, 2009.
13. Le comportement pris comme source par le comédien étant déjà restauré, le jeu du comédien est un comportement doublement restauré.
14. Richard Schechner caractérise la relation du comédien à ce qu'il joue comme "not me... not not me". Selon lui, cette relation est "transitionnelle" et le comédien fait l'expérience de soi à travers son interprétation d'un autre. Il n'est plus lui-même car il incarne un autre, mais il n'est pas exactement "pas lui-même" car sa personnalité influence son interprétation du rôle. Schechner, Richard, "Restoration of Behavior," in *Between Theatre and Anthropology*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, pp. 111-112.
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27. The Performance Group, *Makbeth*, Performing Garage, New York, 1969.
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29. Lepecki, Andre, *Allan Kaprow: 18 Happenings in 6 Parts (Re-doing)*, Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany, 2006.
30. Les luddites étaient les membres d'un groupe clandestin qui s'opposait à l'industrialisation et l'utilisation des machines en Angleterre au début du XIXe siècle. Aujourd'hui, le néo-luddisme désigne l'opposition aux nouvelles technologies.

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## INDEX

**Mots-clés :** Abramovic (Marina), avant-garde, performance, Dionysus in 69, répertoire, reprise

## AUTEURS

### CHRISTIAN BIET

Christian Biet est professeur d'histoire et d'esthétique du théâtre à l'université Paris Ouest – Nanterre. Outre son travail de recherche sur le théâtre du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle et la représentation de la violence au théâtre, il s'intéresse à l'approche des Performance Studies, notamment aux écrits de Richard Schechner et à l'aspect interdisciplinaire de la performance. Il a dirigé en 2013 avec Sylvie Roques un numéro de *Communications* sur la performance, dans lequel il a écrit un article, « Pour une extension du domaine de la performance (XVII<sup>e</sup>-XXI<sup>e</sup> siècles) » (in *Communications* n° 92, 2013/1, pp. 21-35).

### RICHARD SCHECHNER

Richard Schechner est un des fondateurs du département de Performance Studies à la New York University, créé en 1980, dans lequel il enseigne toujours. Ses théories sont fondatrices dans cette discipline, notamment le concept de comportement restauré, qu'il définit comme « la caractéristique principale de la performance », et selon lequel tout comportement humain est une recomposition de comportements précédents ("Restoration of Behavior," in *Between Theatre and Anthropology*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985. pp. 35-116). Ainsi, toute action est déjà une reprise, consciente ou non, d'attitudes, mouvements et actions antérieurs que l'individu copie, coupe, réinvente, et réarrange. Fondateur et directeur du Performance Group de 1967 à 1980, il est un artiste majeur de l'avant-garde des années 60 et 70. Il poursuit désormais son travail artistique avec le collectif *East Coast Artists*, qu'il a fondé en 1992.