
Editor's Note

PERFORMANCE, like so many terms, has taken on new dimensions in the current idiom. What once was an event has become a critical category, now applied to everything from a play to a war to a meal. The performative, as Kimberly Benston points out, is a cultural act, a critical perspective, a political intervention. Performance is embraced as text, and writing is recognized as performance. Such perceptions radicalize the commonplace and invite fresh interpretations. No doubt, the modern Western zeitgeist, with its destabilizing, nontranscendent, revisionary tendencies, lies at the root of the redefinition. The Editorial Board's call for papers on performance lent conspicuous recognition to this development, and the response confirmed the significance that critics of sundry persuasions attach to the concept.

Accompanied by Mario Valdés's thoughtful and invigorating presidential performance, the articles that follow, each a critical performance in its own right, are stunning for the scope that their inquiry comprises. They scan questions of genre, voice, representation, institutional structures, the marketplace, and spectatorship. They touch three continents, encompass a time span from the Middle Ages to the 1980s, and rehearse music, dance, painting, poetry, film, television, and theater. Just as teachers perform, performance teaches, and so do these essays.

For the third time since the feature was initiated, a special topic has spawned a sufficient number of contributions of high quality to fill an entire issue of *PMLA*, a sizable one at that. Like its predecessors, this collection is a remarkable demonstration that our aim to generate coherent groupings without compromising the policy of anonymous submissions is attainable. In addition to the authors, a number of colleagues too modest to take curtain calls deserve acknowledgment for their roles in this project. We would like to thank Robert Weimann, one of the MLA's honorary members, for providing us with the essay that we print here and for his extraordinary display of generosity, flexibility, and humility while working with us. We are also grateful to Marshall Brown for facilitating our initial contacts with Weimann, who was at the time still an *East* German scholar, and to Walter Cohen for offering invaluable assistance with Weimann's manuscript. Finally, we are deeply indebted to Kimberly Benston for his tireless and cheerful labors as coordinator of this special topic and for his own spectacular performance in four scenes, an inspired solution to the challenge of ordering and synthesizing the diverse scripts of eleven talented players.

JOHN W. KRONIK