In this article I would like to examine two passages from two chapters of Mandel'shtam's lyric autobiography, *The Noise of Time*. Each passage treats a "performance" and expresses an "esthetic of performance." The performances are of different kinds, although they both represent critical moments in Mandel'shtam's attempt to shape his personal autobiography in terms of Russia's cultural history.

The first passage is from chapter 4, "The Bookcase," and in the context of Mandel'shtam's cultural history, refers to the 1890s. The second passage is from chapter 13, the penultimate chapter of the autobiography, and is entitled "Komissarzhevskaia." This chapter not only treats the 1900s, but opens with Mandel'shtam's programmatic statement defining his concept of autobiography as cultural history. Furthermore, both passages conclude their chapters and both serve, to a great extent, to illustrate the themes of those chapters.

The first passage may be read as an attempt to illustrate the idea of history as performance, that is, the general idea of "All the world is but a stage." Even though Mandel'shtam does not consider the art produced in this instance as "great" or "genuine" art, it is still art and it puzzles him, that is, it stimulates him to further historical investigations and esthetic endeavors.

The second passage illustrates both the art of performance and the idea of art as performance, that is, the given performance results in or produces an esthetic "miracle." Secondarily, it also illustrates an aspect of Mandel'shtam's autobiography as cultural history.

We must always keep in mind that Mandel'shtam was, however, above all, a lyric poet; thus, there is a third concept of "performance," above and beyond those illustrated by the two passages, which envelops his work as a whole. This is the ultimate performance of the author or poet, likened in Mandel'shtam's favorite musical metaphor to the conductor's or musical director's performance.

Since our focus in this symposium is principally on the art of the avant-garde, one might ask, Is Mandel'shtam in fact a representative of the avant-garde in the same sense as the Futurists, Vsevolod Meierkhol'd, or Sergei Eisenshtein? I would argue that in *The Noise of Time* through both tech-

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nique and preoccupation he declares himself to be indubitably a representative of the “modern.” Here as elsewhere Mandel'shtam did not passively acquiesce to a ready doctrine, but sought to find for himself just what the “modern” was. Any discussion of the role that performance played in shaping the aesthetics of the first decades of the century would be incomplete without an account of Mandel'shtam's searching attention to theater.

The Komissarzhevskaya chapter opens with Mandel'shtam's programmatic statement declaring his intentions to write his autobiography as cultural history rather than according to the traditional models of Aksakov and Tolstoi: “My desire is to speak not about myself but to track down the age, the noise and the germination of time. My memory is inimical to all that is personal . . . I never was able to understand the Tolstois and Aksakovs . . . enamoured of family archives with their epic domestic memoirs. I repeat—my memory is not loving but inimical, and it labors not to reproduce but to distance the past. A raznochinets needs no memory—it is enough for him to tell of the books he has read, and his biography is done. . . .” (p. 122) Rather than reproducing the details of family life, Mandelshtam sought to present those memories which stimulated his consciousness of the age in which he grew up and those memories which he perceived as giving shape to that age. Note the dual perspective of the autobiographical narrator and the dual role of the autobiographical act: the memory recalled and the reshaping of that memory to give form to the whole. If considered in terms of performance, the first is the historical performance, the latter is the esthetic performance. For Mandel'shtam, there is yet a third performance, however; the poetic act associating and reconciling the historical and the aesthetic performance which he, as a poet, mediates.

Since Mandel'shtam's milieu was the intelligentsia of urban St. Petersburg, whose Jewish and Russian cultural origins collided in his creative consciousness, the shaping of his consciousness in response to the forces of the eclectic cultural milieu dominates this work. Mandel'shtam's family history is perceived as an integral part of the history of the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. His personal history is viewed as part of the “enigma of Russian culture,” that is, shaped by the cultural, political, and social forces which he still does not fully “understand,” forces which acted on his family, his city, his school, and which were reflected in the concert halls, theaters, streets, and homes which he frequented during his childhood and adolescence, and which he, as a poet, living in a new age, must shape. Individuals and institutions representing various cultural, social, and political forces as well as historical events, books, and cultural monuments affecting his understanding of history and the age which nurtured him are introduced as significant elements in his autobiography. His autobiography then, is his attempt to give shape to the age that nurtured him so as to understand the roots of his own identity and to give that age meaning in the context of the new age and eternal, esthetic Time.