PLAYING WITH CONSTRAINT:

PERFORMING THE OULIPO AND THE

CLINAMEN-PERFORMER

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OUTPUT INFORMATION

ABSTRACT

Approaching a rare example of constraining literature written for performance, this article introduces the 'clinamen-performer', a term used to describe the unpredictable and playful behaviours of the performer under constraint. The OuLiPo (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle) (Workshop for Potential Literature) have been using imposed structural constraints to generate new writing since the 1960s. Following an introduction to the group, this article reflects on the performance of Oulipian Georges Perec's radio play The Machine by contemporary theatre company Third Angel. The Machine reads as a 'how to' of oulipian constraint, and while rule-based structures are well known within contemporary theatre, the specifically analytical and granular devices within this particular radio play present a rare opportunity to understand the effects of constraint on the live performer. The various structures of the text encourage the clinamen-performer to enjoy a game structure at its most liberatingly constrained. The performer simultaneously adheres to the various protocols of the text and the invisible, formal expectations of theatre. The clinamen-performer may dive in and out of the rules and flexibly play with the nuances of delivery, pitch, dialogism and irony, by participating in a competition that offers no obvious prize. Whereas the clinamen represents for the Oulipo an acceptable, usually aesthetically inclined rule-break, as a live performer it represents the recognition of being the conduit between the text and the audience—the ineffable vessel of meaning-making.

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