

The Reality of Contingency: Performance as Materialized Trope and the Theorization of Rupture

Kurt Zemlicka & Marjorie Hazeltine

Abstract: This paper offers a theory of ruptural performance: that which exposes reality as a contingent and arbitrary assemblage, disrupts the spectacle on the level of signification, and enacts alternatives to current instantiations of truth and the real. This requires a new understanding of performance: materialized trope. This view of performance takes into account the temporal duration of an event and argues that the processes by which the event is interpreted is as much of the performance as the instant it happens. Through this reading of performance as materialized trope we offer the Occupy movement as an example of ruptural performance.

Key words: ruptural performance, spectacle, Occupy, signification, truth production

The conception of performance as rupture is a relatively new linkage of live, materially enacted events and the productive disruption of social reality. The recent work of several theorists provide an invaluable starting point for theorizing the role of performance in challenging oppressive instantiations of the Real in the context of what Guy Debord has called “the society of the spectacle.” However, ruptural performance, as currently theorized, tends to ignore the temporal element of the performance, which we believe is essential to disrupting monolithic conceptions of spectacular capitalism. If ruptural performances do succeed in jamming the material flows of capital, the lack of theorization about the extended effects of what we will classify as the “reading” and “rereading” of the performative event places an overemphasis on the ephemeral nature of the rupture. This, we argue, ultimately leads to passive contemplation, a spectacular logic that rupture must counter not support. Therefore we argue for an examination

Kurt Zemlicka is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His research focuses on poststructuralist rhetorical theory, psychoanalysis, and the study of bioethics and public argument.

Marjorie Hazeltine (MA Communication Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) is an actress in the San Francisco Bay Area and teaches English at The Harker School in San Jose, CA.

of the extended temporality of ruptural performance as that which exposes reality as a contingent and an arbitrary assemblage, disrupts the spectacle on the level of signification by opening reality to constant re-interpretation and re-negotiation, and enacts alternatives to current instantiations of truth, both materially and ideologically – all after the ruptural event has taken place. This requires an understanding of performance that moves it away from theatricality and towards materialized trope.

In the following article we summarize and critique current conceptions of rupture, offer our alternative theorization of performance and rupture, and link these conceptions to an example of ruptural performance. The first section examines Tony Perucci's recent theorization of rupture as published in "What the Fuck is That? Poetics of Ruptural Performance," as well as Josette Feral and Leslie Wickens' work on "The Aesthetics of Shock." We believe each author forwards a necessary starting point to theorizing rupture, but ultimately ignores the ongoing re-negotiation that occurs after the event takes place. Furthermore, we critique both theorists' evocation of a monolithic understanding of spectacular capitalism and neo-liberalism, and argue that spectacular capitalism is a specific instantiation of an epistemological framing that constructs what constitutes reality.

In the second section, we suggest an alternative theorization of performance, through Paul de Man, as materialized trope; an embodied enactment of signification that navigates the divide between the figural and literal components of meaning production as well as rethinks the binary between textuality and materiality. Ruptural performance is a specific instantiation of materialized trope that acts *performatively* – it does not attempt to hide the fact that it cannot account for its own production and thus leaves open the possibility of continued rereading, or the challenging of the production of truth and reality. In this sense we believe that rupture is a performed act of intellectual specificity and focus on the temporal moments that occur after the ruptural event itself. This intellectual specificity is a contextualization of the historical production of truth coupled with an exposure of reality as contingent that enables the viewer to disarticulate the inevitability of their current spectacular condition. In the third and final section we examine the Occupy movement to demonstrate the necessity of including the temporal element of materialized trope in reading an event as rupture.

I: (Re)framing Rupture

Making Strange: Theories of Rupture

In his essay, "What the Fuck is That? The Poetics of Ruptural Performance," Tony Perucci theorizes ruptural performance as that which "seeks to challenge and disrupt the values and especially the *experience* of the society of the specta-

cle...it shares with spectacle the qualities of being dramatic and theatrical, what distinguishes them is how they disrupt the experience of daily life, a rupture of the living of social relations" ("What" 3). Supplementing this understanding of ruptural performance is Guy Debord's theorization of the spectacle. The spectacle is defined through Debord as a "modality of experience" that "flattens encounter with presence" in which people are driven to contemplation and not action." ("What" 2). Perucci argues that ruptural performances contain certain qualities that enable spectacular disruption: they interrupt, disrupt temporality, confront, baffle, and confound by focusing the viewer on the present. This presencing of the present places a demand on the viewer that imbues these performances with their ruptural qualities. Instead of unmasking hidden truths, ruptural performances seek to "[return] one's gaze to that which one avoids to maintain acceptance of the inequities of the contemporary social orders" (Perucci "What" 9). When habits are disrupted one's awareness of the present is heightened because simple script following is no longer possible. Furthermore since ruptural performance "embraces the notion that the political message is sometimes not immediately clear," their ambiguous nature frustrates the audiences' ability to assign concrete meaning to the event ("What" 12). By forcing an emphatically inquisitive response, ruptural performances destabilize the spectacular notion of business as usual and therefore constitute a new subversive process that can be utilized by activists within the age of commodity capitalism. Ruptural performances are interruptive because of the way they challenge the temporality of the spectacle. Drawing upon the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky and Walter Benjamin, Perucci argues that these performances "delay the habitual practices of daily life" by making strange the everyday functioning of the spectacle ("What" 5). For Perucci, ruptural performances make the spectator aware that he or she is "in the midst of an event. It is this eventness...that enlivens the occasion of the here and now" ("What" 8). Thus an implicit linkage is drawn between the establishment of historical temporality and the habits and routine of daily spectacular living. By creating an awareness of the present, Perucci argues that ruptural performances *make strange* day-to-day living. It is on this act of making strange that Perucci and others hang their hat, exalting the transformative potential of the ruptural performance to expose the ridiculousness of everyday spectacular capitalism.

Josette Feral and Leslie Wickes offer a similar reading of the ruptural event in their work on the "Aesthetics of Shock," arguing that these moments force the audience to confront reality. They argue that when these events occur:

[They] indicate a rupture, whether violent or not, that suspends the representation in order to allow the factual, and thus the present, to emerge onstage. They create an event. The stage suddenly loses the play of illusion, of the appearance, of the as if, and the spectators find themselves face to face with a reality that has emerged where they least expected it, a reality that modifies

their initial contract, once implicit, surrounding the representation (54).

The result is that the spectators are “[forced] into a mode of reception that differs from what traditional spectacles have accustomed them to” (Feral and Wickes 54). This new mode of representation, a mode that the spectator is thrust into, has the potential, according to theorists of rupture, to usher in transformative effects on the audience. Feral and Wickes argue that the effect is twofold. In the context of violence on stage, they outline the rupture’s potential:

The first effect of this emergence of reality is to surprise the spectators and modify their gaze and the tacit contract, once traditionally ensconced, that guarantees a show as a place of play and illusion. ... The second effect is clearly the absence of referents. It is true that spectators, fascinated by the violence of the action, the risk that the artist voluntarily undergoes, and the real danger that threatens, try to distinguish between what has been planned and controlled and the ever-present possibility of accident. They are carried away by the potential of the action’s immediacy (Feral and Wickes 55).

In both Feral and Wickes’ as well as Perucci’s account of the ruptural act, the key is the instantaneous moment in which the spectator becomes hyper-aware of the present. The key here is that the society of the spectacle is disrupted by exposing the strangeness of the here and now. However, we argue that these formulations fail to take into account a critical element of rupture: how the event is rendered intelligible after the initial shock of the ruptural act. In other words, how is it that the “presencing of the present” is not just a flash in the pan? To answer this question, we argue, is a critical way to extend the work done by theorists of ruptural performances in order to account for how ruptures can become durable – an important task, we think, given the political commitments of both the specific theories of rupture and the discipline more broadly. In order to understand what these events “rupture” specifically, and why we must investigate the aftermath of the events themselves, it is critical to situate them in the conjuncture in which they take place.

The Logic(s) of the Spectacle

Following Debord, Perucci argues that the spectacular society fundamentally rearticulates our relationship to production and consumption through the primacy of the commodity:

Such a dynamic is characteristic of what Guy Debord terms spectacular society’s “real unreality,” which is the manifestation of the commodity’s “colonization of social life” (13, 29). As a modality of performance, the spectacle stifles alternative, resistive, or radical modes of performance that surge in the occasion of imminence heightened by the actor in time and space. For, the spectacle works to pacify us in separated “contemplation” of images. For producers and consumers alike, the spectacle depends upon a “violent expropriation of

their time” that constructs an “estranged present” and a “spatial alienation” (114, 16). This estranged present is paradoxically constructed by: the performance of the ahistorical presence of the commodity with its elided historicity; what we might call, following Michel de Certeau, the “absent presence” of the workers who produced it; and the estranged present of the consumer. (“Guilty” 317)

Here an implicit linkage is drawn between the logics that propagate a particular regime of truth that is centered around the foregrounding of images and representation and the creation of an economy focused on the commodification of everyday life. We argue that there are two components to the society of the spectacle: an epistemological spectacularization of the social and a commodification of political economy. It is important to delineate the two given that the commodification of political economy is predicated on an epistemological grounding that produces the truth-value of economic systems. In this conjuncture, the production of truth enabled by the epistemology of the spectacle manifests itself in the enactment of spectacular capitalism.

Furthermore, this epistemology is itself produced conjuncturally; there is no single institutional entity or practice that is responsible for its instantiation, but rather Debord’s analysis demonstrates that a new mode of experience has emerged that focuses on the importance of the proliferation of the image and that mode of experience it now takes as true. Debord sets out this epistemological framework by commenting that, “The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by image” (4). He then argues that, “The spectacle’s form and content are identically the total justification of the existing system’s conditions and goals” (6). This process of self-justification represents an affirmation of its own particular representation of truth. However, Debord then links this epistemological justification to its economic counterpart, stating, “The spectacle subjugates living men to itself to the extent that the economy has totally subjugated them. It is no more than the economy developing for itself. It is the true reflection of the production of things, and the false objectification of the producers” (16). We argue that spectacular capitalism is *enabled*, but *not intrinsic to*, the epistemological spectacularization of society. The application and execution of spectacular capitalism is anything but consistent. Often rife with contradictions, disarticulations and rearticulations, it is applied unevenly across the social field. What remains constant however, is the epistemological presuppositions on which it asserts its primacy: the logics enabling the proliferation of images that lay the groundwork for the commodification of day-to-day living.

The epistemological framing of the spectacle represents what Foucault calls a “regime of truth,” in that it is intrinsically entwined with the exertion of power to dictate the grounds of evaluating what constitutes true and false. He argues, “... truth isn’t outside power”:

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth ... the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (*Power* 131)

Therefore, spectacular capitalism is enabled by a set of arbitrary and contingent epistemological truths. Given the nature of the spectacle, truth is not purely relegated to determining what types of knowledges and narratives are considered acceptable, which Foucault describes as the *modus operandi* of truth regimes, but rather it dictates what counts as reality itself. In other words, the regime of truth in the spectacle is a contingent regime of *the Real* (*Power* 131-2). As Debord explains, “Ideological facts were never a simple chimera, but rather a deformed consciousness of realities ... all the more so when the materialization, in the form of spectacle, of the ideology brought about by the concrete success of autonomized economic production in practice confounds social reality with an ideology which has tailored all reality in terms of its model” (212). Therefore, the power of the spectacle to frame our understanding of the world lies not just within its ability to determine the truth-value of knowledge, but the truth-value of existence itself. This epistemological hegemony represents the cornerstone of the current conjuncture, and is absolutely necessary for the commodification of political economy. Spectacular capitalism itself is actualized through an instantiation of reality that enables its own existence.

Within the spectacle, ideology is not simply an interpolative process that indoctrinates subjects into particular political, social or economic beliefs. Rather, it, as Baudrillard claims, “[conceals] the fact that the real is no longer real, thus preserving the reality principle” (13). The role of power, in its execution of ideology, is therefore to “reinject the real and the referential everywhere, to persuade us of the reality of the social, of the gravity of the economy and the finalities of production” (Baudrillard 22). The notion of ideology as an act of false consciousness is no longer applicable in the current conjuncture because there is *no reality to be referred back to* in a world of images. There can be no false consciousness because there is no “true” consciousness, only multiple *consciousnesses* that are contested, marginalizing and marginalized within the struggle over regimes of truth. However, that is not to say that ruptural performance is not ideological. If rupture is to disrupt the spectacle, it must do so, at least in some capacity, on an ideological level – it must challenge the epistemological regime of the real established by the spectacle. Therefore, it is not sufficient for rupture to simply disrupt the material flows of spectacular capitalism in a one-off, or immediate and unintelligible way. Acting only on this level leaves intact the logics that enable the reproduction of the spectacular society, addressing only the symp-

toms of the spectacle – not the epistemological syndrome that enables their proliferation.

In “making strange” the day-to-day activities of consumption, the witnesses of these types of ruptural performance are left understanding that the systems in which they engage are fundamentally harmful to their social well-being, yet without being provided any alternatives, they are forced to continually participate in activities that they understand as unethical. While making strange is an essential starting point to theorizing what makes ruptural performances so subversive, it is necessary but insufficient to capturing the true potential of the ruptural event. What is needed, we believe, is an examination of the temporality of the interpretation of the event. Theorizing this “after-event” is critical to demonstrating the constant remaking of the real that occurs after reality has been made strange. Failure to think through the after-event, we believe, facilitates a type of passive Nietzschean *ressentiment* that entrenches passivity. According to Deleuze, “In Nietzsche ‘passive’ does not mean ‘non-active’; ‘non-active’ means ‘reactive’ but ‘passive’ means ‘non-acted’. The only thing that is passive is reaction insofar as it is not acted. The term ‘passive’ stands for the triumph of reaction, the moment when, ceasing to be acted, it becomes a *ressentiment*” (118). This fostering of *ressentiment* facilitates inaction because the witnesses of a ruptural event will “feed the corresponding object as a personal offense and affront because [they make] the object responsible for [their] own powerlessness to invest anything but the trace - a qualitative or typical powerlessness” (Deleuze 116). The act of estrangement therefore propagates the existence of the spectacle by creating a type of “slave morality” whereby the affected individuals “[want] others to be evil, [they need] others to be evil in order to be able to consider [themselves] good. *You are evil, therefore I am good*; this is the slave’s fundamental formula” (Deleuze 119). The result, extrapolating from Nietzsche, is that this mentality leads to the embracing of spectacle – its very existence is required to reinforce the moral superiority of those who are external to it:

While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is “outside,” what is “different,” what is “not itself”; and *this* No is its creative deed. This inversion of the value-positing eye—this *need* to direct one’s view outward instead of back to oneself—is of the essence of *ressentiment*: in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all—its action is fundamentally reaction. (36-7)

This short-circuits the ruptural event’s ability to, as Perucci claims, force “the experience of the encounter of returning one’s gaze to that which one avoids to maintain acceptance of the inequities of the contemporary social orders” (“What” 9). By forcing one’s gaze to the external institution of spectacular capitalism one elides his or her own responsibility in participating in those systems.

Individuals can hate the system, find the system strange and terrible, but ultimately need the system in order to continually justify their hatred. This is the type of contemplation Debord argues is at the core of the spectacle. Ultimately, a theorization of rupture that reinforces the epistemological rationale of the spectacle, while perhaps challenging the actualization of spectacular capitalism, abrogates any ability to effectively disrupt the foundational logic upon which it rests.

What is required, therefore, is an understanding of rupture that challenges the epistemological instantiations of reality by the spectacle. Concurrent with this is the understanding that the spectacle's actualization in the form of the assemblage of spectacular capitalism is not an external entity, but rather that it is constituted by the everyday practices of populations. Theorists of rupture must take seriously Foucault's account of power relations as inherently dynamic and fluid. He argues that, "[Relations] of power, and hence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extend beyond the limits of the State" or in this case, the spectacle (*Power* 122). He continues:

[First] of all because the State, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations, and further because the State can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations. The State is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth. True, these networks stand in a conditioning-conditioned relationship to a kind of "meta-power" which is structured essentially round a certain number of great prohibition functions; but this meta-power with its prohibitions can only take hold and secure its footing where it is rooted in a whole series of multiple and indefinite power relations that supply the necessary basis for the great negative forms of power. (*Power* 122)

Ruptural performances must be theorized to expand their targets and durations beyond instantiations of spectacular capitalism and focus on their ability to disrupt the epistemology of the spectacle as well as its imposition of reality. In order to accomplish this task, a supplement to the theory of the effects of ruptural performances is required; one that realizes that the act of "making strange" is a *necessary but not sufficient* step to disrupting the conjuncture of the spectacle and takes seriously the aftermath of the performative event. This will be the task of the next section.

II: An Alternative: Rupture as Endless Rereading

Performance as Materialized Trope

Since performance, at its most basic level, operates on some plane of signification, we believe that it is essential to begin its theorization with an exploration of

the signifying process. Here we will turn to the work of literary critic Paul de Man and his theory of language, which we understand as an examination of the use of signs. While de Man refers specifically to linguistic representation, his theory extends beyond language – it provides an explanation of the process of meaning-making in contexts that are not confined to the spoken word. Here it is important to make several distinctions about the nature of textuality in its relationship to performance. We believe that any performance is bifurcated into two main components: the material conditions of enactment, and the textual level of meaning. Instead of reducing the study of performance to simply one or another, we believe that each plane of action mutually constitutes the other – their relationship exists in a knot. A performance without material enactment is no more of a performance than one that does not convey some kind of meaning through the plane of signification.

This view of the relationship between textuality and performativity supplements much of the discussion already occurring in the field. However, we believe that much of the debate over the materiality/textuality divide are split into two positions of thought that frame the heuristics as mutually exclusive. On one side, there exists the Performance Studies scholars who view textuality as the primary method for interpreting performance, with materiality relegated to a second, asignifying role. Kirk W. Fuoss forwards one such interpretation, arguing from a perspective of contestation at the heart of performance that:

The textual sphere of contestation refers to the struggle among competing symbolic practices at both the intratextual and intertextual levels. Intratextual contestation refers to the contestation among symbolic practices within a performance and is roughly equivalent to what Bakhtin calls “internal dialogism” (275-301), the struggle among the various discourses incorporated within a single text to overpower, discredit, and displace one another. Intertextual contestation refers to the way an individual performance (with its particular intratextual configuration) competes with other performances and other types of texts (with their particular intratextual configurations) (Fuoss 338).

While Fuoss mentions the “spatial” and “conceptual” spheres as additional areas of contestation, two things are clear: First, that the textual sphere is primary to all forms of materiality since it is predicated upon meaning-making (341-344). Second, the textual and spatial spheres exist in opposition to each other, yet it is unclear how one affects the other if even at all. We believe that the material and textual levels of a performance do not exist in such a relationship, rather they constantly affect and are affected by each other since neither is ontologically prior to the other. Instead, we believe that textual is material and the material is textual.

Those who believe in the total primacy of the material represent the other side of the conceptual scale. Again, a distinction may be made between the textual and the material, yet here the binary relationship is inverted from the text-

centric position. One such scholar working in this direction is Julia A. Walker, who argues for the reassertion of performances' enacted materiality over a more rigid textual heuristic. Walker "would like to suggest that this return to the notion of performance over the course of the past fifty years reveals a desire to recognize the ways in which our very language has erased the material conditions of our existence" (Walker 171). This attempt to reassert the "materiality" of existence in the face of its erasure by the system of language serves as a starting point for understanding the importance of the co-constitutive model of textuality/materiality that we would like to put forth. However, we believe that Walker swings the pendulum too far in the other direction. Instead of simply abdicating the possibility of any form of textual analysis, we believe that fostering a notion of "materializing" the components of the text itself will serve to assuage the critique of textuality proffered by Walker. Another critique of the standard textual interpretive paradigm comes from Dwight Conquergood. His critique of "textocentrism" is incisive, and ultimately, we believe, accurate. He argues that, "The hegemony of textualism needs to be exposed and undermined," and urges performance scholars to look to the livedness of the event (147). However, Conquergood is quick to point out that "textocentrism - not texts - is the problem" (151). He provides us with the elucidating example of Zora Neal Hurston, who utilizes dance, play, and the written word to challenge hegemonic structures of domination (Conquergood 150). Others have forwarded the notion that a textual interpretation of a performance shackles it into the realm of representation in Performance Studies, including Della Pollock (260) and Peggy Phalen (13). Elsewhere, specifically in some strands of Cultural Studies, the notion of critiquing the concept of representation serves as an important anchor for new methods of analysis. (Grossberg, Packer). We agree with this critique of representation, but argue that it is precisely the tendency to assert acts of representation as having correspondence with the Real to create reality is the fulcrum of ideology. We also theorize textuality outside of representation, looking instead to the formal elements of signification that makeup the workings of the representative apparatus. In other words, we understand that texts do not necessarily "represent" reality in that they demonstrate a one-to-one correspondence with it. Rather, we believe that texts both produce and are produced by reality, and their representation "as a reflection of the Real" is a functioning of an ideological apparatus – the epistemological level of the spectacle.

It is also critical to point out, that unlike many of the above critiques of text-centered criticism, we do not believe that the concept of "text" is chained to the written word. Rather, to "read" something textually is to examine the ways in which it produces significance for the audience who witnesses a performative event. Thus a critical element of temporality is introduced – one that focuses on the interpretation of the ruptural event after the material performance has itself ended. Thus, we believe that the distinction between the textual and material

elements of a performance is ultimately unhelpful for the theorist of rupture. Instead we need an expanded view of both sides of the false dualism: texts can be material and materiality can be textual, what delineates the two is the element of temporality – just as the event is separated from the interpretation of the event, the text of a performance, as Carl Lavery points out, is “a kind of ‘postscript’ or relic of/for an event that has passed ... an architecture for conjuring ghosts” (37). This temporal distancing from the event of “making strange” that allows for interpretation and reinterpretation is critical for any theorization of the ruptural event since it is the space where the audience, after being bewildered, takes the time to renegotiate their relation to reality – a temporal function of the rupture that is essential to understanding its subversive nature.

According to de Man, all texts are bifurcated between “a generative, opened, non-referential grammatical system” (its declarative statements) and “a figural system closed off by a transcendental signification that subverts the grammatical code to which the text owes its existence” (its method of declaration) (*Allegories* 270). In other words, the literal meaning of a text is constantly undermined by its figural counterpart – “grammatical cognition is undone,” he argues, “at all times, by its rhetorical displacement” (*Resistance* 17). Since all processes of signification entail a figural component, they constantly defer stable meaning due to their tropological nature. Understanding the figural nature of signification, however, is not sufficient to determining the overall truth claim of a text. De Man writes, “we reach the conclusion that the determining characteristic of literary language is indeed figurality, in the somewhat wider sense of rhetoricity, but that, far from constituting an objective basis for literary study, rhetoric implies the persistent threat of misreading” (“Literature” 188). Misreading, in this context, is the failure of a reader to affix a final, “true” meaning to a text.

De Man’s conception of “misreading” therefore has two implications: first, the concept of a “text” is radically expanded. As Andrezej Warminski points out, “the tropological system of the text (i.e., that *is* the text) cannot close itself off (in a final stable meaning) because that system cannot account *for its own production*, that is, cannot account for the inaugural act that put it into place in the first place in its own terms, that is, according to principles internal to itself as system” (24). In other words, any process of signification carries with it the threat of being misread. As Martin McQuillan states:

The conclusion we can draw from this argument is that language itself is material, i.e. our use of language determines our experience of the real world ... Not that the real world is a text, rather that as far as human beings, as users of language, are concerned the real world is always experienced textually. Thus, by de Man’s account, his own critical- linguistic analysis ... is well placed to provide a useful understanding of the political and ideological problems of material existence. (86)

In this context, language is understood as a process of signification and in at-

tempting to analyze its nature, and the process of reading itself, we can extend this analysis to any material phenomenon that we interpret through signs and symbols. The material world is therefore understood as a series of materialized texts, a set of experiences that we “read” by attempting to interpret them through signifying processes.

Second, de Man’s understanding of misreading provides a framework for a new understanding of what it means to “read” a text. He argues that reading “implies that the grammatical decoding of a text leaves a residue of indetermina-tion that has to be, but cannot be, resolved by grammatical means, however ex-tensively conceived” (*Resistance* 15). This means that the reader must remain vig-ilant in his or her denial of the impulse to affix meaning to a text, made difficul-t by the fact that the very nature of language is to present itself as trope while denying its existence as such. As McQuillan explains, “Language as rhetoric makes it impossible to place a limit on meaning in a text and so prevents closure in that text” (19). Thus, “reading is a critical challenge to perception which re-fuses to accept a desire for stable or single meanings” (19). Therefore, one can never put an end to the task of reading, since to do so would be to affix a final meaning to a particular text.

Through de Man we understand performance to be materialized trope, an embodied enactment of signification. Performance represents a materialization of the tropological nature of signification that occupies the space between its literal and figurative components. This conception of performance, theorized through a deconstructive lens, is in accordance with many performance studies scholars. Elin Diamond articulates the relationship between the actions of a ma-terial body and the signification of those actions as constitutive of performance. For Diamond, performance is “the immediate act of doing, and the thing done”-that which exists in its eventness and in the meaning/signification of the event (155). Peggy Phelan articulates this relationship through the appearing and dis-appearing of the performer’s body. She claims that in performance the perform-er’s body appears materially only in so much as it disappears into signification becoming “metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of ‘presence’” (150). Rich-ard Schechner marks the experience of performing as “not me... not not me,” explaining the dual nature in performance of a material self but a self that is also standing in for something else (110). The conception of performance as material-ized trope rearticulates a relationship that has been heavily theorized in the field of performance studies. However, a theorization of performance through trope provides a theoretical framework of signification that allows us to articulate where and how meaning is made and how a particular mode of performance can effectively rupture current logics of truth making rather than the materialized instantiations of those logics.

In this context, the act of performing can be understood as a process of ei-ther reading or misreading. In the inherently contradictory nature of significa-

tion, understanding performance as an act that expresses the tension between its figurative and literal components means that it has the ability to articulate the relationship between the two. Here, de Man outlines two functions of signification that represent the ways in which we believe performance navigates this divide. The first function, called the “cognitive” level of meaning, asserts that language is a closed topological system. Understanding signification on this level is accomplished, according to Warminski, “...by interpreting the text as to be understood on the basis of (and *as*) a topological system that would be closed, in the sense that its intelligibility is *grounded* in some ultimately stable meaning, an ultimately stable hermeneutic horizon of meaning. (In such a setup, the rhetoric of tropes would be continuous with, homogeneous with, logic – the possibility of universal and hence extratextual [and hence extralinguistic] meaning.)” (23-4). When performance enacts the cognitive level of signification it can be understood as a process of misreading. That is to say it is enacted in a way that presents itself as a closed system accounting for its own production. The result is that the cognitively performative act tries to affix a stable meaning to the particular ideological process or text that it acts within. That ideological system is presented as the entity that is responsible for the performance and in doing so this type of performance can be understood as a reification of a particular ideology. In the context of the spectacle these performances represent an unquestioning of the production of reality (trope). This type of performance upholds the passive non-action endorsed by the epistemology of the spectacle. As Warminski explains, “... without the epistemological critique of trope, as de Man puts it, nothing happens. There is no direct, immediate, royal road to the performative, to action and the act, political or otherwise. Pretending that one can go to it directly is sheer delusion and a guarantee that nothing can happen, nothing will ever happen” (28).

Performative Signification and the Ruptural Event

Ruptural performances, therefore, disrupt the stable hermeneutic horizon of meaning through a process of self-reflexivity. Instead of presenting themselves as referring back to an extratextual entity such as spectacular capitalism, these performances expose actualizations of the spectacle as an open topological system – always unstable and always constituted by the embodied, topological practices of individuals within the spectacle. These performances operate under a conception of meaning that, according to de Man, transcends the cognitive threat of misreading. He argues that, “the passage from a conception of language as a system, perhaps a closed system, of tropes, that totalizes itself as a series of transformations which can be reduced to topological systems, and then the fact that you *pass* from that conception of language to *another* conception of language in which language is no longer cognitive but in which language is ‘performative’”

(*Allegories* 132). This performative conception of language is an enactment of a ruptural process that is critical to theorizing the disruption of spectacular logic. These performances, according to Warminski, function as “a sort of jump— [they stutter], as it were—into another textual and linguistic model...[that] disrupts the text as cognitive, as trope” (24). Ruptural performances therefore expose and disrupt texts as acts, as embodied practices in everyday life. For example spectacular capitalism is not an external entity with a stable meaning, but rather is an assemblage of performed actions that constantly affirm specific claims to reality and truth. By operating on the performative level of signification, ruptural performances, according to Gayatri Spivak, “disclose how the corrective impulse within the tropological analysis is obliged to act out a lie in attempting to establish it as the corrected version of truth” (19).

Ruptural performances, therefore, serve as a particularly insidious form of ideological critique; one that seeks to disrupt the holistically coercive regime of the Real that serves as the heart of the logics of the spectacle. By challenging the linkages between truth and reality, as well as those between textuality and politics, ruptural performances foreground the possibility of redefining what constitutes a politics outside of spectacular logic. This is similar to what Bill Readings has called “the deconstruction of politics”:

[What] is at stake in the deconstruction of the opposition of the textual to the political, in the refiguration of the literal, is precisely politics itself, the terror of the real that governs the government and the argument (so that argument is limited to government) of Western politics in democracy or in its most extended form in totalitarianism, a terror that operates by grounding its prescriptive judgments as the descriptions of an empirical reality outside signifying practice ... The real will not be the ground of judgment; we will not seek to defend our prescriptives by appealing to a descriptive function that is purely denotative. The real will no longer be a given by the standards of which all attempts to think outside the status quo will be silenced, forced to transgress the real, even as they seek to enter the argument. (230, 38)

Ruptural performance operates to expose and disrupt the rules of truth making, disarticulating truth from its current instantiation in real embodied practices. If truth only exists in so much as it is performed in reality, it can be reshaped and enacted differently¹ (Butler 321).

¹ Judith Butler’s theorization of the hope of performativity is mobilized here to illustrate the social construction and performance of reality as contingent and able to be re-performed and thus remade: “To say that gender is performative is to say that it is a certain kind of enactment; the ‘appearance’ of gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth; gender is prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or the other (usually within a strictly binary frame), and the reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with power; and finally, there is no gender without this reproduction of norms that risks undoing or redoing the norm in unexpected

Therefore ruptural performance not only makes strange the inevitability of reality within the spectacle but also exposes the logic of reality as contingent. This conception avoids the trap of encouraging passive nihilism by exposing the possibility of alternate conceptions of reality – the beauty of the ruptural performance lies in its delight of unmasking ideological instantiations of the real, an infatuation with the drive to continually “reread” the conjuncture in which it is situated. By foregrounding the exposure of contingency as an end in and of itself, ruptural performance constitutes an act of *active* nihilism. As Alenka Zupančič explains, “the difference between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ (or ‘reactive’) nihilism” is that:

The first is still an expression of the power of the spirit, where “life interprets life against life”; whereas the second is the expression of its impotence. Active nihilism could be described as a fight against semblance, as an attitude of exposing and unmasking the “illusions,” “lies,” and imaginary formations is the same of the Real ... It involves the power always to go forward, to remove one veil after another—it is the enthusiasm of knowledge that (still) believes in its salutary power. It does not stop before the truth, as cruel as the latter might be. This, however, is not the end of the ascetic ideal, but, rather, its very triumph ... (63-4)

Conceived of in this way, a ruptural performance does not simply “make strange” a particular practice without providing a space for alternative action (leading to passivity and *ressentiment*), but rather opens a space for contingency, in its temporal aftermath, whereby the viewer understands that the actualization of a particular social context is not a necessary outcome following from an unquestioned epistemological framework. Spectacular capitalism is not presented as an externalized entity that monopolizes the flow of power within a rupture – at the moment of this opening, power is presented as fluid and the act of questioning reality itself becomes a forceful process of resistance.

The task of the ruptural performance is thus linked with Foucault’s call for specific intellectualism. Foucault contrasts specific intellectualism with the “universal intellectual” who seeks to uncover a final and ultimate truth about “universal human values” (*Power* 130). “The ‘specificity’ of intellectual practice,” according to David Owen, comes “in the refusal to legislate a universal determination of ‘what is right’ in favour of the perpetual problematisation of the present” (210). Eric Darier further elaborates that this constant act of critique seeks to “constitute an aesthetic of existence. A beautiful life worth living is a life of constant self-critique, a work with regard to the possibilities of thinking differently, of becoming something different from what we have been made, in the process of construction called ‘self-improvement’” (233). Thus performances become

ways, thus opening up the possibility of a remaking of gendered reality along new lines” (321).

ruptural not when they take a stand against a grand narrative of spectacular capitalism, but rather expose the contingency of truth in particular contexts, challenging the very logics of the spectacle and exposing them as random presentations of contingent reality. A ruptural act is simultaneously a critique of material practices and epistemology – an opening of a space in which both particular business practices and the realities they produce come into question. Within this space, politics itself is no longer subservient to the terror of the real; possibility flourishes when ruptured from the stranglehold of reality. Ultimately, theorists and practitioners of ruptural performances would be wisely served to heed Foucault’s call for a new type of intellectual labor:

The essential political problem for the intellectual is not to criticize the ideological contents ... but that of ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth. The problem is not changing people’s consciousnesses – or what’s in their heads – but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth.

It’s not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power ... but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social control, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time. The political question, to sum up, is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness or ideology; it is truth itself. (*Power* 133)

Ruptural theorists thus stand at the crossroads between intellectual and performative praxis – a praxis that must be understood within the context of the historical struggle over reality.

III: Directional Movements: Occupy as Materialized Trope

Ruptural performances, as materialized trope that requires constant reading and rereading have no direct correlation to theatricality. Thus, in order to identify what we see as ruptural performances, we turn to material instantiations of trope that both expose contingencies of reality and provide/enact alternatives to the logics of the spectacle that are not necessarily constituted by heightened, exaggerated expressivity, but also the processes of meaning making that occur after the event itself has long faded to memory.

The Occupy movement exerts its primary effectivity over the two planes of materiality and signification and, given its disruptive nature, is an excellent example of a ruptural performance as materialized trope. “What strikes me, and very positively so,” writes Richard Schechner, “is how much Occupy is a ‘solidarity’ rather than ‘particularist’ movement. Since the 1980s at least, there has been no one over-arching progressive movement issue. Actions have been on behalf of some specific group. But Occupy’s “We are the 99%” signals an important shift. The aim is to include (just about) everybody” (8). This shift from

particularity to solidarity has rapidly expanded the movement well beyond its initial encampment in New York. Schechner explains, with perhaps some suspicion that, "Occupy is very popular on social networks. An 8 December 2011 Google search yielded 575 million entries. Hundreds of thousands of people use Occupy-related Facebook sites to stay connected to the movement. Are these web-radicals willing to put their physical bodies on the line in order to force a redistribution of wealth? Exactly what the future of Occupy will be is not certain" (8). The unstable nexus of various political movements has allowed the Occupy movement to not only continue, but also proliferate over the Internet and in localized spaces. Even the existences of the physical encampments are no longer necessary to keep the movement afloat. What this means is that the Occupy movement's effectivity is not predicated solely on the plane of the material nor signification. Rather its existence, as a movement such that it is, relies on the co-constitutive nature of its performativity: realized both in physical encampments and Internet social networks. While the "form" of activism has largely changed with this shift in the movement, its message remains on point: "We are the 99%."

Besides occupying both levels of performance, when viewed from the perspective of materialized trope, the Occupy movement serves as an example of a ruptural performance. Apart from "making strange" the material flows of capital in its initial stages by having a diverse crowd of activists camp in public places often next to institutions of capital (Schechner 8), Occupy constantly engages in a reflexive process of rereading with the hegemony of the status quo. Rereading is reflexive in that it occurs both as the spectator of Occupy is forced to confront the conditions of possibility (or reality) that led to the creation of the 99% and the movement itself responds to those confrontations by rereading its own ontological makeup. Once police cleared out most of the encampments in winter of 2011-12, the movement bourgeoned on the internet and elsewhere. We understand this as a process of rereading whereby the movement chose to reread itself in order to prevent a final, affixed understanding of what the movement is or was, stymying attempts to end it. It is this reflexive rereading that makes Occupy a ruptural event. Reading it as a materialized trope is insightful because it allows for the dissolution of the material/textual binary that is essential for understanding the movement's effectivity. Due to the nature of Occupy, along with its continuous reflexive rereading, it appears to have no ontological hierarchy between its signifying and material components. The movement is effective both in localized encampments and dispersed through social media – its effectivity is radically different, but it is effective none the less, such that it continues to make demands on the status quo. The trope of the movement (represented most clearly by "we are the 99%") is materially reenacted from its height in the Fall of 2011 by encampments across the country, to today's social media coordinated activism to connections to the Arab Spring and protests in Syria through its

channels of solidarity. Thus the trope itself is both discursive and material: actualized through signification and in material enactments. The Occupy movement operates in an agonistic relationship to the status quo – one that causes its effectivity to oscillate between material and signifying poles. Fuoss characterizes this dispersal as “directional movement,” and, “this directional movement occurs as a result of strategies that human agents operationalize and, further, these strategies operate either in the cultural performances themselves or in ancillary activities related to them, such as talking about performances prior to or after their occurrence” (Fuoss 332). These directional movements (new encampments, social network memes etc.) engage in a process of rereading their own identities, and thus challenge the fixing of a final, closed meaning onto the movement. Furthermore, spectators to the movement continue to be forced to reread Occupy itself as it continues to challenge the reality of spectacular capitalism – both in its material flows and its epistemic construction of reality – solidifying Occupy as a continual, ruptural performance.

The idea that simply disrupting the material flows of capitalism is not enough for a true ruptural event is critical here. As the materiality of the ruptural performance makes itself most visible, through the disruption of the materiality of capital, it still cannot be considered a challenge to spectacular capitalism because, at the level of its signification, it leaves those flows in place. Kristina Schriver and Donna Marie Nudd point out a similar problem in their ruptural performance of “the Mickee Faust Club,” arguing that, “[the performance] revealed what appeared to be an interesting conundrum: as the performance stage becomes less stable (in the streets, through neighborhoods, past the Capitol steps), the political message, if the troupe was to take respectful clues from its activist brethren, needed firm anchorage” (Schriver and Nudd 197). This means that any ruptural performance must operate on at least two levels: the materiality of the performance itself and the plane of signification in which it produces meaning. We argue that what unites those two elements is the process of reading and rereading that occurs after the ruptural event takes place. To simply focus the ruptural apparatus on the material disruption of the flows of capital, or the event itself, neglects the functioning of signifying practices that predicate its message. Both aspects of a ruptural event need to be examined in order to determine the political efficacy of the event itself. Schriver and Nudd argue that this distinction between the message and the materiality of a performance is critical to understand the complex dynamics of power at play in a conjuncture before it can be ruptured. Specifically, they state that, “[a] major recommendation we offer theatre practitioners who are interested in staging performative protest events concerns recognizing power as fluid and diffuse, power as emanating from many different points. It is necessary to analyze the multiple points of power in order to get a sense of how these points of power are likely to work or, ideally, could work, during the scheduled time and place of a performance pro-

test event” (Schriver and Nudd 208). Power in this sense takes on a uniquely Foucaultian turn: it is dispersed throughout multiple apparatuses throughout the conjuncture, occupying both material and discursive formations.

What makes the Occupy movement a ruptural performance is its undecidability between two movements: The initial movement of the event of Occupy itself, the event that confounds, mystifies, prompts the commentator to exclaim “What the fuck is that?” and the directional movement of the after-event. Both movements are separated by a temporal distancing from the event to the after-event. To draw back on the work of Perucci, and his thinking about the event of Badiou, we can say that the ruptural moment of the Occupy movement occurs both in its event and the naming of the that event (the after-event). Each exists on a temporal continuum, and each constitutes the movement qua rupture. For Badiou, the event exists neither as part of, nor apart from, the situation of the state of things. He argues that, “The undecidability of the event’s belonging to the situation can be interpreted as a double function. On the one hand, the event would invoke the void, on the other hand, it would interpose itself between the void and itself. [It] would deploy, in the interior-exterior of a historical situation, in a torsion of its order, the being of non-being, namely, *existing*” (Badiou 182-183). It is this torsion of the order of the situation that represents both the material disruption of the flows of capital and the rereading of the signifying processes facilitated by its directional movement. Oliver Feltham describes this directional movement in the context of Badiou’s theory of the event, stating, “[There is] an intervention ... that saves the event from oblivion by pinning a signifier upon it. The intervention orients the event towards the situation, and by naming it draws it into linguistic circulation” (103). The entrance of the Occupy event into linguistic circulation occurred as the metaphor for the movement ossified into “We are the 99%.” This naming of the event, or what we have termed the “after-event” must still be regarded as part of the ruptural performance.

Thus the introduction of the element of temporality of the rupture is essential to develop the fullest understanding of the performance itself. Coupled with a movement away from the metaphor of the stage as the central metaphor for explaining the performance, the totality of the Occupy movement, with its own directional movement away from the materiality of the camps and to the digital world of social media highlights its function as a materialized trope. While the initial making strange of Wall Street culture is an essential part of Occupy, understanding its ruptural nature in the fullest way possible requires examining the directional movements of the event after the camps have been raided and the performance “ended.” While the tents have been struck and the human microphones silenced, the directional movement of Occupy lives on, open to constant reading and rereading, articulation and rearticulation, still challenging, in the minds of its participants and witnesses, the day to day reality of Wall Street culture in the United States and around the world.

Conclusion

Fusing the rhetorician's attention to processes of signification with the performance scholar's eye toward materiality, we believe that understanding performance as materialized trope allows for its theorization to extend beyond the formative metaphor of the theatricality. Specifically, performers and theorists of rupture are armed with the task of reinjecting political possibility into the stifling confines of spectacular passivity. By understanding rupture as a process that both destabilizes the production of reality through an exposure of contingency and opens a space for alternative modes of existence previously unthinkable in our current conjuncture, new forms of possibility will be allowed to proliferate once they are freed from the shackles of the terror of the real. We situate ourselves, along with Perucci and other theorists of rupture, on an intersection between theory and practice: tasked with developing a new ruptural praxis that challenges the very foundation of our epistemological understanding of the real, we must resist the urge to proclaim universalist statements about the nature of reality, opting instead to look for, theorize and enact instantiations of rupture that are located within specific socio-cultural contexts. In a world where reality is contingent and truth is always historically situated, possibilities for destabilizing the production of reality that fosters *ressentiment* are abound – we must never rest in our unrelenting quest to performatively reread the texts of the real.

Works Cited

- Badiou, Alain. *Being and Event*. Trans. Feltham, Oliver. London: Continuum, 2005.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Trans. Glaser, Shelia Faria. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Trans. Zohn, Harry. Ed. Arendt, Hannah. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.
- Butler, Judith. "Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics." *AIBR: Revista de Antropologia Iberoamericana* 4 3 (2009): 321-36.
- Conquergood, Dwight. "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research." *TDR* 46.2 (2002): 145-56.
- Darier, Eric. "Foucault against Environmental Ethics." *Discourses of the Environment*. Ed. Darier, Eric. Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1999.
- de Man, Paul. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979.
- . "Literature and Language: A Commentary." *New Literary History* 4 1 (1972): 181-92.
- . *The Resistance to Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

- Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Trans. Nelson-Smith, Donald. New York: Zone Books, 1995.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Trans. Tomlinson, Hugh. New York: Continuum, 1986.
- Diamond, Elin. "The Shudder of Catharsis in Twentieth-Century Performance." *Performativity and Performance*. Eds. Parker, Andrew and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Feltham, Oliver. *Alain Badiou: Live Theory*. London: Continuum, 2008.
- Feral, Josette, and Leslie Wickes. "From Event to Extreme Reality: The Aesthetic of Shock." *The Drama Review* 55.4 (2011): 51-63.
- Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Trans. Gordon, Colin, et al. Ed. Gordon, Colin. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.
- Fuoss, Kirk W. "Performance as Contestation: An Agonistic Perspective on the Insurgent Assembly." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 13.4 (1993): 331-49.
- Grossberg, Lawrence. *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Lavery, Carl. "Is There a Text in This Performance?" *Performance Research: A Journal for the Performing Arts* 14.1 (2009): 37-45.
- McQuillan, Martin. *Paul De Man*. Routledge Critical Thinkers. London and New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. Trans. Kaufman, Walter and R. J. Hollingdale. Ed. Kaufman, Walter. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.
- Owen, David. *Maturity and Modernity: Nietzsche, Weber, Foucault and the Ambivalence of Reason*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Packer, Jeremy. "What Is an Archive?: An Apparatus Model for Communications and Media History." *The Communication Review* 13.1 (2010): 88-104.
- Perucci, Tony. "Guilty as Sin: The Trial of Reverend Billy and the Exorcism of the Sacred Cash Register." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 28 3 (2008): 315-29.
- . "What the Fuck Is That? The Poetics of Ruptrual Performance." *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 5 3 (2009): 1-16.
- Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Pollock, Della. *Telling Bodies Performing Birth*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Readings, Bill. "The Deconstruction of Politics." *Reading De Man Reading*. Eds. Waters, Lindsay and Wlad Godzich. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Schechner, Richard. *Between Theater and Anthropology*. The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.
- . "Occupy Solidarity." *The Drama Review* 56.1 (2012): 7-9. Print.
- Schrifer, Kristina, and Donna Marie Nudd. "Mickee Faust Club's Performative Protest Events." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 22.3 (2002): 196-216
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Walker, Julia A. "Why Performance? Why Now? Textuality and the Rearticulation of Human Presence." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 16.1 (2003): 149-75.
- Warminski, Andrzej. "'As the Poets Do It': On the Material Sublime." *Material Events: Paul De Man and the Afterlife of Theory*. Eds. Cohen, Tom, et al. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

Kurt Zemlicka e3 Marjorie Hazeltine

The Reality of Contingency

Zupančič, Alenka. *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 5.0 License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/5.0/>; or, (b) send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 2nd Street, Suite 500, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.