PERFORMANCE

Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies

Edited by Philip Auslander

Volume III
CONTENTS

VOLUME III

Acknowledgements ix

PART 1

Science and social science 1

1.1 Performing science

45 From science to theatre: dramas of speculative thought 3
GAUTAM DASGUPTA

46 Performance and production: the relation between science as inquiry and science as cultural practice 11
ROBERT P. CREASE

1.2 Social behavior as performance

47 Verbal art as performance 32
RICHARD BAUMAN

48 A performance-centered approach to gossip 61
ROGER D. ABRAMS

49 Becoming other-wise: conversational performance and the politics of experience 75
LEONARD C. HAWES

50 Social dramas and stories about them 108
VICTOR TURNER
1.3 Performing ethnography

51 Performing as a moral act: ethical dimensions of the ethnography of performance

Dwight Conquergood

52 Performance science

Michael M. McCrack and Howard S. Becker

53 The efficacy of performance science: comment on McCall and Becker

Richard A. Hilbert

54 SNAP! Culture: a different kind of “reading”

E. Patrick Johnson

PART 2

History, politics, political economy

2.1 Performing history

55 Disappearance as history: the stages of terror

Anthony Kubiak

56 Historical events and the historiography of tourism

Michael Kobialka

57 Spectacles of suffering: performing presence, absence, and historical memory at U.S. Holocaust museums

Vivian M. Patraka

2.2 Political activism and performance

58 Spectacles and scenarios: a dramaturgy of radical activity

Lee Baxandall

59 Fighting in the streets: dramaturgies of popular protest, 1968–1989

Raz Kershaw

2.3 Theorizing political performance

60 There must be a lot of fish in that lake: toward an ecological theater

Una Chaudhuri

61 Brechtian theory/feminist theory: toward a gestic feminist criticism

Elin Diamond

62 The ontology of performance: representation without reproduction

Peggy Phelan

63 Praxis and performativity

Andrew Parker

2.4 Work, Production, Political economy

64 The future that worked

Joseph Roach

65 Rhythm and the performance of organization

Richard A. Rogers

66 The performance of production and consumption

Miranda Joseph

67 Legally live

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Part 1

SCIENCE AND
SOCIAL SCIENCE
Artistic practice and scientific inquiry are commonly perceived as distinctly opposed modes of thought. The underlying assumption is that art—specifically theatre in this case—concerns itself with human and social relations, while science purveys the domain of physical reality. Since at least the early nineteenth century, however, such divergences have on occasion been breached. The incursions of newer forms of investigative disciplines—Darwinism, Freudianism, behaviorism, social sciences—have all made their mark on the drama and theatre of recent times. It can be argued, though, that as the above disciplines are not rigidly scientific in approach, their usurpation by the artistic mind has been made that much easier. Their referent is the human mind, not formulations about the nature of reality.

Of course, aligning such humanistic disciplines with artistic practice betrays a myopic view of how ideas in various spheres of activity interpenetrate one another. To take just one instance from an earlier century, did not Herbert Spencer, precursor of Darwin and theorist of social evolution, support his claims by acknowledging the physical principles of the conservation of energy? Could we not, then, resurrect this missing scientific link in discussing the dramatic works of Zola, Hauptmann and Strindberg, for example, as instances of a deterministic dramaturgy where aesthetic and structural laws derive from an accepted scientific paradigm? The preferred methodology has been to study their plays as expressive of evolutionary processes that have been “humanized,” i.e., for their residual implications in the realm of human activity. What I am proposing instead is a re-working of dramatic and artistic thought as the locus of prevalent scientific ideas of the time. Hopefully, in pursuing this line of inquiry, it may help us understand from the dominant perspective of scientific development through the ages what brought about the emergence of certain styles of drama at given historical periods. We may then,
at one stroke, be able to overcome the traditional bias against the unification of science and theatre, a deeply ingrained prejudice that continues unabated not only in the minds of the general public but on the part of artists and scholars alike.

The issue here is not so much one of influence but of correspondences that may emerge when the theatre is subjected to a mode of inquiry sustained by discoveries in the sciences. If both science and theatre seek to comprehend the nature of reality in all its varied manifestations, surely they must converge at some point in their individual searches. Such correlations, when and if they can be determined, do not necessarily have to present themselves in the structure and language of the corresponding discipline. Transpositions along metaphorical lines allow all art to subsume ideas prevalent in other fields. Could we not speculate, for instance, that Aristotle’s emphasis on dramatic action as the first principle of dramaturgy may have reflected his own scientific studies on motion? Furthermore, did his placement of tragedy as superior to comedy in the hierarchy of dramatic genres stem from his belief in the idea of Final Causes, as opposed to that of Efficient Causes? From the alternate viewpoint of scientific inquiry, we find subatomic physics borrowing the metaphor of the “quark” from Joyce’s *Ulysses*; and the ongoing debate about determinate and indeterminate workings of physical reality not only replicate ancient philosophical concerns but also reflect opposed dramatic strategies that lie imbedded in the plays, for example, Sophocles and Euripides, or Corneille and Racine. What concerns me here is not which came first, the chicken or the egg. The goal is far more modest: to outline on a provisional basis modalities of thought that seem to recur in the exercises of the theatrical imagination and of the scientific temperament.

For the purposes of my remarks here, and as an initial foray into this field of research, I have narrowed the subject of my inquiry to two contemporary artists who best exemplify the advanced theatricality of our time. The choice of Richard Foreman and Robert Wilson is arbitrary insofar as drawing links between theatrical practice and scientific discourse is concerned, although it may be safe to suggest that such correspondences are more easily identified in works that radically break with traditional patterns of dramaturgy and accepted modes of theatrical representation. The schism itself announces an altered strategy to reflect upon the world, a move that has much in common with the scientific spirit. And though many of my observations below could be applied in slightly modified form to the works of other contemporary artists, I have, for reasons of specificity, relied on the theatrical careers of Foreman and Wilson.

* * *

The very naming of Foreman’s Ontological-Hysteric Theatre clues us in to the philosophical premise on which his theatre is grounded. Although the philosophic component is by now old hat, Foreman’s coming to terms with ontology in our century lead to complexities that are bounded by scientific theories. His ontological quest to deal with the nature of being or reality as manifested in his consciousness, of real existences deduced from his thoughts, align the enterprise with a Cartesian approach to metaphysics. From the legendary predicate “cogito ergo sum” he chooses rather to focus on what constitutes the being of thought, in other words of how to make his thinking visible (and audible). If, for Descartes, physical reality was an extension of pure reason, for Foreman the issue is whether reason (or thought) itself has physical attributes. Can thought be materialized such that it can be perceived “clearly and distinctly” and beyond the criterion of indubitability (to borrow Descartes’s methodological principle). Put another way, can consciousness perceive thought, and analogously, can consciousness itself be the subject of consciousness?

In a single stroke Foreman, through his theatrical practice, raises issues that rest within the realm of science: what makes matter (thinking matter) visible, and the relevant accompanying question of perception, what are the possibilities of a dual consciousness and a bicameral mind, already under investigation in split-brain research? Can thought be analyzed within the coordinates of space and time in a manner that will convince me of the reality and truth of my thoughts? From a philosophical perspective, this leads Foreman, via Descartes, to Husserl and his formulation of the “transcendental ego.” Phenomenology assures Foreman of a “pure consciousness” that subsumes consciousness, as we know it, as an object for contemplation. From the viewpoint of science, it is obvious that the shadow of neuro-and-psycho-biology creeps into the picture.

Furthermore, since perception itself is a thematic component of his theatrical enterprise, Foreman’s explorations are not dissimilar from inquiries that have plagued quantum physicists now for over half a century. The paradox of observation and its effect on reality, vividly pictured in the image of Schrödinger’s Cat, which dissolves all attempts to reconcile reality as a stable fixture “out there,” has led to bewildering conclusions regarding the very nature of reality. This in turn has led various later physicists, such as Eugene Wigner, David Bohm, and Hugh Everett III to submit models of potential and/or parallel universes. In fact, consciousness theories are now as much a subject of study for brain researchers as they are for physicists working in the quirky domain of fundamental particles. For the moment, however, I shall stay with Foreman’s coming to terms with the concepts of space and time, two of the determinants of physical reality.

Once Foreman accomplishes the task of corporealizing his thought, its physical contours exist on stage. But unlike in traditional theatre, where a completed thought process emerges through language and gesture, he chooses to find metaphorical cognates of discrete quantities of his thought. To study thought (and consciousness) is to analyze it at its moment of coming into being, the essence of its ontological thrust. Atomicity of thought in space
becomes a prerequisite if Foreman is to analyze it with clarity and precision. It must be isolated and held in place, the stage action frozen in tableaux, so that thought may be contemplated in its stasis.

But to contemplate this atomized, spatial configuration of thought as an isolated phenomenon, it proves impossible to ground in certainty what the configuration implies in Foreman’s scheme of thinking. Although he wants us to perceive distinctly a stage image within its spatial coordinates, the image also exists in time (and duration), a coordinate that Foreman views as problematic in nature. Like Gertrude Stein, he wants us to engage in the act of perception within a continuous present, of vision sustained by the idea of a landscape. But matter and the act of perceiving it, as modern physics has demonstrated, exists in a space-time continuum. Foreman, on the other hand, would rather hold time in abeyance so as to properly situate his experiments with ontology. Just as Wittgenstein found time a problematic factor in his investigations along the path of logical atomism, so too Foreman who would rather present experiences as autonomous entities of thought minus its referential attributes.

In atomized behavior, which Heisenberg theorized as a consequence of the space-time, four-dimensional nature of reality, certainty is not attainable (his Uncertainty Principle would also hold for our normal world were it not for the masses of objects being so huge). It is this same uncertainty that gets transferred to Foreman’s atomized reality, which is perhaps why he feels compelled to deny the temporal axis of his experiments and thoughts. It is the only way that he could arrive at the Cartesian certainty postulated as one of the crucial determinants of his theatrical premise.

In following the Cartesian dictate of matter as extension, Foreman necessarily succumbs to a rigidly geometric conception of stage movement. Even the moments of stasis in his theatre are established within strict Cartesian coordinates. In fact, even the stage spaces employed by him betray this notion of matter in extension. The elongated frontal imagery with which he first began then gave way to an extension in depth, and the physical attributes of matter were discarded in favor of placement and movement that adhered to a science of kinematics. At times, objects were framed within the parameters of a door or opening and the playing area itself compartmentalized with strings, the latter a familiar trademark of his staging. Geometry as the art (or science) of spatial extension (and also the art of pure ideation) is close to Foreman’s heart. It is a construct of pure thought, as is mathematical formulation. It is hardly a coincidence that many of the titles of his plays take on the form of algebraic equations, while his manifestos on theatre are cluttered with tautologies, syllogisms, and other computational linguistic systems.

When matter is viewed as extension, it follows that the actor too becomes merely a property of the geometric model. In addition, speech too takes on a monotonous quality. Acting and diction do not refer to anything that would subtract from their attributes as matter in motion. Furthermore, if all matter is extension, then, as in Descartes, the notion of empty space has no validity.

Matter and space become a contiguous, infinite whole, and space is nothing other than matter in a state of continuous extension. Consequently, the stage space in a Foreman production is a space of ceaseless visual and aural stimuli. The relentless bombardment of the audience with sounds, lights, and rapid physical movement suggest that not only nature, but being and thought themselves abhor a vacuum.

Oddly enough, however, although Cartesian physics was superseded by Newtonian mechanics, since Faraday on to the present time, science has showed reality to be more and more consonant with many aspects of Descartes’s theories. The Newtonian distinction between matter and space gave way, through the discoveries of fields of force and the concept of energy, to a mechanical philosophy and new physics itself has been geometricized to a large extent. In keeping with the emergence of concepts such as energy and fields of force, Foreman’s theatre increasingly took on the mechanisms of an interactive system, with the director himself firmly located within his theatrical system. The equivalence of matter and energy (as in Einstein’s formulation) became the crux of all O-H Theatre exercises. All perception of stage reality leads, in equationary fashion, to the energies of thought expended by Foreman. Thought, as fundamental neural energy, becomes theatre, turns into matter, and the increasing complexity of his stagings betray the increasing complexity of energy displayed in his thoughts. In fanciful terms, one could suggest that Foreman’s theatre is a black hole (curiously, the O-H Theatre in its heyday employed black as the sole color of its props and scenic elements) into which is poured the density of his thought-energies. And in reverse (or, as I suspect, in the right direction), since what we perceive on stage are all emanations from his mind, it is as if in the final analysis Foreman’s own mind is the black hole where all reality is trapped beyond redemption. Theatre, or artistic praxis, for Foreman cannot lead to communicability or expressivity; it stays trapped within a solipsistic exercise.

Of course, Foreman’s theatre is not all an extension of the mind. The mind-body dualism of Descartes is implied in the Hysterical half of his theatre. Hysteria (derived from the Greek hysteria, meaning uterus) suggests a neurotic condition stemming from somatic traits and assuming strange mental configurations. Again, in an equationary mode, if ontology partakes of the presence of being, hysteria subsumes both bodily and mental states. In addition, from the semantic point of view, the uterus, source of the becoming of being, joins forces with the ontological quest. The naked body (more often female than male), a quintessential part of the O-H Theatre, points to this interrelationship between the mind-body, ontology-hysteria dualism. Is body as matter a further extension to be attributed to pure reason? Or does the body generate thought and actions of the mind? These are questions for neurobiologists (and that discipline may well be one of the last frontiers of science today), but they are also questions with which Robert Wilson has concerned himself with these past few years.
Robert Wilson has been known to have worked with mentally-impaired children in the past. If attributes of space and time are generated from reason in the theatre of Foreman, in Wilson’s work they are generated from how the brain not only perceives these parameters but how it goes about creating them.

If matter is extenuated in Foreman’s theatre, time undergoes a similar shift in Wilson’s vast spectacles. Time is now atomized into discrete units. Perception is what interests both these practitioners of stagecraft, although in the former spatial perception becomes paramount, while in Wilson to perceive in time does so. For him, to perceive in time is to see how the very act of perceiving and what is being perceived undergo a change. In this respect, of course, Wilson’s enterprise belongs to the nature of quantum mechanics where the very act of observation changes the reality of that which is being observed.

It may seem odd that in Wilson time is atomized, since what we experience in his stagings is the elongation of time stretched out over an infinitely long continuum. In essence, what seems paradoxical is not the case, because by extenuating time we become conscious of each passing moment of time. Perception in time, with a nod to the nature of light, is what resulted in Einstein’s theories of relativity, with his famous example of clocks that slow down, and other bewildering paradoxes. In Wilson’s use of time dilution one suspects a certain coming to terms with a similar relative nature of time.

Once the relative nature of time is posited in the Wilsonian theatre, simultaneity of experience also enters the theatrical matrix. While there are always crucial densities of experience concentrated in space in Foreman’s theatre, with action contemplated at a distance and movement transposed from one area of the space to another, in Wilson’s theatre space is not so distinctly demarcated. The relative nature of time allows Wilson to portray different actions at different places that may not be visible from either location and yet taking place at the same time and within the same structure of theatrical experience (as he did in Iran with a week-long production spread out over vast distances or as he continues to do in the vast confines of his stagings).

All of this begins to look very much like the discontinuous nature of reality that quantum mechanics revealed to physicists in the first half of this century. Observations on the path of atomic particles displayed strange wave functions that, in their motion, demolished traditional theories of continuity in the universe. So extreme were the mathematical formulations to describe the aberrant and chaotic behavior of fundamental particles that causal principles had to be abandoned in dealing with the precise location or momentum of these microscopic constituents of matter. The present could not be predicted on the basis of the past, and knowledge of the present was of no help in determining the future direction a particle might take. Loss of continuity in terms of temporality and directionality opened up visions of a fluid, changing and interchangeable construct of reality. It is the reality of a Wilson spectacle, where historical subjects, periods, animate and inanimate life meld into one another.

Differing actions take place on a Wilson stage, each totally separate from the other and united only by the passage of time, which in turn is different for each observer. This leads to the subjectivity (as opposed to the Foremenesque solipsism) that is at the heart of Wilson’s project. He does not aim for a perception that is clear and distinct; in fact, to daydream at his theatre is seen as an asset by Wilson himself. This again has bearing on the nature of simultaneity. How can it be possible, he seems to be asking, that while perceiving a given material stimulus our minds continue to drift onto visualizing inwardly other images of reality? Is there a surreal reality of which we are subliminally aware even when confronted with objective reality? Taken to its extremes, what is questioned here is the smallest unit of time in which a thought arises in our mind in pure isolation, without further contamination of other levels of thought-experience and simultaneity. These questions are now being increasingly posed by brain researchers through studies in Neurometrics, evoked response patterns, and the fascinating study of P300 (or P3) waves, that last a time-based study of neural firing that attempts to determine the precise moment at which a thought is formed and emanated.

In addition, the very tenuous nature of time and the consequent simultaneity of spatial configurations lead to the amorphous quality of Wilson’s stage picture in contradistinction to the angularity of Foreman’s stagings. One could even say that circularity is what further defines Wilson’s stage experiments. (In fact, it is no coincidence that he collaborated with Philip Glass, Andy de Groat, and the repetitive, albeit angular, dance structure of Lucinda Childs, each of whom displays a concern for fluidity through repeatedly endless gestures in time of unitized spatial movement.) Each repeated movement is seen anew at a different time scheme, perceived according to patterns, the recognition of which is increasingly being advanced as the means whereby we gain knowledge of the environment. Pattern recognition, with its spatial and temporal attributes, has long attracted studies in brain formation.

From an alternative viewpoint, Wilson’s blurring of space and time is paralleled in the sciences where space itself is endowed with time attributes and vice-versa. Just as the geometric model of the atom has given way to an amorphous cloud picture viewed more in terms of energy and its spatial-temporal definitions, so too have Wilson’s spectacles, which appear in our perceptual mechanisms with as much consistency as that of a dream or vision. And finally, if space and time can so easily be interchanged (not unlike the fact that light also can be both a wave and a particle), then is it not possible for alternative realities to co-exist?

The plurality and simultaneity of realities is what I believe, continues to fascinate Wilson with the workings of physically and mentally-impaired children. His work with deaf and autistic children (whom he has used in his productions and from whom he continues to learn much) raises compelling questions about how reality is constituted in the brains of these children. At this juncture one can only speculate about influences, but perhaps someday
someone could analyze Wilson's theatrical and dramatic structure from the perspective of mediation determined by brain impairments. How, for instance, do brain hemispheric dysfunctions or imbalance generate the possibility of embracing new visionary (or other sensorial) fields? Does sensory deprivation in one area lead to a sensitizing of other perceptual tools that in turn effect the manner by which the brain assembles reality? Already, deaf and blind people are being taught to “hear” and “see” through tactile bodily sensations, prosthesis that works through pattern recognition. And what of brain dysfunctioning, where neural manipulation has allowed researchers to bypass the damaged portion of the cortex or limbic system and thus resume a “normal” flow of thought processes. Or indeed how the brain processes information in a manner that those possessed with “normal” brain growth could perhaps never hope to attain.

But even outside of tactile neural stimulation, is it possible to generate thought processes by appealing to other forms of stimulation (visual, auditory, etc.)? Can Wilson’s success with Christopher Knowles, an autistic child, be laid to his being able to generate forms of pattern recognition that drew a mentally introverted self, fixated on his own ego, to relate to the external world? What precisely goes on in our brains, and what constitutes the relationship between our sensory and cognitive faculties, is a subject that both Wilson and brain researchers have chosen to elaborate on, each in his own way. Conversely, did Knowles’s specific neural arrangement lead to the architectural and sculptural models that are now the basic compositional units of Wilson’s own theatre? Whatever the case, there can be no doubt that in his work on stage, Wilson has aligned theatre with the most advanced studies being conducted in science today.

* * * * *

My assertions and speculations are offered to suggest that theatre (indeed all art) and science are not as divergent as is usually assumed. If Foreman belongs to the classical age of atomic physics, then Wilson seems closer in spirit to the ethos of quantum physics. If the one age gave us Einstein, the other Bohr, it is not too far-fetched to speculate that the earlier age re-introduced Aristotle in our century, the latter Zeno. And perhaps Foreman’s insistence on space as the dominant attribute of his staging is a complex re-visioning of Aristotle’s philosophic premises of a continuous universe, whereas Wilson’s emphasis on time and a discontinuous world reflect the paradoxes of Zeno’s analysis of motion. Ideas exist in the world to be shared. And in any particular era, the most adventurous artists incorporate the advanced thought of their times (and all times) into their work. The mechanism of consciousness is fast becoming the final frontier of scientific research as epistemology reaches unexplored heights, and it is small wonder, then, that two of the most serious artists working today reflect this mode of inquiry.

At the end of chapter 3, I said that the absence of experimentation from our picture of science could be filled in with the help of the theatrical analogy, or the point-by-point comparison between scientific experimentation and theatrical performance. Performance has three principal dimensions: presentation, representation, and recognition, and analogues of each of these were discovered in experimentation and elaborated in chapters 4 through 6 with tools provided by the three thinkers discussed in chapter 2.

The theatrical analogy has allowed us to redefine experimentation philosophically. Experimentation is a process of inquiry that seeks to make phenomena known through the performance of actions. Performances are executed by and for members of a suitably prepared community, in response to problematic situations. Reconstruction of those problematic situations gives rise to a more assured, deepened, and enriched engagement with the world. Inquiry is interpretive, involving the development of the understanding via moving in the hermeneutical circle, two versions of which may be distinguished: text hermeneutics, involving textual interpretation, and act hermeneutics, involving the performance of actions. Problematic situations are reconstructed via recognition of phenomena that appear in performance; taking objects and events as instances of phenomena is the cultural attitude of science.

Performances have three principal and related dimensions: (1) they are skillfully executed actions, or performances; (2) they are actions in which a suitably prepared community seeks the recognition of phenomena; and
(3) both the performance process and the performance product are structured by a representation.

When successful, experimentation involves the appearance of phenomena: experiments prepare phenomena for study. Phenomena are accessible to perception; scientific entities are usually (but not always) accessible to perception via readable technologies. Phenomena appear through profiles, which particular profile depending on the relative positioning of observer and observed.

The regularity of profiles under passive and active transformations is the invariance of the phenomenon. An invariant names an identity of structures in subject and object; it is the noetic-neomictic correlation. Invariants entail horizons of possible profiles, which are given together with the phenomenon; in exploring phenomena in inquiry, horizons are constituted, filled in, revised, and extended. Horizons may be internal or external. One acquires confidence that one has accurately represented a phenomenon through an ability to move from profile to profile. Expectations may be fulfilled or not, for a phenomenon is capable of revealing itself in new and unanticipated ways, and the invariant structure of the perceived phenomena may have to be adjusted accordingly. A scientific phenomenon is something "behind" the data that denominate its presence and "behind" the theories by which it is represented. Representation is related to the kind of thing a phenomenon is, presentation to an individual profile. Phenomena can be classical or path-dependent.

The principle of the primacy of the performance means that presentation, representation, and recognition are each in the service of the appearing of the phenomenon; data are fluid, theories fragile, and recognitions stage-dependent. For not all interpretations of the world are contextually legitimated; a performance can exceed the theory used to create and understand it, calling for new performances and theories. The unity of the sciences, and relations between different branches, are a function of the unity of and interrelations between the phenomena involved.

A host of objections may be raised. Someone will object that scientific performances concern a world already made, theatrical performances a self-created one. But the difference is due to different kinds of phenomena presented in performance, not to the basic performance structure itself. Someone will object that theatrical performances are more "subjective" than experimental ones due to the presence of theory and thus an objectivity in the latter. But the representation in each case is a script whose function is to allow us to come face to face with the things themselves in performance.

Someone will produce a sample of book reviews or opening night reviews of famous musical or theatre works to try to score the point that theatre criticism has proven remarkably inconsistent over the years even in the hands of renowned commentators, and object that in science much more objective criteria for the evaluation of experiments is available. But when the background context is standardized with respect to equipment, techniques, expectations, ways of recording and so forth, there are indeed shared procedures within the scientific community for evaluating what is a good experiment. But these are not always present, and in that event a play of perspectives will produce controversy as each individual relies on a different experience, acquaintance with procedures, advice of friends, hunches about proper methods and direction of the field, and so on. Anyone who doubts this should attend a meeting of a laboratory program committee faced with the task of selecting from among several proposals the minority to be supported by the lab. Fierce competition often emerges among noted scientists and vast disagreement over the value of each proposal. Shouting matches have transpired between eminent researchers over the value of new and unstandardized techniques such as magnetoencephalography. Similarly, while opening night reviews of a new work are one thing, and subject to the idiosyncracies of the individual reviewers, there are cases where a standardized background context exists—say, at a graduate school evaluation or recital. In that case, it is possible to put aside one's temperament or personal inclinations and achieve a consensus.

Experimental performances thus lead to the disclosure of new entities in laboratory and other situations. These new entities may be related to already familiar entities; the laboratory phenomenon of electrons may be related to lightning; for instance, or the laboratory phenomenon of optical refraction and reflection may be related to rainbows. But these familiar entities are not deductions from the theory in an explanatory sense. When one understands the scientific account of a rainbow, one experiences something new—an account of the behavior of light under certain conditions—that is now coupled with the familiar experience of a rainbow as a multicolored thing in a hermeneutical way. When I understand the scientific account of the rainbow, I do not now see the scientific rainbow instead of the life-world rainbow, but merge the two—I see the multicolored rainbow as an instance of something else.
Production

While a general characterization of performance can be attained by addressing its three principal dimensions, another important structure is addressed by production. A phenomenon does not lend itself to all circumstances, and lends itself differently to different circumstances; it belongs to different circumstances differently. Röntgen's X rays present themselves through glowing screens in some circumstances and exposed photographic plates in others; the rays are, we might say, differently produced. If one somehow were able to "replay the tape" of this episode, thoroughly erase everything to a point in time a number of years prior to November of 1895, and let the tape run again with all the decisions and actions free to occur differently, X rays might well have presented themselves to someone other than Röntgen in a different form. Production thus plays a crucial role in experimental inquiry.

In theatre, the need for a production arises from the fact that, by itself, a script or score is but an abstract testimonial to the possibility of a performance. To realize a performance, a number of decisions have to be made and acts accomplished in advance to specify and create the circumstances. Advance decisions involve aspects like casting, props, staging, blocking, and costumes; advance actions include securing funding, obtaining a theatre, and drawing up a production schedule.

Similarly, theories are but abstract testimonials to the possibility of the presence of phenomena. They do not specify, for example, when or where a phenomenon is to take place in a lab. The process of experimental production forces a researcher to make a number of decisions and to accomplish a number of actions in advance of an actual experiment in order to create the environment or special context in which the phenomenon may appear. Advance decisions involve choice of collaborators, site, equipment, timetable, and design; advance actions include securing funding, necessary permissions, lining up contractors if necessary, and drawing up organizational plans and schedules. This environment or special context then provides a stable context to the runs or performances of that experiment, making it possible to speak of repeating runs and even of repeating experiments; the latter would occur if, elsewhere, the same set of decisions regarding the phenomenon were to be made and the same environment recreated. (In theatre, too, specific productions of a show as opposed to the show itself can be revived in a similar manner.)

And just as there may be different "runs" of one preparation, there may be different ways of "producing" the same phenomenon. I mentioned the various ways Röntgen produced his X rays: in modern physics the productions can be much larger in scale. The Glashow-Weinberg-Salem electroweak theory, for instance, lent itself to several different kinds of productions: of neutral currents, of the scattering of polarized electrons, and of atomic parity violation effects. These amounted to three different ways of producing the same phenomenon (through any number of individual performances), the electroweak force, on the basis of a single theory.

Production requires one to operate in a concrete social context, and any event "produced" therefore is shaped by political, environmental, economic, and psychological factors. Even deciding to build a laboratory or observatory in a specific place is the outcome of such factors. The site selection for a modern scientific laboratory is inevitably a protracted and highly political process. A long list of scientific, environmental, and political factors were taken into account in the planning of Brookhaven National Laboratory, for instance, including the consideration that the new laboratory, the first in the Northeast region of the United States with a nuclear reactor, be an overnight train ride from the universities involved in its planning. Once constructed and commissioned, laboratories then become part of the "world" of science, part of the available sites where certain kinds of experimental performances can take place. At this point, other sets of social factors come into play in the practice of science, each of which could become the theme of an inquiry in its own right. At any given time, thousands of experiments might be performed; national laboratorie and observatories are swamped with proposals for experiments; and can accommodate only a fraction of the requests for lab time put to them. The choice is dictated by a variety of motives, including the reputations of the scientists who make the proposals (including how qualified, reliable, and easy to work with they are), the facilities of the laboratories, the aims of the laboratories, the ability of a team to draw outside funding, and other factors such as the desirability of international collaboration.

Not all sites may be available or have the appropriate facilities. Anyone wishing to arrange a series of astronomical observations, for instance, has a choice of observatories to approach with different possibilities; moreover, these observatories are generally oversubscribed and one may be forced to work with a less convenient site to gain time on a telescope. Similarly, someone wishing to produce an experiment in high-energy physics has only a small number of laboratories with large particle accelerators from which to choose, and even if one's proposal is approved one must compete for beam time with other ongoing experiments. Here again, a less convenient site may be more available. One factor, however, is inevitably a judgment about the pressing scientific questions of the day and which of the proposed experiments best addresses them.

An experimental production also embodies an entire set of judgments about how that phenomenon is to appear in an experimental performance. The Glashow-Weinberg-Salem electroweak theory was a "script" with a variety of possible performances; experimental productions could involve vastly different contexts in which these performances might take place (national laboratories, or at the bottom of deep mines), each of which called for vastly different instrumentation, funding, and personnel. The simplest Grand Unified Theory, on the other hand, was a script with few possible performances...
given present-day instrumentation—performance being proton decay. Several groups of scientists working in different productions proved unable to execute performances in these environments, suggesting that the script had to be revised.

Moreover, in producing an experiment one must choose and work with a set of available or promising technologies, a set of personalities, available money, contracts and regulations, and so forth. Questions arise: Can it be done cheaply enough? Can these people work well together? Is the schedule realistic? Are supplies available? Are the techniques reliable enough? Can one work within the prevailing regulations and restrictions—involving, for instance, handling and disposal of radioactive materials, union regulations, research on human or animal subjects?

Production may require considerable ingenuity. It is desirable when using lead shielding for cosmic ray experiments, for instance, to have the lead refined to eliminate naturally occurring radioactive isotopes. Refining is expensive, however, and clever experimenters seeking to bring in their projects under budget have from time to time turned to other sources, including lead coffins, and lead ingots from the cargo of ancient Roman sailing vessels. This illustrates ingenuity in production for budgetary reasons; ingenuity is also frequently needed to create the very conditions in which a phenomenon will appear. Such ingenuity characterizes a good experimenter, making it possible for that experimenter to “reach” a result before someone else. Consider, for instance, the cosmic ray studies based on analysis of rat urine. The middens or nests of desert rats consist of a jumble of sticks, garbage, and other material that then becomes drenched in the animals’ urine. Such middens have been preserved for thousands and even tens of thousands of years, and are treasure troves for biologists studying plant life thousands of years ago. They have also been used for cosmic ray studies. Cosmic rays passing through the atmosphere change argon atoms to chlorine-36, which is then taken up by plants, consumed by animals, and discharged in urine; the amount of chlorine-36 in urine is thus an indicator of the cosmic ray flux. By examining the chlorine-36 content at various levels of a rat midden, scientists have been able to obtain a reading on the cosmic ray flux at various points in the Earth’s recent history. In this case, it is not a matter of a clever production decision (in creating the right environment in which to seek profiles of a phenomenon) making the appearance of a phenomenon to scientists economical—it is a matter of a clever production decision devising the conditions in which the phenomenon can appear at all.

Personal style is often involved in production; it was a factor, for instance, in the choice of which large experiments to construct at the Superconducting Supercollider. Production is also the domain examined by the sociology of science, such as whether scientific activity is normed by particular kinds of values, presuppositions, and mores. One may get the impression nowadays that things like competition, personalities, patents, and publicity exist only in bad science, but they have a formative role in good science as well. It is important, however, to see their role in the experimental inquiry; namely, in production, or in the set of decisions and actions that have to be executed before experimental performances take place.

Do anecdotes about the role of such things as ingenuity, personality, and competition truly reveal something essential about science? Only someone hopelessly naïve about scientific activity can answer in the negative. Researchers are not interchangeable parts so that it matters little whether A or B conducts an experiment. Significant differences can occur in experimental performances because A did it in his or her way, and B did it in another way. The final performance or “product” is dependent on the process that led to it; yet neither does it reduce to the cultural and historical influences on that process. Therefore, unless one knows how to address the role of something like ingenuity or personal style in production, one is not yet in possession of a serious or adequate account of experimental inquiry, and hence of a true philosophy of science.

Production is one of the most prominent aspects of the large and complex contemporary high energy physics experiments, and the requirements of such a production place constraints on the kind of performance that ultimately takes place. Furthermore, experiments are influenced by what might be called production values, or factors to be emphasized in performance. In the experiments to determine whether cold fusion was really a phenomenon, for instance, researchers in the community came to direct their attention to the role of certain key ingredients in descriptions of the experimental performances to judge whether the profile was really present, including measurements of the amount of tritium, neutron emissions, and temperature rise. Experimenter thus took special steps to convince the community of the reliability of the instruments and methods used to make such measurements.

The role of production allows us to resolve the philosophical problem of what I called the antinomic character of scientific knowledge: the fact that on the one hand, it is affected by the historical, cultural, and social contexts in which it develops, but that, on the other hand, it also has a kind of objectivity or independence from these contexts. Social constructivists stress the dependence of science on historical, cultural, and social contexts, while positivists and realists stress its objectivity. Both positions, I said, have validity; human beings “make” science but not any way they please. The task of the philosophy of science is to model scientific activity in a way which illuminates this dual character; otherwise, the argument between partisans of each position will continue indefinitely.

The theatrical analogy allows us to create just such a model, in the difference between performance and production. While experimental productions always take place within a social and historical context, within an external horizon, and thus bear the imprint of the various forces at work in that context (imprints that can be empirically studied), experimental performances...
reveal phenomena having a measure of independence from that context
insofar as they reveal themselves as having profiles in other kinds of contexts.
The concepts of performance and production thus allow a better understand-
ing of the interrelation of science as inquiry and science as cultural practice.
Thus, to our list of definitions at the beginning of the chapter, we must add
that performances are produced by a set of decisions and actions executed in
advance of the performance. The antinomic character of performances of any
sort is that they are simultaneously ontological, or concerned with the real
presence and disclosure of invariants in the world, and praxial, or shaped
by human cultural and historical forces. The antinomic character of science
gives rise to the temptation to overemphasize one of two different aspects: its
objectivity (invariant structure) on the one hand, and its social construction
on the other. Both temptations should be resisted, for performance involves
the coworking of each.

Any appropriately structured inquiry into science at some point must
identify the various social, historical, cultural, and economic factors involved
in the practice of science, and locate their proper place. This inquiry uses the
theatrical analogy as a preliminary way of recognizing these factors, and to
model their interaction. It would be as much of an error to ignore the presence
of such factors as it would be to reduce the activity of science to them. The
traditional philosophy of science has taken the former path, supposing that
social, cultural, and historical influences either do not exist or that they are
unimportant. Social constructivists and epistemological relativists, on the
other hand, have chosen the latter path, considering socio-historical-cultural
factors to be determinate. They underplay the constraints placed on the
development of scientific experimentation and inquiry by the necessity to
achieve the real presence of scientific phenomena in the laboratory as achieved
through readable technologies. The theatrical analogy exposes the naiveté
of both approaches. The unsophistication of someone who asserts that the
theatrical world is exclusively about explorations of the Meaning of Human
Existence as is evident as the cynicism of someone who claims that it is all
politics or personalities. The point, of course, is that both views are right to
an extent. The theatrical analogy, in conjunction with the schema of pragmatic
hermeneutical phenomenology, allows us to perceive the situation aright,
to reconstitute our perception of scientific experimentation, and to notice
that scientific phenomena, like those of theatre, take place amid a complex
interaction of internal and external horizons. Scientific experimentation is at
once ontological and praxial, indebted alike to Being on the one hand and
history and culture on the other.

The ideas pertaining to production and performance outlined above allow
us to describe conveniently the existence of different ways in which a scientific
research program may be conducted. First of all, it may be directed to looking
for the theory behind a series of repeatable performances—performances
that experimenters know how to prepare consistently. Röntgen’s efforts (and
those of his contemporaries) to understand what was making his scintillation
screen glow is an example of this kind of research program. In such research,
theorists are looking to write the theory or script, as it were, for a series of
performances that have been consistently executed. A successful writing of
the script presumably would show the possibility of performances in other
circumstances, and possibly lead to their standardization.

Second, scientific research may be directed to preparing a performance for
the first time. In more traditional language, this would be “discovering” a
phenomenon predicted by theory. Seeking a subatomic particle predicted by
theory is an example of this kind of research. Here, experimenters are looking
to see whether a certain performance can be achieved, so to speak, on the
basis of an existing script.

Third, scientific research may be directed to seeking out deviations between
experimental performances and theoretical scripts. Experimenters or theorists
alike may engage in this kind of research program. Experimenters may try
to prepare performances in novel conditions to see whether such perform-
ances still “fit the script.” Instances of this include measurements of familiar
phenomena, such as the position of hydrogen spectral lines or important
constants, to an unprecedented degree of accuracy, or the half-century-long quest
to discover improved breakdowns in the theory of quantum electrodynamics
at close range. Theorists may try to see in already executed experimental
performances indications of another “script” and attempt to write it; the
Eighth Fold Way is an example. Here, the theatrical analogy is in parlous shape;
would it be as if directors continually tested the limits of how a play can be
performed while critics sought to pick out novel features of the performance
not codified in the script—and if, furthermore, this information required
scripts to be reworked.

Science as inquiry and as cultural practice

The model of scientific activity as involving the distinction between perfor-
mane and production also helps to signal the dangers of overemphasizing
aspects of experimentation. One mistake in an inquiry into theatre, for instance, is to
focus too much on the script, viewing the performance as a species of demonstra-
tion or ornamentation. Equally misguided is the approach that focuses
too much on the cultural and historical context in explaining the meaning
of a performance. Imagine a drama critic able to account for each and every
detail of performance of, say, Julius Caesar, as a function of political and social
factors. Although the army uniforms and boots worn by the Roman actors in
Orson Welles’s 1935 production can be explained as part of the theatre
world’s horrified reaction to the spectre of fascism then rising over Europe, it
would be a mistake to reduce the production to an antisemitic diatribe.
Some critics did so, of course. But Welles’s Julius Caesar was a play, and not only a
sort of theatrical op-ed piece responding to the specific political context:
indeed, it was the same play that had appeared in many other political contexts and been spoken in a different way in each.

Similarly, science is not just theory, for theories are fragile, they are theories of performances and the aim is to represent the phenomenon that puts in an appearance in performance. Nor is science only data, for data are fluid; data are descriptions of the way something appears in a particular context, and science is interested in the phenomenon that appears rather than merely how it appeared. Science is not just the production of literary texts, as "laboratory studies" people often would have it for these texts are accounts of performances or the preparation for such performances. Science is not just about the domination and control of nature, for performances involve no mastery or control but play. Nature is not infinitely pliable, not all performances are possible, and one must engage Nature to "play along" in order to discover the rules of that play. Science is not just about economic or political praxes, as social studies of science scholars occasionally imply, nor is it about the clash of ambitious personalities, as some journalism would have it, because these relate only to the social dimension involved in the preparation of performances; experiment is a poines, or a bringing-forth of some phenomenon through praxes. One could just as legitimately claim that theatre is about box office, or the clash of ambitious personalities, or the desire for fame or power, and so forth. Social forces have their place in the appearing of phenomena in performance, but if human beings were not interested, fascinated, and preoccupied by the performances, they would not happen. If we view scientific activity without the productive aspect, as positivism attempted to do, then we have no understanding of the role of social and historical forces at work in it. If, on the other hand, we view science without the productive aspect and concentrate wholly on the productive aspect, as the social studies of science scholars often do, then we are in danger of seeing in science only the arbitrary clash of forces. It would be like flying over a soccer game in an airplane sufficiently high up so that one can see the competitors but not the ball; the players will seem to ebb and flow in a series of interesting behaviors exhibiting many different patterns—patterns that could be described empirically in great detail—but the key element that would allow us to grasp the real meaning of the game would be invisible.

Consider, as an example, the light that the performance-production model sheds on the controversy over the nature, desirability, and dangers of "Big Science," which involves scientific production. Alvin Weinberg, then director of Oak Ridge National Laboratory, coined the phrase in a 1961 article entitled "Impact of Large-Scale Science on the United States." Ever since, "Big Science" has been a standard term in the lexicon of those who write about science, though not always with the same connotations. While Weinberg, for instance, was cautious about the prospect and stressed the dangers of large scientific projects, others were enthusiastic and emphasized the opportunities. Today, "Big Science" is generally used as a term of opprobrium.

Large scientific projects pose certain dangers, Weinberg wrote, including "moneyness" (expending money not thought), "journalism" (public rather than scientific debate on projects), and "administrativus" (an overabundance of administrators). He criticized the manned space program for "hazard, expense, and relevance," and was unenthusiastic about large accelerators, which were more scientifically valid but equally remote from human concerns. He wondered whether such projects would sap resources of science and society, and proposed redirecting money to "scientific issues which bear more directly on human well-being." Weinberg's aim, however, was not to cast judgment but to inaugurate "philosophic debate on the problems of scientific choice._" Big science, he felt, introduces new issues into science policy that must be exposed and addressed lest they be settled by default at the expense of scientific "productivity" (note that this word has a different meaning from what I have called "production," but the use of both terms in this chapter is unavoidable). But additional issues have appeared in the intervening years, and the debate over the value of Big Science and its impact on productivity has continued unabated.

Productivity is notoriously difficult to measure and even define, regardless of the field. Consider agriculture, for instance, where the definition and determination of productivity might seem, erroneously, to be relatively straightforward. To take a simplistic example, a farmer faced with a choice of what to plant on a particular plot of land could decide to maximize monetary profit, number of calories per acre, amount of protein per acre, security of the harvest, number of calories per man-hour of labor, prestige of the farm, and so forth. There is, in short, no single index of productivity. Each option mentioned is guided by a different set of possible values which puts into play a different index of productivity and suggests a different crop. In practice, of course, no sole value would likely be given entire priority and the actual outcome would be some compromise.

In science, the matter is further complicated because, Weinberg says, the "product," the understanding of and ability to manipulate nature, can be evaluated by two different kinds of measures which he called "internal" and "external" criteria. Internal criteria "arise from within the science itself, or from its social structure and organization," while external criteria "stem from the social or other setting in which the science is embedded." Neither kind, in turn, involves a single index of productivity; within each set different possible values can be identified implying different indices.

In practice, as the working scientist knows only too well, the decision of which scientific projects to support is the outcome of a highly political process generally involving compromises between a number of different internal and external values. Moreover, the social negotiation involved takes place on a number of different levels. Science, for instance, competes with a number of other activities that also are perceived to be of some economic, military, cultural, or political value. Within science, in turn, a competition
exists for support among its different branches, such as particle physics, oceanography, astronomy, chemistry, molecular biology, and geology, among others, each with its own perceived value. The competition continues within each branch, where different projects are rivals for available resources.

The Big vs. Little Science debate, which is all about that aspect of scientific activity that I have called production, was spawned by the fear that the emergence of large scientific projects threatens to skew an otherwise healthy competition on all levels and to distort the way values are applied to evaluate projects. A large project in one branch, it was felt, could soak up money that might be shared by several smaller but equally valuable projects. Moreover, a large project in one branch might get out of hand and wind up unfairly extracting resources otherwise destined for other branches—or even for worthy nonscientific activities. In recent years, the percentage of the total research and development budget consumed by largest projects has increased. It is undeniable, as Weinberg foresaw, that this development has changed the way scientific experiments are conducted, and the conventional wisdom is now that it has brought about the impact of what Weinberg called external values on their planning and execution.

But the matter can be elaborated in a clearer way, I think, by reformulating Weinberg's distinction as that between science as performance and as production. An experiment, I have argued, is a kind of performance, understood in the broadest sense of an action executed to see what happens in order to satisfy an interest. In science, the actions are those of instruments interacting with nature, and the interest is connected with a specific inquiry into natural structures. The performance values of science are those that promote the skilled execution of experiments, and include how well an experiment is thought out, the quality of the investigators, and the relevance of the experiment to the principal directions of the field. Production, on the other hand, refers to the interaction between planners and the particular social, political, technological, and economic context required for performance to take place. Production values of science can include social and economic returns for society, improved instrumentation, international cooperation, and national prestige. The distinction between performance and production values in science is crucial and must be born in mind at a time when so much of science threatens to dissolve into politics.

But it is misleading to imply, as Weinberg does, that production is "external" to science, given the essential place of production in scientific activity. Moreover, more performance values exist than the two ("ripeness for exploitation" and "caliber of the practitioners") Weinberg mentions as internal, and a wider range of possible production values than the three external species he identifies (technological merit, social merit, and scientific merit).

One issue highlighted by the performance-production distinction is the existence of different models for Big Science in various areas involving dramatically different relations between production and performance. The

Superconducting Supercollider, for instance, is a large instrument serving a relatively small number of experiments with low diversity; synchrotron radiation facilities provide centralized staging areas for numerous small maximally diverse experiments; the genome project is a noncentralized coordination of smaller efforts. Optical telescopes are another special case, due to the availability of private money. The community spectrum served, the kinds of risks, and the potential returns are so varied as to involve in each case a different kind of productivity—and a different meaning for "Big Science."

A second issue highlighted by this distinction involves risks that accrue from the fact that the time it takes to complete present-day productions can be so extended—over a decade—that interim changes in the scientific world can alter the productivity of the eventual experiments. The speed, quality, and relevance of a certain kind of experimental production may change in the time it takes to complete one, possibly rendering it obsolete. The factors involved may be of three sorts: technological breakthroughs, completion of other projects, and new information. In the years since construction began on the Hubble Space Telescope, for instance, developments in adaptive optics increased the resolution of ground-based observatories, other "windows" have been opened in the electromagnetic spectrum, and the general body of astronomical knowledge have all changed, forcing changes in the original estimations of the productivity of the device.

Third, the increased size of productions means increased government involvement not merely because the more resources a society has to shell out for them means a greater expectation of return, but because of a greater social interest in the way the interactions are handled. Larger productions attract more attention to the potential impact on the environment, considerations of national security and industrial competitiveness; accountability and the importance of guarding against such things as fraud, collusion, inefficiency, and so forth. Moreover, the larger the scale of a production the greater the temptation to use it as a vehicle for advancing social ends; governmental institutions may insist, for instance, that scientific projects follow "Buy American" and minority business provisions.

Fourth, the realization of a production might have social spinoffs that must be distinguished from the spinoffs of scientific knowledge itself. Technologies may have to be developed or created in the construction of a production that can be successfully transferred out of the laboratory. Constructing a state-of-the-art particle detector, for instance, is an immense production that forces detector physicists, in order to create an instrument that would be at the cutting edge for the maximum period of time, to develop new technologies. In the course of the construction of one particle detector a number of years ago, scientists taught a company that made, among other things, teddy bear whiskers how to make high-precision plastics needed for the detector in exchange for an economical rate; the productive skills acquired by that company in the process then allowed it to compete successfully for military contracts. Some attempts
have been made to try to quantify spinoffs arising from the construction of high-energy physics contracts.\footnote{This kind of production-related spinoff is to be contrasted with performance-related spinoffs that are an outcome of the knowledge gained—for example, the discovery of the X ray, laser, and fission.} Finally, the aims of a production may not be fulfilled by the performances. It has often been the case that the technological implications of the most important and far-reaching discoveries, most notoriously those of the X ray, nuclear fission, and laser, have had nothing to do with the aims of the research programs in which they were first encountered. A similar comment could be made regarding scientific merit; while in some cases discoveries and developments in one field do find immediate use in neighboring branches, in other instances the applications come unexpectedly from far afield. The same is even true of the social value of a project; many of the breakthroughs in the "war on cancer" came not from projects targeted specifically for that purpose by President Richard Nixon's legislation, but from various and apparently unrelated work, including research on yeast, Xenopus, Drosophila, and Caenorhabditis elegans. In retrospect, it is fortunate that funds for such projects had not been diverted to the war on cancer effort. Undertaking a production—e.g., a war on cancer, on AIDS, on high-tech space defense—does not guarantee that the ambition will be fulfilled.

Developing the concept of production may thus help to clarify many issues involved in Weinberg's "philosophic debate on the problems of scientific choice" by allowing us to recognize more features of the process of preparing and executing an experiment than emerge in most discussions of the issue. Like the general analogy between the sciences and the theatrical arts of which it is a part, the analogy with production helps guide development of a language with which to speak about experimental activity that enables one to assign a place both to the cultural and historical contexts that influence experimental activity (and which, for instance, are studied by social constructivists) and at the same time to the invariants that show through such contexts in that activity (on which postivists and scientists themselves rightly place so much emphasis). The analogy helps to show how scientific activity can both exhibit the presence of social factors without being reducible to it. The result is to clarify the much-misunderstood relation between science as inquiry and science as cultural practice. Thus, the benefit of replacing Weinberg's distinction between "internal" and "external" criteria with that between performance and production is not merely that a few nuances are added, but that the new distinction brings the problem in question within the purview of a more comprehensive picture of science itself.

**Implications for narratives about science**

Philosophers have tended to hold storytelling, or the organization of material about a subject into a single descriptive episode following roughly chronological order, in disrepute since the time of Plato. Plato's objection was that storytellers (actors) are imitators and thus one step removed from the reality they are reflecting. Moreover, in imitating one must heed appearance rather than substance and cater to one's audience, so that the product is not even an adequate imitation but a distortion rather than truth. Plato's argument still exerts force today, especially among so-called "new historians" who include Marxists, practitioners of the American chictomographic methodology, and members of the French Annales school. These groups dismiss storytelling, shunning descriptions of the particular and concrete in favor of "scientific" methods allegedly able to yield more universal and eternal truths.\footnote{The activity of the storyteller seems in contrast to be but a pale echo of truth rather than a discovery or creation of it. The storyteller appears to be in the position of playing Aaron to Moses, passing on an already disclosed truth albeit in a form more readily comprehensible to the public. Like Moses, the subject of the tale told by the storyteller (who could be a primary lawyer, explorer, religious figure, artist, or scientist) has one foot in the sphere of the divine, participating in primordial disclosure, bringing to ordinary mortals in the world some previously undisclosed knowledge from the beyond. The storyteller, like Aaron, seems relegated to the role of amanuensis or mouthpiece, the person who lives first of all in the mundane world and who interprets primordial activity so as to make it accessible to the public, but is able to do so only by using distortions, mediations, corruptions, descriptive metaphors, popular language. This attitude among historians has its counterpart in a particular breed of new science history practiced by social constructivists. Just as advocates of the "scientific" methods mentioned above, which are ultimately of positivist inspiration, tend toward a determinist view of history with an emphasis on social and institutional factors, on the impersonal forces of economony, on the leading role of economics and politics, and so forth, while underplaying the role of the culture of the group and of the wills of the group and individuals, so these new approaches to science history also tend toward determinism, emphasizing the role of technology, class, social, political, and economic factors while underplaying the role of individuals, the contributions of nature, and the impact of character and chance.} Recently a renewed appreciation for the value of narrative among historians has appeared.\footnote{The new appreciation was prompted by the awareness that narrative is a tool able to disclose the "event-character" of human life in a way available to no other mode of presentation. As the organization of information into a roughly sequential order exhibiting the decisions affecting a path-dependent phenomenon, a narrative is able to relate the contingent set of decisions actually made in a production with the appearance of a phenomenon that appears in and through that production. A narrative is ideal for exhibiting, in other words, a path-dependent nonclassical phenomenon because it presents the evolution of its appearance along with the contingent decisions.}
that gave rise to that evolution. The previous reflections on the nature of experimentation suggest the fruitfulness of the narrative technique for understanding it.

A fully told story of an experiment, for instance, might involve the weaving together of several different story lines. These include: (1) a story of science itself, and why certain areas of science (weak interaction physics or nuclear cross sections, for instance) were seen as more crucial to pursue, more authoritative, than others; (2) a story of the instruments used in this pursuit, each of which has its own story of development and production; and (3) a story of individuals who conceived, produced, and executed the experiment, and how each of them came to learn what the important problems were and how they came to anticipate the solutions they did. These are only the principal story lines; others include the stories of the various experimental techniques involved (bubble chambers, neutron scattering, etc.) and the stories of the laboratories where the experiment is conducted. One can pursue separately one or more of these story lines, of course. But a true narrative attempts to incorporate each, for as each evolved so did the experiment.

A narrative about a discovery made with a cloud chamber—of the meson, say—might focus on technical details of the apparatus used by the three teams that discovered it almost simultaneously. Or it might focus on production-related factors such as the cultural and historical forces which led to the development of cloud chambers, the institutions whose researchers were given the freedom to pursue such studies, or the journals whose different publication demands determined the order of publication of the discovery papers. Or it might focus on the personalities and actions of the individual researchers. Each of these provides a legitimate perspective for writing a discovery account, for any discovery made with a cloud chamber is intelligible only as disclosive of nature, within complex historical space, and as the act of human beings.

But it would be a mistake to limit the possibility of an account to one of these perspectives; the “event-character” of the discovery process emerges only when each of these perspectives is preserved. It would be as if one tried to tell the story of the assassination of Francis Ferdinand only in terms of the detonation of a bomb in Gavrilo Princip’s gun, the trajectory of the bullet, and its interference with vital life processes inside the archduke; or only in terms of Serbian nationalism; or only in terms of Princip’s personal motives. A first implication of the previous chapters for narratives about science is thus that while narratives can be told about science that are located in one or more particular perspectives, such as individuals, science, institutions, equipment, and production, science itself transpires through the intertwining of all of them.

But there is a deeper implication, I think, having to do not with the content towards which the attention of the science historian is drawn but with the manner of execution of the narrative itself. The construction of a narrative is itself an act carried out for the purpose of disclosing something about science, allowing it to be witnessed for its own sake. This suggests one further argumentative analogy—that narratives are yet another kind of performance. If so, they can be considered to share many of the features about which I have already spoken. They are undertaken for the purpose of rendering present something bygone, and an attempt to tell not just any old story, but to disclose something about a phenomenon: science. They put on display that phenomenon in such a way that certain of its aspects, though possibly already familiar to us, stand out and can be contemplated, lingered over, pondered. Narratives are holistic in that a history is not a catalogue or compendium of one detail after another (which would overwhelm the narrative), but a judicious selection and interweaving of details for the sake of disclosure. Narratives are a priori (exploratory) in that one knows not beforehand exactly what will be disclosed when one sets out to construct a narrative, and one allows oneself to be surprised; one is not constructing a narrative when one sets out to find confirming illustrations of a predetermined thesis. Narratives are a priori in that they are perpetually open to being revised; there is no final narrative about any episode any more than there is a final performance of a play or final experiment in a certain area. Narratives are authoritative in that they demand acknowledgment by those engaged in inquiry into the event in question. They are situational in that they are relative to a certain state of knowledge and perspective; as the perspective or available information changes, a new narrative may be called for. There is a primacy of performance in narrative; one is not in full control of it, and must put oneself in the service of the narrative.

The holism of narrative is especially significant. Every detail is potentially revealing. I was once involved, for instance, in a heated discussion about the disclosive value of candied Mexican hats. In a previous book, my coauthor and I had related a story of a bet made by a physicist that a certain particle would be discovered or he would eat his hat. The discovery was duly made, and at a subsequent conference, candied Mexican hats were passed out for general consumption. A historian of science reproached me at a conference for devoting space to this episode. What did it contribute to knowledge about science? Shouldn't I have devoted the space to scientific information? Hadn't I committed the sin of popularization; to focus on extraneous matters because they would be interesting to and comprehensible by the layperson?

The Mexican hats turned out to be but one instance of a class of details in my book to which the historian objected. Others included a description of the handkerchief that students recall Emmy Noether kept in her blouse and how she waved it when illustrating a point; the flash of an eminent physicist's florid silk tie as he vanished from students’ sight after teaching a class; the fish that remained uneaten when a brilliant future Nobelist met his mentor in a restaurant and deferentially allowed the mentor to order for both of them a dish that the prodigy loathed; the way an Italian physicist crushed out his
cigarette in a film dish; and the comfortable slippers which a Pakistani physicist working in the West kept underneath his desk. A professional, so the historian informed me, would have stuck to the essentials.

I argued in reply that such details properly handled did disclose essential aspects of science. The bet revealed the game-like quality theoretical physics has for many practitioners. It showed an irreverence for final answers and rational solutions and a willingness to put oneself on the line; this quality, in turn, had everything to do with the character of the person who made the bet and the kind of work that he did. The episode thus served as an antidote to the view of theorists as solemn fabricators of the ground plan of the Universe. (The role of comedy and humor in the activities of scientists deserves more attention than it has so far received.) Likewise for the other episodes. The fact that students found Noether's handkerchief behavior unfeminine indicated the presence of gender stereotypes. The flash of the tie was emblematic of the scientific nature of the person who wore it, which in turn was emblematic of the hermetic nature of his work, which in turn had much to do with the eventual reception of that work in the scientific community and how little of it was eventually incorporated into the standard formulations despite the immense achievement it represented. The uneven fish revealed a mixture of respect and iconoclasm; that the prodigy was reverential enough to agree to order it on the advice of the mentor but stubborn enough to trust his own taste and refuse to consume it. The film canister/ashtray bespoke the traditional informality and economy of a certain group of Italian scientists. And the slippers were mute testimony of the lonely efforts of a person from the third world to make a home in an unfamiliar environment. Far from serving as mere entertainment, such details were in the service of the disclosure effects by the narrative, and one cannot draw a line between what kinds of details are discloseive and what are not.

It is true that each such detail was essential in that another, similar one could have been substituted. But that of which the details were discloseive was significant and could not have been omitted; the details were thus symbols. What each detail disclosed could have been made the subject of an explicit study—jokes and gambling in science, sexism, idiocracy, and mentoring, informality, the anxieties of third-world participants in the international scientific community. Such studies are of course important, but a narrative serves a different function, disclosing a different kind of phenomenon. To object to the inclusion of such details in a narrative has as little justice as to object to the lighting, props, costumes, etc., of a play as having merely entertainment value instead of belonging intrinsically to the performance itself. Indeed, to pass over this kind of detail in narratives about science contributes to the impression that science is a privileged activity unlike other kinds of human activity. Thinking, even scientific thinking, is never conducted in a pure, rarefied environment. Thinking always belongs to the world of appearances, of concrete historical environments. One must beware, therefore, of the

impulse to decide beforehand what is irrelevant and what not for a narrative. Any attempt to make such a decision beforehand will be guided by an anticipation of what to expect, by an idea of what the privileged story line is, rather than by the performance itself. To construct a narrative is a process of a back and forth relation between one's ideas about the subject, and what one discovers about it. New anticipations allow us to discover new profiles of the subject, which in turn force us to revise our anticipations.

If narratives about science are akin to performances, then the philosophy of science is akin to the "theory" of the performances. Philosophy of science relies explicitly or implicitly on narratives or accounts of scientific activity, whether extended treatments or anecdotal, and can be thought of as attempting to provide the "theory" of such narrative performances. Too frequently, traditional philosophers of science have relied on mythic or "fictionalized" accounts of science history to support their views. Yet, philosophy of science does not aim to describe an essence above human time and history that works "behind the scenes" of scientific phenomena, but rather to construct a representation of how its characteristic worldly profiles emerge from the processes by which it is produced.

The dialectic between the philosophy of science and narratives about it can be considered analogously to the dialectic between theoretical scripting and experimental performances. Philosophy of science, like theory, allows one to return to the phenomenon—science itself—to look for new profiles and aspects and how they fulfill anticipations. The theatrical analogy, for instance, helps us appreciate aspects that we had not looked at carefully enough before, such as production, recognition, and skill. In highlighting the creative aspect of science, for instance, it might be that we look for and appreciate expressions of the joy of creation among scientists. The expressions of beauty in Millikan's notebooks, the drunken symposium at the Cosmotron dedication party, the joy of the chase in the Double Helix, the satisfaction at knowing about atomic parity violation—all these would then not be particular psychological expressions of individuals but aspects of the practice of science itself insofar as it is a creative and productive worldly activity. True philosophy of science asks questions about science rather than dictates to it, and if things are disclosed about the activity of science it is to allow for new questioning and not to provide things to put up on the shelf as trophies. Other areas that the theatrical analogy opens up for questioning include production, the effect of scale on production, skill, the role of management contracts, the nature of rehearsal calibration, the nature and character of the laboratory, and the way one can get "swept up" by the theatricality of it all in cases of self-deception.

Moreover, like other kinds of performances, narratives are "produced." That means that someone decides to carry them out, makes necessary decisions in advance, and aims the narrative at a certain community—all of which shape its concrete form. Narratives, too, have many different kinds of research programs. One can look in them for a common theme behind a series of
events, look for events having a certain character, and seek out whether there are inconsistencies between a historical event and prevailing characterizations of it.

Viewing narrative as performance thus contributes to a restitution and justification of the storyteller’s art. If a narrative is performance and performance disclosure, then the difference between the activity of the subject of the story and the storytelling activity itself does not correspond to that between primordial disclosure and popularization. The storyteller cannot be seen as playing Aaron to Moses. Or, if one insists on putting it that way, it must be with the recognition that their activities are not so fundamentally different because any act of disclosure, even that of Moses, is already a listening. For, as a patient story-listener once reminded me, Moses played Aaron to God.

Notes


2 My attention was drawn to the importance of this concept by Zev Trachtenberg, “A Theory of Drama,” (M. Phil. thesis. University College, London, 1989).

3 See Crease, “History of Brookhaven National Laboratory, Part One.”


7 Weinberg had before him only two models of Big Science, large particle accelerators and the manned space program, neither of which had really matured. Forefront particle accelerators could still be built at universities and Project Mercury was in its infancy. Weinberg’s article was based on an address given before a meeting of the American Rocket Society in Gatlinburg, Tenn., on May 4, 1961, the day before Alan Shepard became the first American astronaut to be launched into space.


11 This, for instance, is the point made by John A. Remington in “Beyond Big Science in America: The Binding of Inquiry,” *Social Studies of Science* 188 (1988): 45–72, though he uses Weinberg’s distinction between internal and external criteria.

12 For a discussion of an example, concerning the decline of administrative contracts in national laboratories, see Robert P. Crease and Nicholas P. Santos, “Managing the Unmanageable,” *Atlantic* 267 (January 1991): 80–88.


15 See ibid.


17 The use of fictionalized history in the philosophy of science is admitted with a certain chagrin by Herbert Feigl in “Beyond Peaceful Coexistence,” in *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 5, ed. Roger Stuewer (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970), p. 3. But John J. C. Smart defends the use of fictionalized history in “Science, History, and Methodology,” *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 25 (1972): 266. “Methodologists need examples from the history of science only because it is too hard to think up fictitious ones. It does not matter, therefore, whether the history is quite true.”
47

VERBAL ART AS PERFORMANCE

Richard Bauman


Departing from text-centered perspectives on verbal art, an approach is developed to verbal art as performance, derived from recent work in folklore, the ethnography of speech, sociolinguistics, and literary stylistics. The patterning of performance in genres, acts, roles, and events is discussed, as well as the emergent quality of performance, manifested in text, event, and social structure.

We will be concerned in this paper to develop a conception of verbal art as performance, based upon an understanding of performance as a mode of speaking. In constructing this framework for a performance-centered approach to verbal art, we have started from the position of the folklorist, but have drawn concepts and ideas from a wide range of disciplines, chiefly anthropological, sociolinguistics, and literary criticism. Each of these disciplines has its own distinctive perspective on verbal art, and a long tradition of independent scholarship in its study. From at least the time of Herder, however, there has been an integrative tradition as well in the study of verbal art, manifested in the work of such figures as Edward Sapir, Roman Jakobson, and Dell Hymes, scholars who have operated at an intellectual level beyond the boundaries which separate academic disciplines, sharing an interest in the esthetic dimension of social and cultural life in human communities as manifested through the use of language. The present paper is offered in the spirit of that integrative tradition.

In a recent collection of conceptual and theoretical essays in folklore, assembled to indicate a range of new perspectives in the field, it was emphasized in the Introduction that the contributors shared a common concern with performance as an organizing principle (Bauman 1972a). The term performance was employed there, as it was by several of the contributors to the collection, because it conveyed a dual sense of artistic action—the doing of folklore—and artistic event—the performance situation, involving performer, art form, audience, and setting—all of which are central to the developing performance approach to folklore. This usage accorded well with the conventional meaning of the term "performance," and served to point up the fundamental reorientation from folklore as materials to folklore as communication which characterized the thinking of the contributors. Conventional meanings can carry scholarship just so far, however, before the lack of conceptual rigor begins to constrain analytical insight rather than advancing it. In view of the centrality of performance to the orientation of increasing numbers of folklorists and anthropologists interested in verbal art, the time seems opportune for efforts aimed at expanding the conceptual content of folkloric performance as a communicative phenomenon, beyond the general usage that has carried us up to this point. That is the purpose of this essay.

One orientational and terminological point before proceeding: consistent with the chiefly sociolinguistic and anthropological roots of the performance approach, the terms "verbal art" and "oral literature" provide a better frame of reference, at least as a point of departure for the ideas to be advanced here, than the more diffuse and problematic term "folklore." "Spoken art" might be even better, insofar as this paper is concerned solely with a way of speaking and its attendant phenomena, but the term has never achieved currency in any of the disciplines where it might have served a useful purpose—folklore, anthropology, or linguistics. Many things have been studied under the name of folklore, but verbal art has always been at or near the center of the larger domain, and has constituted the chief common ground between anthropological folklorists and those of other persuasions. Accordingly, the shift from the "folklore" of the preceding paragraph to the "verbal art" of those to follow is neither unprecedented nor arbitrary, but will serve, hopefully, to make somewhat clearer the universe of discourse within which the ideas which follow have been formulated.

Let us make explicit as well that a great deal more is intended here than a convenient relabeling of what is already known. The conception of performance to be developed in these pages is not simply an alternative perspective on the familiar genres of oral literature long studied by folklorists and anthropologists. It is that, but it is more than that as well. Performance, as we conceive of it and as our examples have been selected to illustrate, is a unifying thread tying together the marked, segregated esthetic genres and other spheres of verbal behavior into a general unified conception of verbal art as a way of speaking. Verbal art may comprehend both myth narration and the speech expected of certain members of society whenever they open their mouths, and it is performance that brings them together in culture-specific and variable ways, ways that are to be discovered ethnographically within each culture and community.
The nature of performance

Modern theories of the nature of verbal art, whether in anthropology, linguistics, or literature, tend overwhelmingly to be constructed in terms of special usages or patterning of formal features within texts. General formulations identify a primary "focus on the message for its own sake" (Jakobson 1960: 356; Stankiewicz 1960: 14–15) or a "concern with the form of expression, over and above the needs of communication" (Basscom 1955: 247) as the essence of verbal art. Others are more specific about the nature or consequences of such a focus or concern, suggesting, for example, that the touchstone of verbal art lies in a maximized "use of the devices of the language in such a way that this use itself attracts attention and is perceived as uncommon" (Havránek 1964: 10). Among certain linguists, the idea has some currency that verbal art "in some way deviates from norms which we, as members of society, have learnt to expect in the medium used" (Leech 1969: 56; cf. Stankiewicz 1960: 12; Durbin 1971), while others of their colleagues make a point of the "multiplicity of additional formal laws restricting the poet's free choice of expressions" (Fónagy 1965: 72; italics in original).

Whatever their differences, of focus or emphasis, all of these approaches make for a conception of verbal art that is text-centered. For all, the artful, esthetic quality of an utterance resides in the way in which language is used in the construction of the textual item. To be sure, it may be considered necessary, at least implicitly, to assess the text against the background of general linguistic norms, but it is the text itself that remains the unit of analysis and point of departure for proponents of these approaches. This in turn places severe constraints on the development of a meaningful framework for the understanding of verbal art as performance, as a species of situated human communication, a way of speaking.

It is, of course, possible to move from artistic texts, identified in formal or other terms, to performance, by simply looking at how such texts are rendered, in action terms. But this is to proceed backwards, by approaching phenomena whose primary social reality lies in their nature as oral communication in terms of the abstracted textual products of the communicative process. As we shall see, oral literary texts, though they may fulfill the formal measures of verbal art, be accurately recorded, and bear strong associations with performance in their conventional contexts, may nevertheless not be the products of performance, but of rendition in another communicative mode. How many of the texts in our collections represent recordings of informants' abstracts, resumes, or reports of performances and performance forms rather than true performances (cf. Tedlock 1972)? By identifying the nature of performance and distinguishing it from other ways of speaking, we will have, among other things, a measure of the authenticity of collected oral literary texts.

A performance-centered conception of verbal art calls for an approach through performance itself. In such an approach, the formal manipulation of linguistic features is secondary to the nature of performance, per se, conceived of and defined as a mode of communication.

There is a very old conception of verbal art as communication which goes back at least to Plato's insistence that literature is lies. The notion, also manifest in Sir Philip Sidney's oft-quoted dictum, "the poet nothing affirms" (Sidney 1595: 5) holds that whatever the propositional content of an item of verbal art, its meaning is somehow cancelled out or rendered inoperative by the nature of the utterance as verbal art. A more recent expression of this conception is to be found in the writings of the British Ordinary Language philosopher, J. L. Austin. Austin maintains, "of any and every utterance, that it will be "in a peculiar way" hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or spoken in soliloquy." He continues, "language in such circumstances is in special ways—in intelligibly—used not seriously, but in ways parasitic upon its normal use—ways which fall under the doctrine of etiologies of language" (Austin 1962: 21–22; italics in original).

Leaving aside the unfortunate suggestion that the uses Austin mentions exert a weakening influence on language, a product of his particular bias, we may abstract from the cited passage the suggestion that performance represents a transformation of the basic referential ("serious," "normal" in Austin's terms) uses of language. In other words, in artistic performance of this kind, there is something going on in the communicative interchange which says to the auditor, "interpret what I say in some special sense; do not take it to mean what the words alone, taken literally, would convey." This may lead to the further suggestion that performance sets up, or represents, an interpretative frame within which the messages being communicated are to be understood, and that this frame contrasts with at least one other frame, the literal.

In employing the term "frame" here, I am drawing not upon Austin, but on the powerful insights of Gregory Bateson, and the more recent and equally provocative work of Erving Goffman (1974). Bateson first developed systematically on the notion of frame as a defined interpretive context providing guidelines for discriminating between orders of message (1972[1956]: 222), in his seminal article, "A Theory of Play and Fantasy" (1972[1955]: 177–193). We shall return to aspects of this theory, and of Goffman's, in more detail below.

Although the notion of performance as a frame was introduced above, in connection with Austin's thinking, as contrasting with literal communication, it should be made clear from the beginning that many other such frames besides these two may be identified. For example:

- *insinuation*, in which the words spoken are to be interpreted as having a covert and indirect relation to the meaning of the utterance (cf. Austin 1962: 121);
- *joking*, in which the words spoken are to be interpreted as not seriously meaning what they might otherwise mean (cf. Austin 1962: 121);
SCIENCE AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

—imitation, in which the manner of speaking is to be interpreted as being modeled after that of another person or persons;
—translation, in which the words spoken are to be interpreted as the equivalent of words originally spoken in another language or code;
—quotation, in which the words spoken are to be interpreted as the words of someone other than the speaker (cf. Weinreich 1966: 162).

This is a partial and unelaborated list, which does not even adequately sample, much less exhaust, the range of possible interpretive frames within which communication may be couched. It should be noted, moreover, that frames listed may be used in combination, as well as singly. It should also be stressed that although theorists like Austin suggest that the literal frame some-how has priority over all the others—-more "normal"—this is not necessary to the theory, and in fact biases it in unproductive ways (Fish 1973). The notorious difficulty of defining literalness aside, there is growing evidence that literal utterances are no more frequent or "normal" in situated human communication than any of the other frames, and indeed that in spoken communication no such thing as naked literalness may actually exist (Burns 1972; Goffman 1974). For our purposes, all that is necessary is the recognition of performance as a distinctive frame, available as a communicative resource along with the others to speakers in particular communities.

The first major task, then, is to suggest what kind of interpretive frame performance establishes or represents. How is communication that constitutes performance to be interpreted? The following represents a very preliminary attempt to specify the interpretive guidelines set up by the performance frame.

Fundamentally, performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence. This competence rests on the knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate ways. Performance involves on the part of the performer an assumption of accountability to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content. From the point of view of the audience, the act of expression on the part of the performer is thus marked as subject to evaluation for the way it is done, for the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer's display of competence. Additionally, it is marked as available for the enhancement of experience, through the present enjoyment of the intrinsic qualities of the act of expression itself. Performance thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of the act of expression, and gives license to the audience to regard the act of expression and the performer with special intensity.

Thus conceived, performance is a mode of language use, a way of speaking. The implication of such a concept for a theory of verbal art is this: it is no longer necessary to begin with artful texts, identified on independent formal grounds and then reinserted into situations of use, in order to conceptualize verbal art in communicative terms. Rather, in terms of the approach being developed here, performance becomes constitutive of the domain of verbal art as spoken communication.

Some examples may be useful at this point, to demonstrate in empirical terms the application of the notion of performance we have proposed. In several of her writings on the people of the plateau area of the Malagasy Republic (Keenan 1973, 1974), Elinor Keenan delineates the two major ways of speaking identified by this group. The first, called in native terminology roaka, may be loosely defined as informal conversation, described by native elders as "everyday talk," or "simple talk." The other way of speaking, kabary, is the one of principal interest to us here. Kabary is glossed by Keenan as "ceremonial speech, what we might call oratory." The following are excerpts from Keenan's description:

Kabary as a focal point of tradition and as a focal point of artistic expression is ... regarded with great interest. It is not uncommon to see groups of elders evaluating the skills and approaches of speechmakers following a kabary performance. A speechmaker who pleases his audience is rewarded with praise such as: 'He is a very sharp speechmaker.' 'He is prepared.' 'He is a true speechmaker, a child of his father.' His words are said to be 'well-arranged' and 'balanced.' His performance is described as 'satisfying' ... Evaluations are based on both skill in handling winding speech and on one's ability to follow certain rules governing the sequence and content of particular oratory. [1973: 226-227]

And further, "kabary performances ... are platforms for exhibiting knowledge of traditional oratory" (1973: 229). Wedding kabary, in particular, is "the most developed art form in the culture and a source of great delight and interest to all participants" (1973: 242).

It is clear from this description that kabary represents for the plateau Malagasy a domain of performance. To engage in kabary is to assume responsibility to one's audience for a display of competence in the traditional kabary forms, to render one's speech subject to evaluation for the quality of one's speaking. One is judged as a speechmaker, for the way one's words are arranged. Kabary performances are keenly attended to and actively evaluated, with good performances indeed serving as a source of enjoyment and satisfaction to the auditors, for the way they are done. The ethnography of verbal art among the plateau Malagasy thus becomes centrally the ethnography of kabary.

Among the Ilongot of the Philippines, by contrast with the above, there are three major speech styles, described by Michelle Rosaldo: the stylistically unmarked "straight speech" (gubeta nga q補), invocatory speech (gugaw), and a third style, quingawaw, described as "crooked" or witty talk (Rosaldo 1973). It is not wholly clear from Rosaldo's account whether gugaw involves...
performance, but qumbaqon very clearly does. Qumbaqon is "artful, witty, 
charming," "a language of display, performance, pose" (Rosaldo 1973: 197-
198). What is especially noteworthy about speaking among the Ilongot, 
within our present context, is that the telling of tales, always included in a priori 
text-centered definitions of verbal art, is classified as a kind of "straight 
speech." That is, storytelling for the Ilongot is not a form of performance, 
thus in culture-specific communicative terms, not a form of verbal art. The 
domain of speaking among the Ilongot is to this extent, among many others, 
organized differently from that of many of the many cultures in which storytelling 
does involve performance.

Japanese professional storytellers, for example, as described by Hrdličková, 
are certainly performers in our sense of the term. For their audiences, "it is 
not seldom more important how a story is told than what the story relates. 
... Storytellers regard the mastery of [storytelling] elements as a necessary 
preliminary stage prior to any successful practicing of their art in public, 
since the audience not only expects of them an established manner of interpre-
tation, but also rates them according to the degree of artistry the artists 
command" (Hrdličková 1969: 193; italics in original). That is, storytelling 
involves a display of competence in the manner of telling the story, which is 
subject to evaluation for the way it is done. The audience derives enjoyment 
from the performance in proportion to the skill of the narrator (1969: 193).

The point to be emphasized here is that just as speaking itself as a cultural 
system (or as part of cultural systems defined in other terms) will vary from 
speech community to speech community, so too will the nature and extent of 
the realm of performance and verbal art (Bauman 1972b). One of the principal 
questions one must ask in the ethnography of performance is what range of 
speech activity is regarded as susceptible to performance and what range is 
conventionally performed, that is, conventionally expected by members of 
the community to be rendered in a performance mode. For the St. Vincentians, 
for example, performance may be invoked across a very wide spectrum of 
speech activity, from oratory, to storytelling, to gossip—even to speaking 
with a speech impediment—while the seventeenth century Quakers, because 
of basic attitudes toward speaking in general, restricted performance to an 
early extremely narrow range of activity (Abrahams 1970; Abrahams and Bauman 
1971; Bauman 1974, 1975). In performance terms, it is not possible to assert a priori that verbal art consists of "folktale myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, 
and other 'literary forms' " defined solely in formal terms (Baskin 1955: 245). 
We will return to the culture-specific nature of verbal art as performance 
below.

The keying of performance

Before embarking upon a discussion of the further implications of the notion 
of performance put forward above, there is one major element integral to the 
conception of performance as a frame which must be delineated, i.e., the way 
in which framing is accomplished, or, to use Goffman's term for the process 
by which frames are invoked and shifted, how performance is keyed (Goffman 
1974). Here again, we may draw on Bateson's powerful insight, that it is 
characteristic of communicative interaction that it include a range of explicit 
or implicit messages which carry instructions on how to interpret the other 
message(s) being communicated. This communication about communication 
Bateson termed metacomunication (Ruesch and Bateson 1968: 209). In 
Bateson's terms, "a frame is metacommmunicative. Any message which either 
explicitly or implicitly defines a frame, ipso facto gives the receiver instruc-
tions or aids in his attempt to understand the messages included within the 
frame" (Bateson 1972: 1955: 188). All framing, then, including performance, 
is accomplished through the employment of culturally conventionalized 
metacomunication. In empirical terms, this means that each speech community 
will make use of a structured set of distinctive communicative means 
from among its resources in culturally conventionalized and culture-specific 
ways to key the performance frame; such that all communication that takes 
place within that frame is to be understood as performance within that community.

An etic list of communicative means that have been widely documented in 
various cultures as serving to key performance is not difficult to compile. 
Such a list would include at least the following:

(1) special codes, e.g., archaic or esoteric language, reserved for and diag-
ostic of performance (e.g., Toelken 1969; Sherzer 1974);
(2) special formulae that signal performance, such as conventional openings 
and closings, or explicit statements announcing or asserting performance 
(e.g., Crowley 1966; Reaver 1972; Uspensky 1972: 19; Babcock-Abrahams 
1974);
(3) figurative language, such as metaphor, metonymy, etc. (e.g., Keenan 
1973, 1974; Fox 1974; Rosaldo 1973; Sherzer 1974);
(4) formal stylistic devices, such as rhyme, vowel harmony, other forms of 
parallism (Jacobson 1966, 1968; Stankiewicz 1960: 15; Austerlitz 1960; 
Gossen 1972, 1974; Fox 1974; Sherzer and Sherzer 1972);
(5) special prosodic patterns of tempo, stress, pitch (e.g., Lord 1960; Tedlock 
1972);
(6) special paralinguistic patterns of voice quality and vocalization (e.g., 
Tedlock 1972; McDowell 1974);
(7) appeal to tradition (e.g., Innes 1874: 145);
(8) disclaimer of performance (e.g., Darnell 1974; Keenan 1974).

The formal and conventional nature of the devices listed above bears an 
important relation to the very nature of performance itself. Burke has alerted 
us to the power of formal patterns to elicit the participation of an audience
through the arousal of "an attitude of collaborative expectancy.... Once you grasp the trend of the form, it is in its participation." This "yielding to the formal development, surrendering to its symmetry as such," (Burke 1969[1950]: 58) fixes the attention of the audience more strongly on the performer, binds the audience to the performer in a relationship of dependence that keeps them caught up in his display. A not insignificant part of the capacity of performance to transform social structure, to be discussed at the end of this paper, resides in the power that the performer derives from the control over his audience afforded him by the formal appeal of his performance.

A list of the kind given above, however, is ultimately of only limited utility, for the essential task in the ethnography of performance is to determine the culture-specific constellations of communicative means that serve to key performance in particular communities. Features such as those listed above may figure in a variety of ways in the speech economy of a community. Rhyme, for example, may be used to key performance, or it may simply be a formal feature of the language, as when it figures in certain forms of replication, or it may appear in speech play (which may or may not involve performance). It may even be inadvertent. Interestingly, when this happens in English, there is a traditional formula which may be invoked to disdain performance retroactively: "I'm a poet and I don't know it; my feet show it, they're longfellows." This is an indication that rhyme often does in fact key performance in English.

The basic point here is that one must determine empirically what are the specific conventionalized means that key performance in a particular community, and that these will vary from one community to another (though one may discover areal and typological patterns, and universal tendencies may exist). Let us consider some examples.

The telling of traditional folktales, or "old stories," in the Bahamas, as described by Daniel J. Crowley, characteristically involves performance. Narrators assume responsibility for the way they render their stories, and their performances are attended to for the enjoyment to be derived from the telling, and evaluated as displays of competence (for evidence of this see Crowley 1966: 37, 137-139). Old story performances are keyed by a complex system of communicative means.

One of the most distinctive of these is the word "Bunday," which serves as a "trademark" for old stories, "since its mere mention is the sign for an old story to begin.... To the Bahamians, 'Bunday ain't nothing; it just mean old story."' Crowley identifies five conventional functions served by "Bunday" as a marker of old story performance: (1) as a means of announcing one's intention to tell a story and testing the audience's willingness to hear it; (2) as a means of recapturing audience attention (the better the storyteller, the less often he must have recourse to this device, but all storytellers must use it occasionally); (3) for emphasis and punctuation; (4) as a filler to cover pauses and other gaps in the narration; (5) as a signal that the story is ended.

In addition to "Bunday," storytelling performance is further signaled by opening and closing formulae. Some of these, such as "Once upon a time, a very good time, monkey chew tobacco, and he spit white lime," are stylistically developed in their own right, while others, like "Once upon a time," are more simple. Closing formulae are more individualized, with the closing "Bunday" coming before, between, or after the formula. To take one characteristic example, which brings the narrative back to the occasion of its telling: "I was passing by, and I say 'Mister Jack, how come you so smart?' And he make at me, and I run, causing me to come here tonight to tell you this wonderful story" (Crowley 1966: 35-36).

The keying devices for old story performance further include special words and phrases (e.g., "one more day than all ...") to begin a new motif), special pronunciations, elaborate onomatopoeia, and a range of metanarrational devices, such as the following of an impossible statement by "If I was going to tell you a story," and then another even more impossible statement (Crowley 1966: 26-27). Finally, old story performance is keyed by distinctive paralinguistic and prosodic shifts for the purpose of characterization (e.g., Crowley 1966: 67). In sum, this one segment of the Bahamian performance domain is keyed by a complex system of mutually reinforcing means, serving together to signal that an old story is being performed.

As we have noted, the foregoing inventory of keys to old story performance pertains to only one genre. A full and ideal ethnography of performance would encompass the entire domain, viewing speaking and performance as a cultural system and indicating how the whole range of performance is keyed. Gary Gossen's elegant analyses of Chumula genres of verbal behavior come closest to any work in the literature known to the author to achieving such a description (Gossen 1972, 1974). Within the overall domain of "people's speech" (sk'op kiršano, Chumula identity three macro-cATEGORIES of speech: "ordinary speech" (la'il k'op), "speech for people whose hearts are heard" (ko'p sventa sk'isnah yu'lonan xu'wun li kiršano), and "pure speech" (puru K'op)). Ordinary speech is conceived of by the people as unmarked, not special in any way. It is not associated with performance. Speech for people whose hearts are heard and pure speech, on the other hand, are strongly relevant to our discussion.

As an overall category, what distinguishes speech for people whose hearts are heard from ordinary speech is that it is stylistically marked by a degree of verbatim repetition of words, phrases and metaphors, and in certain subcategories, or genres, by parallelism in syntax and metaphorical couplings. Pure speech is distinguished in turn from speech for people whose hearts are heard by its relative fixity of form and the greater density of parallelism, whether by normalization of syntactically parallel lines or by "stacking" of metaphorical couplings.

From Gossen's description, it is evident that repetition and parallelism constitute keys to performance for the Chumula. Both speech for people
whose hearts are heated and pure speech involve the display of competence, contribute to the enhancement of experience, and are subject to evaluation for the way they are done. There is a crucial point to be made here, however. Speech for people whose hearts are heated is idiosyncratic, unified, and markedly less saturated with those features that signal performance. The user of speech for people whose hearts are heated is less fully accountable for a display of competence, his expression is less intensely regarded by the audience, his performance has less to contribute to the enhancement of the audience's experience than the one who uses the forms of pure speech. The performance frame may thus be seen to operate with variable intensity in Chamula speaking.

It is worth underscoring this last point. Art is commonly conceived as an all-or-nothing phenomenon—something either is or is not art—but conceived as performance, in terms of an interpretive frame, verbal art may be culturally defined as varying in intensity as well as range. We are not speaking here of the relative quality of a performance—good performance versus bad performance—but the degree of intensity with which the performance frame operates in a particular range of culturally defined ways of speaking. When we move beyond the first level discrimination of culturally defined ways of speaking that do not conventionally involve performance (e.g., Chamula ordinary speech, Malagasy resalata) versus ways of speaking that do conventionally involve performance (e.g., Chamula speech for people whose hearts are heated and pure speech, Malagasy kaburya), we need to attend to the relative saturation of the performance frame attendant upon the more specific categories of ways of speaking within the community.

The variable range of performance in Chamula is confirmed by the metalanguage employed by the Chamula in their evaluation of performance. Because of the importance of the evaluative dimension of performance as communication, such metalanguages and the aesthetic standards they express constitute an essential consideration in the ethnography of performance; the range of application of such aesthetic systems may be the best indicator of the extent of the performance domain within a community (Dundes 1966; Babcock-Abrahams 1974). Increased fixity of form, repetition, and parallelism, which serve as measures of increasing intensity of performance, also signal for the Chamula increasing "heat." Heat is a basic metaphor for the Chamula, symbolizing the orderly, the good, and the beautiful, by derivation from the power of the sun deity. The transition from ordinary speech to speech for people whose hearts are heated to pure speech thus involves a progressive increase in heat and therefore of esthetic and ethical value in speaking.10

The patterning of performance

Our discussion of Chamula performance has centered upon the way in which performance is keyed, the communicative means that signal that a particular

act of expression is being performed. We may advance our considerations still further by recognizing that it is only as these means are embodied in particular genres that they figure in the performance system of the Chamula themselves. That is, the Chamula organize the domain of speaking in terms of genres, i.e., conventionalized message forms, formal structures that incorporate the features that key performance. The association of performance with particular genres is a significant aspect of the patterning of performance within communities. This association is more problematic than text-centered, etc approaches to verbal art would indicate (Ben-Amos 1969).

In the ethnography of performance as a cultural system, the investigator's attention will frequently be attracted first by those genres that are conventionally performed. These are the genres, like the Chamula genres of pure speech or Bahamian old stories, for which there is little or no expectation on the part of members of the community that they will be rendered in any other way. He should be attentive as well, however, for those genres for which the expectation or probability of performance is lower, for which performance is felt to be more optional, but which occasion no surprise if they are performed. A familiar example from contemporary American society might be the personal narrative, which is frequently rendered in a simply reportorial mode, but which may well be highlighted as performance. There will, of course, in any society, be a range of verbal genres that are not rendered as performances. These will be viewed as not involving the kind of competence that is susceptible to display, not lending themselves for the enhancement of experience. Not to be forgotten are those genres that are considered by members of the community to be performance forms, but that are nevertheless not performed, as when there is no one left who is competent to perform them, or conditions for appropriate performance no longer exist. A related phenomenon is what Hymes calls performance in a perfunctory key (personal communication), in which the responsibility for a display of communicative competence is undertaken out of a sense of cultural duty, traditional obligation, but offering, because of changed circumstances, relatively little pleasure or enhancement of experience. One thinks, for example, of some masses in Latin. Such performances may, however, be means of preserving performance forms for later reinvigoration and restoration to the level of full performance.

It should be noted, with reference to the native organization of the domain of speaking and cultural expectations for performance, that the members of a community may conceptualize speech activity in terms of acts rather than genres. The St. Vincentians are a case in point (Abrahams and Bauman 1971). Speech acts and genres are, of course, analytically distinct, the former having to do with speech behavior, the latter with the verbal products of that behavior. For an oral culture, however, the distinction between the act of speaking and the form of the utterance tends characteristically not to be significant, if it is recognized at all. Thus a particular performance system may
well be organized by members of the community in terms of speech acts that conventionally involve performance, others that may or may not, and still others for which performance is not a relevant consideration.

We view the act of performance as situated behavior, situated within and rendered meaningful with reference to relevant contexts. Such contexts may be identified at a variety of levels—in terms of settings, for example, the culturally-defined places where performance occurs. Institutions too—religion, education, politics—may be viewed from the perspective of the way in which they do or do not represent contexts for performance within communities. Most important as an organizing principle in the ethnography of performance is the event, or scene, within which performance occurs (see, e.g., Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1974).

There are, first of all, events for which performance is required, for which it is a criterial attribute, such that performance is a necessary component for a particular event to count as a valid instance of the class. These will be what Singer calls “cultural performances” (Singer 1972: 71). They may be organized and conducted primarily for entertainment, such as Bahamian old story sessions or Vincentian tea meetings, or they may have some other stated primary purpose, like Malagasy bride-price meetings, but performance will be as integral a component for the latter as for the former.

As with genres and acts, there are other events for which performance is an optional feature, not necessarily or invariably expected, but not unexpected or surprising, as when someone tells jokes at a party. Again, there will be a further range of events in which performance is extraneous, not a relevant variable insofar as people categorize and participate in the events of their culture.

The structure of performance events is a product of the interplay of many factors, including setting, act sequence, and ground rules of performance. These last will consist of the set of cultural themes and social-interactional organizing principles that govern the conduct of performance (Bauman and Sherzer 1974, Sect. III). As a kind of speaking, performance will be subject to a range of community ground rules that regulate speaking in general, but there will also be a set of ground rules specific to performance itself. Basic, too, to the structure of performance events are the participants, performer(s), and audience. Performance roles constitute a major dimension of the patterning of performance within communities.

As with events, certain roles will incorporate performance as a definitive attribute. Performance is necessary to establish oneself in the role, such that one cannot be considered an incumbent of the role without being a performer of verbal art, like the sgealai, the traditional Irish storyteller (Delargy 1945). Other roles may be more loosely associated with performance, such that members of the community have a certain expectation of performance from a person in a particular role, but it is neither required of everyone in the role, nor surprising when it does not occur. Salesmen may serve as an example here, in that there is a loose expectation in contemporary American culture that salesmen are often good performers of jokes, but no one requires or expects this skill on the part of all salesmen. And, as above, other roles will have nothing to do with performance, either as definitive criterion or optional attribute.

Eligibility for and recruitment to performance roles vary cross-culturally in interesting ways. One dimension along which this variation occurs has to do with conceptions of the nature of the competence required of a performer and the way such competence is acquired. Does it, for example, require special aptitude, talent, or training? Among the Limba, storytelling is a form of performance, but it is not considered to require the special talent called for in drumming and dancing. Anyone is a potential storyteller, and it calls for no special training to become one (Finnegan 1967: 69–70). By contrast, the Japanese storytellers who perform rakugyo or kodan must undergo a long and arduous period of training and apprenticeship before they are considered ready to practice their art (Hrdlicková 1969).

Also to be taken into account in the analysis of performance roles is the relationship, both social and behavioral, between such roles and other roles played by the same individual. We have in mind here the way and extent to which the role of performer and the behavior associated with it may dominate or be subordinate to the other roles he may play. To illustrate one extreme possibility, we may cite Kee's assertion that in Afro-American society the role of bluesman assimilates or overshadows all other roles an adult male may normally be expected to fulfill (Kee 1966: 143, 153–155). Sammy Davis, Jr., tellingly reveals the encompassing power of his role as entertainer in his statement that, "as soon as I go out the front door of my house in the morning, I'm on, Daddy, I'm on." (quoted in Messinger et al. 1962:98–99).

The foregoing list of patterning factors for performance has been presented schematically, for analytical and representational convenience, but it should not be taken as a mere checklist. It should be self-evident that performance genres, acts, events, and roles cannot occur in isolation, but are mutually interactive and interdependent. Any of the above factors may be used as a point of departure or point of entry into the description and analysis of the performance system of a community, but the ultimate ethnographic statement one makes about performance as part of social life must incorporate them all in some degree. It will be useful to consider one extended example here, drawn from Joel Sherzer's description of three major ceremonial traditions of the Sun Blas Cuna, to give some indication how the organizing features of a performance system fit together in empirical terms (Sherzer 1974).

Abstracting from Sherzer's rich description of the three traditions, we may note that each is associated with a type of event, within which specific functionaries perform particular genres in a characteristic performance mode. Thus, in the type of congress known as onmekan pela (the women and everybody), the chiefs (vakha) chant (namalke) long chants called pap ikar. The
chants, in turn, are interpreted to the assembled participants in the congress house by special spokesmen (arkar), whose speaking (sarrakke) also involves performance, though different from that of the chiefs. In curing rituals, a special ikar—knower (ikar wisit) speaks (sarrakke) the particular curing chant (each a type of ikar) for which he is a specialist and which is called for by the ailment from which the patient is suffering. In the third type of event, the girls' puberty ceremony, the specialist (kantule) in girls' puberty chants (kantar ikar) shouts (kormakke) the chants for the participants. The three performance traditions may be summarized in tabular form thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Genre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>congress</td>
<td>chant</td>
<td>chief</td>
<td>chief's chant (pop ikar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(omekan pelo)</td>
<td>(sarrakke)</td>
<td>(sakle)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speak</td>
<td>(sarrakke)</td>
<td>spokesman</td>
<td>interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(sarrakke)</td>
<td>(arkar)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curing ritual</td>
<td>speak</td>
<td>special ikar—knower</td>
<td>medicine chant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(sarrakke)</td>
<td>(ikar wisit)</td>
<td>(kapur ikar, kurkin ikar, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>girls' puberty</td>
<td>shout</td>
<td>specialist in girls' puberty chant</td>
<td>girls' puberty chant (kantule)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ceremony</td>
<td>(kormakke)</td>
<td>(kantule)</td>
<td>(kantor ikar)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each ceremony or ritual to count as a valid instance of its class, the appropriate form must be rendered in the appropriate way by the appropriate functionary. That sarrakke, the sarrakke of the arkar's interpretation and the sarrakke of the medicine chants, and kormakke all represent ways of performing for the Cuna is clear from Sherzer's description. All four roles, sakle, arkar, ikar wisit, and kantule, are defined in essential part in terms of competence in these specific ways of performing their respective genres. There is thus, in these ceremonial traditions, a close and integral relationship between performance and specific events, acts, roles, and genres, and the configuration created by the interrelationships among these factors must be close to the center of an ethnography of performance among the Cuna.

Constellations such as Sherzer describes, involving events, acts, genres, and roles in highly structured and predictable combinations, constitute the nucleus of an ethnography of performance among the Cuna, and are aptly made the focus of Sherzer's paper. However, it is crucial to establish that not all performance related to the system Sherzer describes is captured within the framework of conventional interrelationships outlined above. We have noted, for example, that the performance of curing ikar by the ikar-wisit has its conventional locus in the curing ritual; such performance is obligatory for the ikar wisit to fulfill the demands of his role and for the curing ritual to be conducted at all. Against this background, then, it is noteworthy that the ikar-wisit may also be asked to perform his ikar during a chicha festival associated with the girls' puberty rites, purely for entertainment. That is, the performance that has its primary place in a particular context, in which it is obligatory, may be an optional feature of another kind of event, extended to the latter because of the aesthetic enjoyment to be derived from it. The association between performer and genre is maintained, but the context, and of course the function, are different.

Though optional, the performance of curing ikar at puberty rite festivities is no less institutionalized than the obligatory performance of these chants in curing rituals. There is no surprise or novelty in the performance of curing ikar at the chicha festivals. Beyond the institutionalized system, however, lies one of the most important outlets for creative vitality within the performance domain. Consider the following circumstance, involving a group of small girls whom Sherzer was using as linguistic informants. On one occasion, knowing that he was interested in the performance forms of the community, the little girls launched spontaneously into a rendition of an arkar's performance as they were being recorded (Sherzer, personal communication). The remarkable nature of this is apparent when one considers that the role of arkar is restricted to adult men, and performances of the kind the girls imitated belonged, in conventional terms, to the congress and the congress house. Though the little girls' rendition was framed as imitation, a reframing of the arkar's performance, it constituted performance in its own right as well, in which the girls assumed responsibility to an audience for a display of competence.

Consider one further observation made by Sherzer in his study of the Cuna. The congresses (omekan pelo) discussed above, in which the chiefs chant their pap ikar and the arkars interpret them to the audience, are held in the congress house during the evening. During the daytime, however, when congresses are not in session, individuals who find themselves in the congress house may occasionally sit in a chief's hammock and launch into an attempt at a chief's chant, just for the fun of it (Sherzer, personal communication). Here we have what is a conventional performance doubly reframed as imitation and more importantly as play, in which there is no assumption of responsibility for a display of communicative competence, nor any assumption of responsibility for or susceptibility to evaluation for the way in which the act of expression is done.

What are the implications of these two circumstances? The little girls' performance of an arkar's interpretation represents a striking instance of the use of an element from the conventional, structured performance system of the community in a novel, creative, and unexpected way to fashion a new kind of performance. The playful imitation of the chief's chant involves the reframing of what is conventionally a performance genre into another mode of communication—in this case the performance genre is not performed but is rendered in another frame. In both cases, the participants are using the structured, conventional performance system itself as a resource for creative
manipulation, as a base on which a range of communicative transformations can be wrought (cf. Sacks 1974). The structured system stands available to them as a set of conventional expectations and associations, but these expectations and associations are further manipulated in innovative ways, by fashioning novel performances outside the conventional system, or working various transformational adaptations which turn performance into something else. This is a very poorly documented aspect of performance systems, but one richly deserving of study, as a key to the creative vitality and flexibility of performance in a community.

The emergent quality of performance

By stressing the creative aspect of optative performance, and the normative, structured aspect of conventional performance, we do not mean to imply that the latter is fixed and frozen while creativity is confined to the former. Rather, the argument develops up to this point to highlight creativity in the use of the performance frame itself as a resource for communication, for the new theming to be developed in the paper, the emergent quality of all performance. The concept of emergence is necessary to the study of performance as a means toward comprehending the uniqueness of particular performances within the context of performance as a generalized cultural system in a community (cf. Georges 1969: 319). The ethnographic construction of the structured, conventionalized performance system standardizes and homogenizes description, but all performances are not the same, and one wants to be able to appreciate the individuality of each, as well as the community-wide patterning of the overall domain.

The emergent quality of performance resides in the interplay between communicative resources, individual competence, and the goals of the participants, within the context of particular situations. We consider as resources all those aspects of the communication system available to the members of a community for the conduct of performance. Relevant here are the keys to performance, genres, acts, events, and ground rules for the conduct of performance that make up the structured system of conventionalized performance for the community. The goals of the participants include those that are intrinsic to performance—the display of competence, the focusing of attention on oneself as performer, the enhancement of experience—as well as the other aspired ends toward which performance is brought to bear; these latter will be highly culture- and situation-specific. Relative competence, finally, has to do with relative degrees of proficiency in the conduct of performance.

One of the first works to conceptualize oral literature in terms of emergent structures was Albert Lord’s influential book, The Singer of Tales (1960), a study of Serbo-Croatian oral epic poetry for the light it sheds on the classic Homeric epic. Consider the following passage:

Whether the performance takes place at home, in the coffee house, in the courtyard, or in the halls of a noble, the essential element of the occasion of taking that influences the form of the poetry is the variability and instability of the audience.

The instability of the audience requires a marked degree of concentration on the part of the singer in order that he may sing at all; it also tests to the utmost his dramatic ability and his narrative skill in keeping the audience as attentive as possible. But it is the length of a song which is most affected by the audience’s restlessness. The singer begins to tell his tale. If he is fortunate, he may find it possible to sing until he is tired without interruption from the audience. After a rest he will continue, if his audience still wishes. This may last until he finishes the song, and if his listeners are propitious and his mood heightened by their interest, he may lengthen his tale, savoring each descriptive passage. It is more likely that, instead of having this ideal occasion the singer will realize shortly after beginning that his audience is not receptive, and hence he will shorten his song so that it may be finished within the limit of time for which he feels the audience may be counted on. Or, if he misjudges, he may simply never finish the song. Leaving out of consideration for the moment the question of the talent of the singer, one can say that the length of the song depends upon the audience.

[Lord 1960: 16-17]
from the same singer and from different singers that varied in length by as much as several thousand lines.

Ultimately, one of Lord’s chief contributions is to demonstrate the unique and emergent quality of the oral text, composed in performance. His analysis of the dynamics of the tradition sets forth what amounts to a generative model of epic performance. Although it has been argued that perhaps all verbal art is generated anew in the act of performance (Maranda 1972), there is also ample evidence to show that the memorization and insistence on word-for-word fidelity to a fixed text do play a part in the performance system of certain communities (see, e.g., Friedman 1961). The point is that completely novel and completely fixed texts represent the poles of an ideal continuum, and that between the poles lies the range of emergent text structures to be found in empirical performance. The study of the factors contributing to the emergent quality of the oral literary text promises to bring about a major reconceptualization of the nature of the text, freeing it from the apparent fixity it assumes when abstracted from performance and placed on the written page, and placing it within an analytical context which focuses on the very source of the empirical relationship between art and society (cf. Georges 1969: 324).

Other aspects of emergent structure are highlighted in Elinor Keenan’s ethnography of the Malagasy marriage kabary,18 an artful oratorical negotiation surrounding a marriage request (Keenan 1973). The kabary is conducted by two speakers, one representing the boy’s family and one the girl’s. The boy’s speaker initiates each step of the kabary, which is then evaluated by the speaker for the girl. The latter may indicate that he agrees with and approves of that step, urging his opposite number on to the next, or he may state that the other’s words are not according to tradition, that he has made an error in the kabary. The boy’s speaker must then be able to justify what he has said, to show that no error has been made, or, if he admits error, he must correct it by repeating the step the right way and paying a small fine to the girl’s family.

Keenan discovered, however, that there is no one unified concept of what constitutes a correct kabary shared by all members of the community. Rather, there are regional, familial, generational, individual, and other differences of conception and style. This being so, how is it decided what constitutes an error? There is, first of all, a preliminary meeting between the families, often with their respective speakers present, to establish the ground rules for the kabary. These are never fully conclusive, however, and it is a prominent feature of the kabary that arguments concerning the ground rules occur throughout the event, with appeals to the preliminary negotiations becoming simply one set of the range of possible appeals to establish authoritative performance.

Much of the impetus toward argument derives from conflicting pressures on the boy’s speaker, who is obliged to admit to a certain range of errors, out of courtesy to the girl’s family, but who is at the same time actuated by the motives of good performance, i.e., to establish his virtuosity as a performer. The girl’s speaker, desirous of representing the family to best advantage, is likewise concerned to display his own skill as speaker.

The arguments, as noted, concern the ground rules for the kabary with each party insisting on the obligatoriness of particular rules and features by appeal to various standards, drawn from pre-kabary negotiation, generational, regional, and other stylistic differences. Of particular interest is the fact that the strength of the participants’ insistence on the rightness of their own way, their structural rigidity, is a function of the mood of the encounter, increasing as the tension mounts, decreasing as a settlement is approached. Ultimately, however, the practical goal of establishing an alliance between the two families involved takes precedence over all the speakers’ insistence upon the conventions of kabary performance and their desire to display their performance skills; if the kabary threatens the making of the alliance, many are willing to reject the rules entirely to accomplish the larger goal.

The most striking feature of the marriage request kabary as described by Keenan is the emergent structure of the performance event itself. The ground rules for performance, as negotiated and asserted by the participants, shift and fluctuate in terms of what they bring to the event and the way it proceeds once under way. This is an extreme case, in which the competitive dimension and conflicting pressures make for an especially variable and shifting event structure, but here again the question is one of degree rather than kind, for all but the most ideally stereotyped of performance events will have discernibly variable features of act sequence and/or ground rules for performance. The emergent structure of performance events is of special interest under conditions of change, as participants adapt established patterns of performance to new circumstances (Darnell 1974).

In addition to text and event structure, we may uncover a third kind of structure emergent in performance, namely, social structure. To be sure, the emergent quality of social structure is not specific to situations involving performance. Indeed, there is an important line of inquiry in contemporary sociology which concerns itself with the creation of social structures in the course of and through all social interaction.

The principle addressed here is related to Raymond Firth’s articulation, some years ago, of the distinction between social structure and social organization, in which the former is an abstract conception of ideal patterns of group relations, of conventional expectations and arrangements, and the latter has to do with “the systematic ordering of social relations by acts of choice and decision” in concrete activity. In Firth’s terms, social organization is the domain of “variation from what has happened in apparently similar circumstances in the past… Structural forms set a precedent and provide a limitation to the range of alternatives possible…but it is the possibility of alternatives that makes for variability. A person chooses, consciously or unconsciously, which course he will follow” (Firth 1961: 40).
What is missing from Firth's formulation is the centrality of situated social interaction as the context in which social organization, as an emergent, takes form. The current focus on the emergence of social structures in social interaction is principally the contribution of ethno-methodology, the work of Garfinkel, Cicourel, Sacks, and others. For these sociologists, "the field of sociological analysis is anywhere the sociologist can obtain access and can examine the way the 'social structure' is a meaningful ongoing accomplishment of members" (Phillipson 1972: 162). To these scholars too is owed, in large part, the recognition that language is a basic means through which social realities are intersubjectively constituted and communicated (Phillipson 1972: 140). From this perspective, insofar as performance is conceived of as communicative interaction, one would expect aspects of the social structure of the interaction to be emergent from the interaction itself, as in any other such situation. Rosaldo's explication of the strategic role-taking and role-making she observed in the course of a meeting to settle a dispute over bridewealth among the Ilongot illuminates quite clearly the emergent aspect of social structure in that event (Rosaldo 1973). The conventions of such meetings and the oratorial performances of the interactants endow the interaction with a special degree of formalization and intensity, but the fact that artistic verbal performance is involved is not functionally related to the negotiation of social structure on the level Rosaldo is concerned with. Rather she focuses on such matters as the rhetorical strategies and consequences of taking the role of father in a particular event, thus placing your interlocutor in the role of son, with its attendant obligations.

There is, however, a distinctive potential in performance which has implications for the creation of social structure in performance. It is part of the essence of performance that it offers to the participants a special enhancement of experience, bringing with it a heightened intensity of communicative interaction which binds the audience to the performer in a way that is specific to performance as a mode of communication. Through his performance, the performer elicits the participative attention and energy of his audience, and to the extent that they value his performance, they will allow themselves to be caught up in it. When this happens, the performer gains a measure of prestige and control over the audience—prestige because of the demonstrated competence he had displayed, control because the determination of the flow of the interaction is in his hands. When the performer gains control in this way, the potential for transformation of the social structure may become available to him as well (Burke 1969 [1950]: 58–59). The process is manifest in the following passage from Dick Gregory's autobiography:

I got picked on a lot around the neighborhood... I guess that's when I first began to learn about humor, the power of a joke...

At first... I'd just get mad and run home and cry when the kids started. And then, I don't know just when, I started to figure it out.

Through performance, Gregory is able to take control of the situation, creating a social structure with himself at the center. At first he gains control by the artful use of the deprecatory humor that the other boys had formerly directed at him. The joking is still at his own expense, but he has transformed the situation, through performance, into one in which he gains admiration for his performance skills. Then, building on the control he gains through performance, he is able, by strategic use of his performance skills, to transform the situation still further, turning the humor aggressively against those who had earlier victimized him. In a very real sense, Gregory emerges from the performance encounters in a different social position vis-à-vis the other boys from the one he occupied before he began to perform, and the change is a consequence of his performance in those encounters.

The consideration of the power inherent in performance to transform social structures opens the way to a range of additional considerations concerning the role of the performer in society. Perhaps there is a key here to the persistently documented tendency for performers to be both admired and feared—admired for their artistic skill and power and for the enhancement of experience they provide, feared because of the potential they represent for subverting and transforming the status quo. Here too may lie a reason for the equally persistent association between performers and marginality or deviance, for in the special emergent quality of performance the capacity for change may be highighted and made manifest to the community (see, e.g., Abrahams and Bauman 1971, n.d.; Azadovskii 1926: 23–25; Glassie 1971: 42–52; Szewd 1971: 157–165). If change is conceived of in opposition to the conventionality of the community at large, then it is only appropriate that the agents of that change be placed away from the center of that conventionality, on the margins of society.

Conclusion

The discipline of folklore (and to an extent, anthropology as well), has tended throughout its history to define itself in terms of a principal focus on the
traditional remnants of earlier periods, still to be found in those sectors of society that have been outdistanced by the dominant culture. To this extent, folklore has been largely the study of what Raymond Williams has recently termed “residual culture.” Those “experiences, meanings and values which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture, but are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social formation” (Williams 1973: 10–11)

If the subject matter of the discipline is restricted to the residue of a specific cultural or historical period, then folklore anticipates its own demise, for when the traditions are fully gone, the discipline loses its raison d’être (cf. Hymes 1962: 678; Ben-Amos 1972: 14). This need not be the case, however, for as Williams defines the concept, cultural elements may become part of residual culture as part of a continual social process, and parts of residual culture may be incorporated into the dominant culture in a complementary process. At best, though, folklore as the discipline of residual culture looks backward to the past for its frame of reference, disqualifying itself from the study of the creations of contemporary culture until they too may become residual.

Contrasted with residual culture in Williams’ provocative formulation is “emergent culture,” in which “new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences are continually being created” (Williams 1973: 11).

This is a further extension of the concept of emergence, as employed in the preceding pages of this article, but interestingly compatible with it, for the emergent quality of experience is a vital factor in the generation of emergent culture. Emergent culture, though a basic element in human social life, has always lain outside the charter of folklore, perhaps, in part for lack of a unified point of departure or frame of reference able to comprehend residual forms and items, contemporary practice, and emergent structures. Performance, we would offer, constitutes just such a point of departure, the nexus of tradition, practice, and emergence in verbal art. Performance may thus be the cornerstone of a new folkloristics, liberated from its backward-facing perspective, and able to comprehend much more of the totality of human experience.

Notes

1 In the development of the ideas presented in this essay I have profited greatly from discussions with many colleagues and students over the past several years, among whom Barbara Babcock-Abrahams, Dan Ben-Amos, Marcia Herndon, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, John McDowell, Norma McLeod, America Paredes, Diana Sherzer, and Beverly Stoetzel deserve special mention and thanks. My greatest debt, however, is to the three individuals who have stimulated and influenced my thinking most profoundly: Dell Hymes, for imparting to me the ethnographic perspective on verbal art and for his ideas on the nature of performance; Roger D. Abrahams, for focusing my attention on performance as an organizing principle for the study of folklore; and Joel Sherzer for sharing in the intellectual process all along the way.

2 Particularly important for folklorists is the seminal essay by Jansen (1957), and Loomis (1968), and Abrahams (1968, 1972). Two collections which reflect the performance orientation are Paredes and Bauman (1972) and Ben-Amos and Goldstein (1975). Bauman and Sherzer (1974) reflects a wider performance orientation, of which performance in verbal art is one aspect. Singer (1958a, 1958b, 1972) represents the perspective of an anthropologist on “cultural performances.” Colby and Peacock (1973) contains a section on Performance Analysis which, however, ignores the work of folklorists in this field, an omission which is perhaps to be expected in an article on narrative which announces its deliberate neglect of folklore journals.

3 The term “spoken art” was suggested by Thomas Sebeok in discussion of Baecoc’s ideas on verbal art (Bascom 1955: 246; n. 9; see also Dorson 1972: 9).

4 Richard Ohmann, in two recent articles, employs the same passage from Austin as a point of departure for the formulation of a theory of language based on Austin’s theory of speech acts (Ohmann 1971, 1972). Ohmann’s argument is interesting in places, but its productivity is severely limited by his failure—like Austin’s—to recognize that the notion of strictly referential, “literal” meaning has little, if any, relevance to the use of spoken language in social life. For a strong critique of the concept of “ordinary language,” and the impoverishing effect it has on definitions of language, see Fish (1973).

5 The notion of frame, though not necessarily the term, is used in a similar manner by other writers (see, e.g., Huizinga 1955; Milner 1955: 86; Smith 1968; Uspensky 1972; Fish 1973: 52–53).

6 Concerning the ecological model of communication underlying this formulation, are Sherzer and Bauman (1972) and Bauman and Sherzer (1974).

7 Note that it is susceptibility to evaluation that is indicated here; in this formulation the status of an utterance as performance is independent of whether it is judged good or bad, pernicious or religiously, etc. A bad performance is nonetheless a performance. On this point, see Hymes (1973: 189–190).

8 I have been influenced in this formulation by Hymes (1974, 1975), d’Azedro (1958: 706), Mukařovský (1964: 19, 1970: 21), and Goffman (1974). A similar conception of performance is developed in an unfinished paper by my former colleague Joseph Doherty (Doherty n.d.), whose recent tragic and untimely death occurred before he was able to complete his work, and prevented me from benefiting from discussions we planned but never had. Eli Köngā Miranda seems to be operating in terms of a conception of verbal art which is similar in certain central respects to the one developed here (Miranda 1974: 6). Compare also Fish’s conception of literature (Fish 1973).

A special word should be said of the use of “competence” and “performance” in the above formulation. Use of these terms, especially in such close juxtaposition, demands at least an acknowledgement of Noam Chomsky’s contribution of both to the technical vocabulary of linguistics (Chomsky 1965: 3–4). It should be apparent, however, that both terms are employed in a very different way in the present work—competence in the sense advanced by Hymes (1971), and performance as formulated on page 293 above.

9 The aspect of conventionality will be discussed below.

10 Ethics and esthetics are not always as comformist as Gossen suggests, in summing up his analysis of the Chamula. In St. Vincent, for example, the domain “talking nonsense” is negatively valued in terms of ethics, but encompasses a range of speech activities with a strong performance element about them that is highly valued and much enjoyed in esthetic terms (Abrahams and Bauman 1971). Real, as against ideal, moral systems often accommodate more disputability.
References


SCIENCE AND SOCIAL SCIENCE


VERBAL ART AS PERFORMANCE


McDowell, John. 1974. Some Aspects of Verbal Art in Bolivian Quechua. Folklore Annual of the University Folklore Association (University of Texas, Austin), No. 6.


Gossip, like joking, takes place between individuals who stand in a special relationship to each other. We can therefore discern a good deal of the formal and informal social structure of a community by noting those categories of people who joke or gossip with each other. Furthermore, like joking, both the content and forms of gossip are traditional, and it is these conventional aspects which define and restrict the communicative situation. It would thus be instructive in both joking and gossip to investigate the communications exchanged in regard to what limits there are to the license given by the community and by the individuals involved, and how judgement is made on violations of decorum. This means that the observer must take note of the qualities of the specific performance which give rise to these traditional gossiping and joking relationships. To do this, however, it is important not only to see what other forms of conventional conversational interchange exist within the speech community under investigation, but also such other deliberate, licensed performances as occur. In other words, to understand gossip in the context of the range of speech acts of a community, it is necessary to investigate the features unique to gossip and those which are shared with other speech acts and events.

The functionalist perspective has made us sensitive to the elements of social control which underlie so much of what people say and perform to each other. Most public performances call for some dramatization of the ideals of the group, either through a formal or a comic presentation, the strategy of the former arguing emulation, that of the latter, avoidance. But some ethnographers have become uneasy about the functionalist approach, because of its unitary focus. They note correctly that there are other dimensions and uses to such performances which are difficult to account for through the use of the equilibrium model alone.
Commonly the arguments against the functionalists’ position have stressed individual or factional competitive usages of performance devices. Taking the longer view, it seems almost obvious that many of these traditional devices which argue in terms of a public morality, (such as proverbs and myths), may also be applied in the prosecution of personal or factional ends. Indeed, it has been elegantly demonstrated by Leach and Firth that just such a process is to be observed in the use of myths, at least among the Kachin and Tikopians (Leach 1954; Firth 1961). The discussion of the nature and function of gossip has become caught up in this argument.

Analyses of gossip by students of culture and society have commonly focused on the practice of talking about other people’s business as a technique for maintaining community control through the elucidation of a public morality (Gluckman 1963; 1968). Vidich and Bensman (1968) arguing from a slightly different perspective, see gossip in the small town setting as a means of maintaining some kind of community-held public image in the face of internal conflicts and external pressures from the city. These social concerns have been countered by other arguments that would emphasise the importance of gossip for the gossipier, either by increasing the gossipier’s base of esteem, or in the articulation of interactional channels, especially friendship networks (Paine 1967; Swed 1966; Hanmer 1967). Faris, standing somewhere between these positions, sees the practice as a means of constantly renewing and attempting to maintain the fluidity of communications relationships in a small community (Faris 1966).

In gossiping, common sense tells us that all these features may be present at the same time. Furthermore, the practice in one community may emphasise ideas while, in another, it may stress the personal power which is acquired by being able to direct energies into a traditional mode of telling stories about others. There has been, therefore, some recognition of the relationship between gossip and other types of performance, both in rhetorical strategy and in function; but no one, to my knowledge, has systematically examined this dimension of the subject. To this end, this article will focus on the native typology of speech acts and events as expressed by peasants in Richland Park, St Vincent, British West Indies. I shall show that there the continuities between gossip and the more public modes of performance are explicitly recognised.

Though Vincentian speakers of English creole do not have the term ‘gossip’, they use in an almost synonymous fashion the French creole còmness. In this community there is a great deal of talk about talk, and because of this, much judgement passed on communicative behaviour. Not only is còmness judged in this way, but it is related in the minds of Vincentians with such other traditional devices as joking (‘ragging’, ‘making mock’), arguing (‘making boderation’, ‘giving vexation’) and ceremonial performances of a more ritualised sort. In other words, Vincentians seem to say that there is an ‘art’ in gossip just as there is in making a song or speech, or conducting an argument, and they judge the practice of còmness accordingly.

Among the previous commentators on gossip, I find only Edmonson (1966) and Gossen (1969) hinting at such a perspective. Both deal with Middle American Indian languages, and both approach gossip as one native form of self-conscious expression among others. Edmonson points out that these categories are somewhat at variance with ours (a possibility that Gluckman seems to ignore in his reliance on a too restrictive dictionary definition of the practice). Edmonson says:

At first glance the linking of games with gossip and humor may appear both arbitrary and misleading. . . . Taken together, however, the three topics have a certain coherence peculiarly relevant perhaps to the Middle American Indians in many languages of Middle America they are called by the same word. To ‘laugh with’ (or ‘at’) or ‘over’ somebody is to play with him, to mock him, or to amuse him (Nahuatl netz='a, Yucatec chedh).

Gossen, going somewhat farther in this direction, indicates that gossip is not only regarded as a form of play or performance among the Chamula, but is also categorised as a kind of narrative form, embodying stories about the doings of people in the fourth (contemporary) creation world (Gossen 1969: 29-33).

* * * *

Among Vincentian peasants, còmness is judged like all verbal performances in terms of the appropriate use of the form by the performer. It is thus related in the minds of the group to a number of other types of verbally stylised encounters, both in terms of content (where it is associated with other genres which focus on scandal), and form (where it fits into other types of licensed narratives, such as Anansi stories). Gossip is therefore judged in the same terms as a story or a song, that is, according to whether it is judiciously performed in the right setting and under the properly licensed conditions. Since it is regarded as one form of ‘rudeness’ or ‘nonsense’, a good deal of license from the (restricted) audience is called for if it is to be carried off successfully. In line with the previous arguments concerning gossip, Vincentian còmness does elucidate publicly approved behaviour by condemning departures from norms. It is also used by a number of judicious performers to build up their bases of esteem within the community. This we must infer from the failure of some gossipers to use the device appropriately, and from the ensuing discussions of the consequences of such actions in terms of community division. But the approach which will be used in this article will focus less on such public, or personal, aspects of gossip use, and more on the way in which Vincentians view còmness in relation to other performance forms.
As mentioned, on St Vincent there is a good deal of talk about talk. Indeed, the basic institutions of the peasant family- and friendship-networks are defined as much in terms of speech behaviour as by actions. (A folk-taxonomy of speech acts in this community is described in Abrahams & Bauman 1969.) One reason for this focus on talk is the retention of the attitude that control of words and speaking events provides the key to community status and personal power. Words, as control devices, are greatly admired when effectively used in a controlled and familiar atmosphere while observing the conventional rules and boundaries of the occasion, but greatly feared when these controls are absent or when the expectation patterns established by convention are abrogated (Abrahams 1967; 1968). In short, Vincentian peasants retain an essentially oral culture in spite of the high degree of literacy in the community.

Activities such as ‘making comness’ and ‘vextation’ (arguing) occur constantly but are nevertheless feared because they lead to a feeling of loss of control over the most powerful words of all—one’s personal name. One therefore attempts to manage one’s own identity by acting sensibly, especially within the family, and by being judicious in the choice of friends, picking those to whom one may talk without one’s words being ‘stolen’ and publicly dramatised.

However, there is an ambivalence in Vincentian life, arising from the feeling that one can fully manage one’s own identity only by keeping silent at most times; not even friends and family are really trustworthy in keeping counsel. Yet silence on many occasions is a sign of lack of trust and is strongly resented. The strong, silent type is regarded as strange and unnatural in this community. Furthermore, the same motives embodied in gossiping and arguing, when they are channelled into appropriate ceremonial (‘play’) performances, are encouraged by the community. Though there is a fear of having one’s name used in scandal-pieces, there is a contrary notion that prestige may result from having one’s name used (and therefore known) by so many people. In some cases, because one becomes known (albeit notoriously), community scorn is accepted and taken advantage of by individuals. Here the implication is that people would rather be feared as deviants than ignored.

This contradiction seems due to the presence of contrary motives. One motive dictates that one should live decorously, earning respect for oneself and one’s parents. The implication is that one’s role in the community is under one’s own control or under the control of one’s family. The contrary motive is that community role perception and typing procedures are going to accord one a place and that one must learn to accept and capitalise on this. These contrary aspects are not the subject of much discussion or worry because they are not directly perceived. Rather, the Vincentian sees certain elements of his identity which he may control through developing the expressive capacities consistent with certain roles. There are, however, other features of the role-casting over which he has little control, which he therefore learns to accept and even capitalise upon. This is especially evident in the stigmatisation of the physically or mentally defective person.

Everyday communicative behaviour is judged on the same terms as more stylised performances. Little distinction is made between those formally and obviously structured expressive performances, such as singing a song, or dancing, or telling a tale, and ordinary expressive interactions. Thus while there would be no confusion in the minds of the community between a ceremonial song and an everyday argument, both would be recognised as related to each other and evaluated as performances of varying appropriateness and effectiveness.

In short, any public activity (i.e. one which goes beyond the family or a pair who are ‘friending) is regarded as a performance; public life is seen as a continuity of experience, from the most serious everyday event to the most stylised ceremony. Gossip is therefore seen as simply one of the many inevitable performances of everyday life.

This does not mean that gossiping is regarded as good. Indeed, if the Vincentian is directly asked whether he approves of gossiping, he will respond that it is of no value whatsoever, and that it leads to fights and hard feelings and to family and community divisions. But he will also reply that gossip is inevitable, the proclivity being inborn in people, especially Negroes. The white stereotype of Negroes here provides a convenient rationale for a type of behaviour regarded as potentially disruptive but vital to the life of the individual and the community. Through being talked about, one risks having one’s activities disapproved of; but one stands to gain much by such talk—a sense of community identity and involvement. Indeed, there are many individuals who, if their activities have not been public enough, will utilise the gossip network to talk about their own business and thus to feel more fully members of the network and of the community—a process called ‘nigger business’. Gossip is only denigrated when discussed in abstract—therefore ideal—terms, or when it leads to divisive or destructive public actions.

Because of its relation to these ideals, however, gossip is regarded as ‘nonsense’ and is therefore one of a number of performances—everyday and ceremonial—so designated. Being placed in such a category is, in a sense, a value judgement. ‘Nonsense’ activities are those which are potentially divisive from the community point of view. They exhibit traits which are regarded as non-factual, ‘ignorant’; and those who fall into ‘nonsense’ are often described as ‘ignorant fellows’. Consequently, behaviour is being condemned when qualified as nonsense. But in the actual operations of the group, ‘nonsense’ provides the major motive for a number of important ceremonial entertainments such as wakes. In wakes, license for ‘nonsense’ is given so that the social confusion of death may be articulated, brought playfully into the open,
played out, and handled in this way. Licentious play behaviour brings the group together and allows it to rehearse confusion and embarrassment in a context which is under control. On such occasions, 'nonsense' can be seen to serve as a community focus in channelling creative energies in socially useful directions.

To understand this it is necessary to recognise that 'nonsense' is a contrast-term for 'sensible', and 'sensible' performances are those which are regarded as embodying the highest ideals of the community. A 'sensible' performance is one in which 'decorum' (often the key word in such a ceremony) is boldly stated and acted upon; it is one in which the realistic ideals of the community are openly discussed. It is looked upon as a model of behaviour not only because of its order but because of its 'sense', its factual and reliable content. Being 'sensible' means being well-spoken and knowledgeable—the two traits are regarded as synonymous—and anything weighed against 'sensible' enactments is seen to be of little or no value.

The 'sensible' performance is one which emphasises the order and decorum afforded by knowledge, the 'nonsense' focuses upon the energetic and the licentious ambience which accompanies lies. The 'sensible'-'nonsense' contrast not only refers to the embodiment of truth or lies, but also to two other categories of performance attributes: language and interaction-types. Reflecting this are two further contrast-sets of terms.

Language usage, which is associated with 'sensible' performance, is referred to as 'talking sweet' or 'talking good'. Speech which is congruent with 'nonsense' occasions is designated as 'talking broad' or 'talking bad'. 'Talking sweet' generally means approximating to formal standard English in diction, grammar and syntax. There is a natural congruence felt in both principle and practice between the use of this level of language (especially in diction) with the highly decorous stylised ceremonies which are designated as 'sensible'. Indeed, they are more often referred to as 'sweet' than 'sensible'. Furthermore, when 'nonsense' occasions are designated, it is often because they are not only full of lies but they are expressed in creole language, or 'talking broad'.

The second contrast-set related to the 'sensible-nonsense' dichotomy is the distinction between being 'rude' and being 'behaved' or 'besaid'. 'Being behaved' is regarded as an attribute of being 'sensible'; 'rudefulness' is associated with 'nonsense'. There is also an intimate relationship between language-level and this behaviour contrast, for the 'behaved' are regarded as those who have words under control, while the 'rude' are those who do not and who therefore cause embarrassment, fear and anger in others. As one informant put it, 'rude people, they do make noise to annoy' (i.e. to embarrass). The 'besaid' articulate with words and with silence. Thus, the Vincentian has three sets of terms by which he comments upon and judges a performance according to its conformity to his conscious speaking ideals: 'talking sweet', 'acting sensible', 'being behaved'; and 'talking broad', 'talking nonsense',

'getting on rude'. All these terms are applied both to everyday and to ceremonial performances. These contrast terms must be understood if the operation of gossip in Vincentian culture is to be fully appreciated.

Vincentians regard talk about the doings of others as a device by which these others' names are 'called'. By this is meant the ability of a speaker to refer to someone by their familiar designation, and through such reference to use the naming as a means of, on the one hand, increasing one's base of esteem, and on the other, controlling the person named. The 'calling out' of names occurs in all performances. But it is taken note of only in those cases where it is regarded as illegitimate or badly done. The 'rudeness' of such 'calling out' draws attention to itself most commonly in those recurrent failures of reciprocal communication, situations of embarrassment.

For instance, when I was in St Vincent, certain of my acquaintances would yell out my name as I would pass on the road, and I noticed that my Vincentian companions would suck their teeth in displeasure, or would suddenly become very quiet. Naturally I asked why this was wrong, and was told that it was very improper for anyone, even my closest friends, to 'call out' my name. The true sign of friendship in such circumstances would have been to wait until our eyes met and then to raise the eyebrows, or to say 'How, how?' or 'What happening, man?'. The inappropriateness of 'calling out' my name, especially in the diminutive form, was that when someone names you they imply that you are a friend. Friendship means more than an available communication relationship; it involves a whole series of rights and obligations, and therefore, a friend needs to have more of a sign of friendship than simply the knowledge of someone's name.

This sense of embarrassment indicates that there are strongly felt distinctions in what is regarded as proper in public, and what should remain private. A person's name epitomises his private world, and when this intimacy is violated by the inappropriate 'calling' of his name, the victim may say, 'You tink me and you is sex and size?'. This term describes the offender of 'playin' man before 'e time'. The implication here, of course, is that the namer has mistakenly assumed a peer-group relationship with the one to whom he has called.

'Calling name' means more than yelling it at you when you pass. It also refers to naming a person when discussing his activities in conversation. Vincentian ideas of * común* are included in this concept, and someone who is always talking about others is described as having a 'fas' mouth'. This term is significant for being 'fas' means being pious, and having a 'fas' mouth' is thus regarded as 'tiefin'; someone's good name, betraying trust.

* * * *

Because it has so many referents, * común* is contrasted with at least two other terms, and it is in these contrasts that we see the range of meanings...
defined. In the sense in which the term is usually employed, it is virtually synonymous with calling someone's name in a face-to-face context. But on another level, if a person wants to point out who has done the talking about whom, a distinction is made between cōnness and 'nigger business'. In this context, cōnness means talk about someone else while they are not present, while 'nigger business' refers to talk about someone's business which has been instituted by themselves, but which is on the same subjects and in the same terms as cōnness. 'Nigger business' is discussed abstractly, as is cōnness, as a weakness of the community. One informant, for instance, explains, 'You know we Negroes are “broad-minded” [talkative] people, “bl'a-guard” [bad because of talking too much] ; we just feel that if we have any worry on our mind, we couldn't keep without explaining someting' [talking about it].

This rationalisation is exactly the same as the one given for 'calling out a name' and for cōnness. They are grouped together as examples of 'nonsense', 'ignorance', inability to organise one's thoughts and present them in effective language. One often hears remarks that Negroes are 'a ignorant people—we have no sense atall, atall, atall'.

One of the reasons why there is such a strong feeling that both cōnness and 'nigger business' are wrong is that privacy, especially in family affairs, is highly valued. The quiet person, who keeps most of his communications within the family is someone who, in principle, is admired. But in actual interpersonal relations, he may be reacted to as an unfriendly person and his reticence may be held against him. This attitude may be shown by members of his own family; he will then be termed a 'gard man' (one who keeps to himself in the fields). Not only will this lack of communicativeness be held against him, but imputations of greed and lack of co-operativeness may also be voiced, for these traits are those which are associated with this widely recognised Vincentian social type. A similar attitude is maintained in regard to another social type, the bashful person (the Vincentian term is 'selfish', meaning not covetous but inward-looking). The shy individual is regarded as a somewhat undesirable type, especially because he is said to have no sense, of humour and to become easily irritated by those who make fun of him.

This ambivalent attitude towards gossip is dictated by conflicting systems of association within the social structure, and by extension, by conflicting values. The disparity can best be summarised by the conflict between the value conferred on a close-knit extended-family unit, on the one hand, and on the other the importance placed on having a large network of friends. Cōnness and 'nigger business' are naturally associated with friendships, for such talk is one way in which friendship may be demonstrated and maintained. On the other hand, this kind of talk often involves clear violations of the kinds of privacy which are associated with the family.

A further reason for the ambivalent attitudes towards talk about people is that in many ways the small community's social system demands cōnness and even more extreme publications of others' business for the maintenance of social order. The subjects discussed or gossiped about are commonly dealt with the proper maintenance of the household and the appropriate practice of interpersonal relationships within the family and among friends. Talk about such matters constantly serves to remind those involved of the importance of the norms of the community, but also rehares the necessity of working within the decorum system by which household and friendship networks are maintained. In a very real sense, cōnness and 'nigger business' establish bases of communication which play an important part in holding the community together.

But, as the members of the community recognise, there are strong dissociative potentials in any speech act which involves the 'calling out' of a name. Thus a distinction is sometimes made between cōnness, which means gossip of any sort, and 'melée', which is malicious gossip. When contrasted in such a way, cōnness is regarded as permissible because it is harmless, while 'melée' is frowned upon, especially in principle.

Cōnness in all its uses provides an active way of guaranteeing a certain level of homogeneity of ideals and even of social practices. This is clearly seen in the common topics which are gossiped about. Men talk about each other primarily in terms of how well they demonstrate their masculinity (in athletics, with women, by getting work and learning a trade, by the number of babies that they have 'made'), or how well they share and co-operate with others, or how many friends they have. Men talk about girls in terms of who is 'wild'—that is, who violates the ideals of trust which are supposed to hold sway in man-woman relationships. This ideal of trust means, primarily, that a girl is never supposed to 'talk wit' or 'friend wit' more than one boy at a time. (These terms may refer simply to courting, 'gossin' wit', or they may mean engaging in sexual intercourse.) Women gossip about other women in regard to their abilities to keep their households in order, either in terms of tidiness, or in regard to the personal behaviour of members of the family. Bringing up children badly is one common topic of 'melée', as is the way a woman treats her man in terms of keeping him 'in line'.

But to view cōnness only in terms of normative content is to ignore certain features of its practice. Cōnness is subject to a variety of uses. Not the least of these is the maintenance of one's esteem by using stories-about-others both to demonstrate the extent of one's network of people whose business one knows, and to solidify a reciprocal trust-and-gossip relationship with the person with whom one is gossiping. This can only be done if certain rules of cōnness are observed. One must not talk badly of others if they are very close friends or family, for then the gossiper is subject to a rebuff which leads to a failure of reciprocity in the exchange. One must never give the feeling of coming to another person just to gossip, unless the subject of the information
is 'news'—that is, something very startling which has just happened. But if commonness arises in a conversational context, it must preserve the appearance of the spontaneous utterance. Furthermore, commonness will be rejected if the initiator conveys the information in too heated a way, thus betraying a coercive or side-taking purpose in an on-going argument. The communication is then a potential 'moles' (label) and therefore is of a different intensity and involves a different strategy from commonness.

To view commonness in this way is to see it as contributing to both a sense of community (by articulating ideals and by providing a patterned and expected sanctioning procedure) and to an individual's sense of esteem. But to argue that it should be judged in terms of one or the other is to ignore the way gossip actually operates. Like so many such expressive devices, commonness is a procedural feature of interpersonal behaviour which mediates between conflicting principles. This suggests, then, that one of the keys to understanding gossip, at least on St Vincent, is to understand the nature of the internal conflicts, and to see how expressive devices of all sorts, including gossip, are used to mediate the contradictions which arise in the form of public problem situations.

As noted above, perhaps the greatest source of intra-cultural 'rub' is the way in which the family system of ideals conflicts with the friendship networks central to the maintenance of esteem, especially among males. Recurrent problem situations arise in those activities where the two systems of values conflict.

The yard and the house of the family are regarded as inviolable, and are the domain of the mater familias. Consequently, she is the guardian of the yard and is judged in terms of how effectively she runs her household. Male friendships are carried on in the streets and rumshops, for the most part, except during special family-centred occasions like wedding fêtes and wakes. What few friendships the women engage in within the community are carried on in the yard, but these are discouraged by the men.

The Vincentian family is a unit composed of those living in one yard. This commonly means a nuclear family of father, mother and their children, and less commonly grandparents and grandchildren. Matrifocal households are not unusual, but far from the rule (as in some other West Indian communities). Close relations tend to live near each other and to regard each other's yards as their own. The extended family ideal persists and is acted upon, especially during ceremonial occasions, by the sharing and helping principle.

'Friendship' is regarded as threatening to family loyalties, for a number of reasons. One's loyalties are supposed to be primarily to one's family, especially in sharing, but friendship also calls for the same kind of sharing process. Furthermore, male friendships carry one away from the focus of the family, and while one is away, one is no longer so severely under the control of the family centre of authority. Finally, friendships may come into conflict with familial values because the latter emphasize co-operation and an orderly household. The greatest enemy of order is seen to be words out of control—in arguments especially. It is regarded as very important to keep one's family affairs to oneself. Because of the high value placed on staying out of public notice, commonness is feared especially when it is 'molested'. But this is just the kind of malicious talk which is commonly carried on between friends.

Conversely, it is regarded as unnatural, and especially as unmanly, to stay in the yard and the garden and not to have friends. A man earns respect by the number of friends he can count on. On a day-to-day basis, conflicts between family and friendship roles do not arise because the ideals of friendship grow out of family ideals: trust, privacy, sharing. However, a friendship must be a reciprocal arrangement, and reciprocity (not primarily economic) exists on the social level. Consequently, to demonstrate friendship (with one of the same or opposite sex) one must talk with the other, and the friendship is potentially threatening to the family since one must tell the other something, and that something may come from within the family. One must answer trust with trust—but one also does not expect that trust to be kept as well by friends as by family. The family is also a circumscribed social grouping, while the friendship network is not. Thus, there is a feeling of constraint and restriction within the family group, and contrarily there is a sense of freedom felt in developing friendships. This has a physical concomitant, since family affairs must be pursued primarily in the house and yard, while friendships are carried on in the streets.

Because of this psychological opposition between freedom and constraint, those who break away from the household especially strongly are the young men. This is regarded as natural, on the one hand, and yet also as leading inevitably to a loss of 'sense' and to 'rudeness', for the family is regarded as the locus of 'sense', it being the centre of the social ordering system of the community. This is reflected in the drinking of rum, 'the nonsense-maker', on friendship occasions. Naturally enough, it is the young men who are regarded as the centre of 'rude' activities in the community.

From this ambience arises a felt (and often expressed) relationship between friendship, gregariousness, 'rudeness' and 'nonsense', and by extension, also between family and order, 'acting sensible' and 'behaved'. This has its ramifications in performances of all sorts, especially in ceremonial occasions. Those festivities which go on in the yard emphasize bringing friends and family together by an aesthetic stylisation of decorum, and those carried on in the streets style 'nonsense', or licensing behaviour. Naturally, these latter occur only at very special times.

This survey of the use of talk about others' business suggests that though gossip is a device which is available both for social control and the pursuance
of individual aims, it may be more profitable to look at the practice from a more performance-centred perspective. This would enable us to focus on the folk recognition and evaluation of telling stories about others’ business and thus to perceive the place of gossip in the native system of communication. Further, at least in regard to Vincentian peasants, there is a felt continuity between speech acts, such as cōmness, and speech events, such as riddling or story-telling sessions. Cōmness, like Anancy stories and Carnival performances, is classified as permissible rudeness, as licensed nonsense—licensed because of the need to embody anti-social motives and to castigate them.

But once the continuity between the more casual mode of the cōmness performance and the ceremonial ‘rude’ performances is recognised, it is necessary to notice the differences between them. Cōmness is a conversational genre; it must therefore follow the dictates of conversation, which means that it must, among other things, appear to be spontaneous. Just as there is a structure to overall conversations, there are standard casual story-telling patterns into which this conversational device fits. And there are certain times when the item of gossip will be regarded as most appropriate. Furthermore, though there is an art to cōmness, we recognise the artfulness of the practice not so much through the apparent abilities of the performer (as we do in more stylised performances), but through the abilities of those who do not understand the rules, and who therefore cause embarrassment and the attribution of ‘making mélée’. In this, too, the practice is an aspect of general conversation, because in all such small, casual and spontaneous personal interactions, we learn about the rules of performance primarily through failures, commonly registered on the interacting group as embarrassment (cf. Goffman 1968). The patterns of oral composition and improvisation are not as evident with cōmness as they are with the more self-conscious performances, but it is this very appearance of spontaneity which, in large part, provides the license for gossip.

Gossip must follow certain lines of argument. It makes a statement of approval or condemnation which reiterates the approved behavioural limits of the group. But it is also a tool by which the gossipier exercises personal control over the talked-about person, if only because he is licensed to call the person’s name. The most important rules of cōmness are that the stories must be told in small groups, ones which include neither the talked-about person nor anyone who would report the conversation to him. It is judged in terms of its success as ‘nonsense’, as a device by which friendship values and often friendship-networks may be maintained without seriously challenging the moral authority of the family. One is given license to talk about others by judging behaviour in terms of the ideals of family life. But by judging all behaviour in terms of inevitability and human fallibility, including cōmness itself, flexibility is maintained even while condemnation goes on.

Cōmness is one of many devices by which one may use the behaviour of others as an occasion to demonstrate one’s own verbal ability. But unlike

story-telling and song-making, it is a technique available to everyone, and all but social misfits (poor performers) may ‘make cōmness’ to sustain their position in this speaking community.

This article argues, then, that the function of gossip in specific groups cannot be fully understood until it is related not only to the system of ideals and the techniques of achieving power, but also to the system of performance. This involves an understanding of the rules governing interpersonal decorum and the procedures by which license is accorded to an individual to perform. It also necessities a consideration of modification, or refusal of audience participation, because of ineptitudes and failures in performance, especially those involving failure to recognise the norms and conventions appropriate to the occasion. In this way, gossip may not only give us cues as to the dictates of public morality, but may also indicate the native criteria of a good performance (in this case, through performance failures rather than successes).

Notes

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1 Both the quotation here and the explanations of the key terms came from the informant, Reginald ‘Caloo’ MacDonald, 24. The definitions were elicited, of course, because the words did not seem to conform to common English usage. Both ‘broadminded’ and ‘bla’ guard’ were subsequently observed being used in essentially these senses—‘bla’ guard’ being a common term for those who could not refrain from the kind of talk that leads to fights.

References


This theoretical discussion about conversation, performance and cultural politics makes eight moves. First, conversation is theorized as the micropractical flows and microphysical traces of the means of production and reproduction of dominant ideas, prevailing beliefs, and articulated subjectivities. Second, rules, rituals and performances of everyday life are theorized as both art and practice. Third, practicality, temporality and spatiality are then reformulated as common sense and conventional wisdoms. Fourth, conversational turn-taking formats are theorized in terms of the political-economics of turn-taking. Fifth, human bodies are theorized as the material in and through which memory and practical consciousness are inscribed as both context and artifact. Sixth, conversing selves are conceptualized as unfinished, open ideas with multiple voices that express the truths of tactical and strategic experience. Seventh, conversation is theorized as the micropractical production and reproduction of the ideology of everyday life, as the methods of formatting consciousness, structuring feelings, and expressing experience in ways that allow meaning and significance to reproduce themselves indefinitely. Finally, conversation is theorized in terms of autoethnography, as the writing practices of self-implication and self-reflexivity.

Cultural studies is predicated on the assumption that, in addition to being configured macroscopically, deployed strategically, and driven economically—if not determined in the last instance—sociocultural phenomena are also...
managed microscopically, performed tactically, and realized politically. A crucial project for cultural studies, conversational critique and critical theory is to theorize, track and critique conversations as courses of action, lines of flight, paths of resistance, as well as openings for transformation. Conversations foreclose as well as disclose ways of escaping from and relocating to different subject-positions at the same time they revalue ideological boundaries: theorizing conversations in such a fashion renders dominant practices and their transparent codes as audible fictions that put into practice novel as well as mundane modes of resistance and surrender. Paying genealogical attention to discursive formations and their discontinuities and ruptures is one way this critical-experiential-political work proceeds. This essay develops a theoretical rationale for thinking through the microphysics of power in terms of the micropractices of conversation.

**Conversations as micropractical flows and microphysical traces**

Conversations, as assemblages of strategic and tactical micropractices, are dialogical as well as dialectical—intimately political. Certainly conversation can, and does, take on a disjunctive organization. Left as dialectical formats, however, conversations are often hollow. Here is Bakhtin's characterization of dialectics and dialogues:

> Take a dialogue and remove the voices... remove the intonations... carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics.

Dialectically organized conversations, then, are contradictory and oppositional; dialogically organized conversations can be, and often are, both contradictory and oppositional as well as heteroglossic and unfinalizable. They are digital, synchronic translations of analog, diachronic desire. Julia Kristeva might formulate this feature of conversation as the practices of producing symbolic language from semiotic desire.¹ For Kristeva, subjects-becoming—*thetic subjects*—leave a chaotic, fluid, turbulent, oceanic domain of the semiotic chore—that which comes before language—and enter the domain of the symbolic, of language, logic, order, patriarchy and hierarchy. The tensions between the semiotic and the symbolic never ultimately resolve themselves. Instead, a *thetic* subject, as Kristeva insists, is a subject in process/on trial. Individuals are not fixed, unitary subjects; they are, rather, multiple, fluid, in process, and nonlinear.² Translating the semiotic into the symbolic, that which cannot be said and is beyond language is the desire that produces that which must be said and cannot go without saying.³ In this sense, conversational micropractices discard use, practical consciousness, as Giddens theorizes it; these micropractices are practical insofar as they say and do that which must be said and done.

It would be a mistake to theorize conversation as a totality, as some coherent, bounded, unitary phenomenon. One of my critical tasks is to deconstruct conversation into its multiple voices and diverse micropRACTICES, some of which install and position individuals into discursive formations as conversed and conversing subjects, and some of which cut off individuals from discursive possibilities. The installation of an individual, as a conscious subject, into the regime of language is, in large measure, the marking of identity and difference, of presence and absence, of sound and silence, of self and other. In the realm of language, an individual is alternatingly, and often simultaneously, subject and object. Subject/object divisions and oscillations are coded in conversational formats and performed by means of exchanges—taking and giving turns.² The boundaries of division and the movements of oscillation are learned in a (m)other's arms, in touching, voicing, listening and nurturing—or their absences—and are produced and reproduced in contextually sensitive patterns that articulate subjects adept at performing in accord with the logics of sociocultural exchange systems.⁴ Such discursive micropRACTICES interpellate individuals—as interlocutors—to the speaking voices of performing bodies. Installed into these discursive (un)verses, an individual is positioned, as interlocutor, to address *self* and one or more *others*. So positioned, interlocutive subjects are in positions to give and take turns, to engage in the practices of division and oscillation that constitute the circuitries of common sense and conventional wisdom of everyday life. I am referring here to a matter of scale: practices are notable and observable to common sense whereas micropRACTICES are observable only to more finely attuned ears and eyes. It is by means of their apparent invisibility that power is exercised; who would think of conversational practices and micropRACTICES as suffused with power? Isn't the real world the world of actions and pronouncements? Actions speak louder than words, don't they? Conversations, and the fantastic arrays of realities they perform, are material manifestations of consciousness. As such, conversations are overlooked/overheard and not attended to; only not because they are so densely pervasive but also because they are assumed to be inconsequential, the small change of everyday life. This is precisely where their effectivity lies; they formulate and speak us; they are conventional formats and mundane performances. They produce us, and in so doing, leave us with seemingly unmistakable impressions that we are originating authors of our ideas and thoughts.

Conversational micropractices situate, identify, produce and trace these interlocutive subjectivities. When speaking ceases, conversed subjectivity dissolves into silence; no visible traces are left behind, unless recorded. As a microtechnology of subject(ive) experience located within voices' bodies, conversations are indexical referencing devices. To lose one's place is to lose one's identity; keeping track of one's identity has material and spiritual
consequences in the seemingly mundane daily affairs of living. This is a theme that many feminisms have made historically, and continue to make in a variety of ways in the ongoing contestations with dominant and dominating patriarchal authorities. When not speaking, it is vitally important to listen or otherwise to attend well enough to follow along. Knowing one’s place as an interlocutive subject—staying in it and keeping track of it—has undeniably real political and personal consequences.

In their performances, conversations are non-linear phenomena; they resemble rhizomes much more than hierarchies.2

That’s it, a rhizome. Embryos, trees, develop according to their genetic performance or its structural reorganizations. But the weed overflows by virtue of being restrained. It grows between. It is the path itself. The English and Americans, who are the least “author-like” of writers, have two particularly sharp directions which connect: that of the road and of the path, that of the grass and of the rhizome. . . . Henry Miller: “Grass only exists between the great non-cultivated spaces. It fills in the voids. It grows between among other things. The flower is beautiful, the cabbage is useful, the poppy makes you crazy. But the grass is overflowing, it is a lesson in morality. The walk as act, as politics, as experimentation, as life: “I spread myself out like a fog BETWEEN the people that I know the best” says Virginia Woolf in her walk among the taxis.

(30)

Like rhizomes, conversations grow from the middle, given that there are no beginnings and endings, other than those imposed from the outside. Granted, conversational micropractices are ideologically formatted and hegemonically circumscribed; nevertheless, conversations wander down blind alleys, slam into dead-ends, topple off sheer cliffs, get turned around, become asphyxiated, repeat aimlessly, and suddenly break off. They circle around and fold back onto themselves; they retrieve and recreate, recall and adumbrate in ways that elude the assumptive foundations of formal logics and dialectics.

Much of the theoretical and cultural significance of conversational micropractices are their performative locations along the seams of speech/language. On the one hand, conversations partake of both speech and language; on the other, they have little to do with either. Inssofar as language is that which its (collusive) members assume they know in common—that which goes without saying—language is a practical consciousness, an implicitly held common sense. Speech, on the other hand, is a discursive consciousness—an individuated, explicit performative sense—insofar as it is that which must be said because it cannot be assumed to pass in silence. Speech can be thought through as the discursive appropriation of, and at the same moment

developing into the discursive formulation of, practical consciousness, in what Mikhail Bakhtin calls a dialogue of utterances.3

Michel de Certeau locates distinctions between speech and language in the problematics of enunciation, which he characterizes in terms of its four properties. First, language takes place by means of speaking; speech realizes language by actualizing portions of it as potential and possibility. Second, speaking appropriates language in the very act of speaking it. Third, speech presupposes a particular relational contract with an “other”—real or fictive. And fourth, speech instantiates a present as the time for an “I” to speak. (33) In these ways, conversational micropractices produce and reproduce sociocultural structures and formations by means of binding time and space. They are more or less transparent mediational practices of and for structuration.

The question I set for myself in this essay is: How do these conversational micropractices—so seemingly innocuous and innocent of power—produce and consume ideologies of everyday living?

Conversation is a term designating a large but finite assemblage of discourse micropractices that produce and reproduce cultures and their social formations. How is this performed conversationally? Both ethnography generally, and conversation analysis particularly, have invested heavily in the finely grained descriptions of the indexicality and reflexivity of everyday life.5

There are growing research literatures that describe arrays of interactional sociolinguistic and ethnomethodological devices and procedures instrumental in the co-production of conversation. Sociolinguistic variation, ethnomethodological conversational analysis, extended standard theory, and ethnography of communication share several theoretical and methodological assumptions. However, situating any of this work in the intimately political worlds of the conversants themselves is still relatively rare. Conversational moves, devices and properties (e.g., greetings, repetitions, questions and answers, accounts, correction invitations, address terms, stories, paraphrasing, quoting, pronouns, gossiping, visiting, politeness, hosting, telephone talking, among others) are seldom explored as modes of consciousness, structures of feeling, shapes of experience; nor are they often fitted into the dominant, residual, and emergent features of their sociocultural traditions, institutions and formations.10 I want to take a different course and follow several lines of cultural studies, performance theory, and conversational studies to foreground some pivotal differences distinguishing these traditions.

Everyday conversations are identified, reified, described, and analyzed, but rarely are they abstracted back into the material and spiritual relations of the political-economies of the daily lives of its interlocutors. One is left with little sense of how these conversational micropractices produce and reproduce the structural and post-structural conditions of the experience of postmodern life. V. N. Volosinov’s theoretical and critical work in the philosophy of language, Mikhail Bakhtin’s work in speech genres, poetic and dialogic, Michel Foucault’s work on the genealogies of power/knowledge, and the ethics,
morality and care of the self, and Julia Kristeva’s theorizations of the revolutionary potentials of poetic language, serve as a theoretical and dialogical context for conducting a socioculturally oriented examination and critique of conversation, work that goes beyond analytics and dialectics to dialogues.11

Rules, rituals and performances as art and practice

In Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein encapsulates many of the current dilemmas confronting theories of discourse that invoke rules to explain communicative practices:

What do I call “the rule” by which he proceeds?—the hypothesis that satisfactorily describes his use of words, which we observe; or the rule which he looks up when he uses signs; or the one which gives us in reply when we ask what his rule is?—But what if observation does not enable us to see any clear rule, and the question brings none to light?—for he did indeed give me a definition when I asked him what he understood by “N”. But he was prepared to withdraw and alter it. So how am I to determine the rule according to which he is playing? He does not know it himself. —Or, to ask a better question: What meaning is the expression “the rule by which he proceeds” supposed to have left to it here?

(38–9)

For Pierre Bourdieu, the theoretical status of a rule is as the presupposed solution to these very difficulties, the difficulties posed by an inadequate theory of practice. Insofar as there is no adequate theory of practice, there is a compensating emphasis on rules and codes as devices for explaining practices as accomplished social facts; as products, rather than as processes of production. Rules are the structural keys to the engines of social praxis; the difficulty is that rules themselves are products of discursive knowledge. Rules are discursive inventions whose value lies in their retrospective accounts of social practices. Insofar as our understanding of practice is incomplete, rules are rationalistic devices that supposedly account for practical outcomes. Consider language as an example: being able to specify its grammar is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for putting the speaking rules into performative practice. Chomsky’s theory of practice is woefully underdeveloped in relation to his theory of competence, the latter being his version of Saussure’s langue, the former his version of parole.

To make rules theoretically operative requires the attribution rather than demonstration of agency to individuated subjects. This supposedly solves the problems of how speakers are able to put discursive competence into performative practice. The relation of competence to performance is assumed to be more or less direct and unproblematic; the practices of conversation supposedly execute language merely by following rules. For Chomsky, as for Saussure, the theory of speech practices reduces almost legislistically to the function of obedient execution. Practices of performance are simplified drastically and stripped of the possibilities of style, tactic and strategy. It is this more or less directly executive relation between rule and practice that is the stubbornly unresolvable paradox for most theories of communication generally, and conversation in particular. Knowing—in a discursive or theoretical sense—the strategic rules and codes is a grossly imperfect predictor of an interlocutor’s tactical ingenuity. The fallacy of locating competence either in an autonomous language, external to and independent of individual speakers, or alternatively within corporeal homo sapiens as a psychologized attribute, is that either alternative simply postpones the realization that competence is a wholly magical construct and as such is an inadequate theory of and for practice. To have a code of rules as a model for performative practice is to fall far short of being able to say much at all about the everyday practical circumstances of the production and consumption of conversation.

To account for everyday conversational practices in terms of conversational rules—whatever the relation between rule and practice is taken to be—is to hold to the position that practice is a product of rules, which has the consequence of privileging synchronic competence over diachronic performance. Discourse, as systems of rules and codes of relations, is thereby in the master position and it is for speech to be obedient to those discursive rules, consequently reproducing and more deeply inculcating the epistemic bias and its unresolvable paradoxes, the chief one among them being that to explain conversational performance in terms of codes and rules is to undermine the very possibility of ever theoretically accounting for everyday conversation. This condition is a direct consequence of a discourse whose voice takes a position of observer and one which conceptualizes everyday conversational practices as representational objects of observation. Conversation comes to be theorized from a position of outside observer rather than from an interlocutive position.

Practicality, temporality and spatiality: common sense and conventional wisdom

Given that conversation is a turn-taking system, I want to open this section with the problematic of subjectivity and how to locate subject-positions and agency in such systems. Pierre Bourdieu’s concern with the individual operations of exchange systems (of whatever kinds—land, cattle, women, challenges, gifts, utterances)—locates the practicing subject within the moment of a practice’s production, rather than locating it outside of practice and time.12 He aims at a science of the dialectical relations between theoretical and practical knowledges that include, for him, scientific as well as everyday practices. Instead of positioning itself outside of everyday temporality and
off to one side of the dialectical relation—the better to reconstruct its possibility, conditions, and operating rules—he locates the practicing subject as close to the scene of space/time as possible—the better to construct the generative principles of practices. He writes:

Because it produces its science of the social world against the implicit presuppositions of practical knowledge of the social world, objectivist knowledge is diverted from construction of the theory of practical knowledge of the social world, of which it at least produces the lack.

For Bourdieu, the operations of the practices of everyday life—and that includes conversational micropractices—presuppose that subjects do not recognize, or that they misrecognize, the mechanisms of the exchange systems that analysts’ models expose by temporally collapsing them, rendering diachronic practices as synchronic structures. As a temporally deflated structure of textured relations, practices now appear to be reversibly granularized rather than irreversibly temporized. Inflating a structuralist model with the temporality of the subjects’ practices produces a dialectic of two opposing truths. The reversible sign-value system of relations of power is as true as, even if overshadowed by, the irreversible symbolic-exchange system.13

Temporalizing structural relations of power doesn’t invalidate political-economic models; rather it produces a symbolic-exchange model, and each system underwrites the possibilities of others. Time is the medium through which spatio-structural contradictions are worked through/out, and analytic concerns shift to practices of and for making time take place. For Bourdieu, these practices are strategies; for de Certeau, they are tactics.14 Both refer to temporal practices that materialize in space but are not inscribed in time “once and for all time.” Intervals between durations of actions constitute the temporal embodiments and amplifications of contradictions that are resolved more or less precisely by these unfolding discursive tempos. Variable intervals of time between actions accommodate the acceptable arrays of contradictions to be taken account of practically, to be appropriated and worked through time, and that materialize as practices. Bourdieu writes:

To restore to practice its practical truth, we must... reintroduce time into the theoretical representation of practice which, being temporally structured, is intrinsically defined by its *tempo*. The generative, organizing scheme which gives... improvised speech its argument, and attains conscious expression in order to work itself out, is an often imprecise but systematic principle of selection and realization, tending through steadily directed corrections, to eliminate accidents when they can be put to use, and to conserve even fortuitous successes.

As these broadly deployed micropractices of selection and realization—of bricolage and performance, of temporal practices for producing and reproducing the temporos of everyday life—conversational micropractices resolve appropriate contradictions and discrepant understandings, and suppress the materialization of others. As multiply mediated, conversations can be likened to the play of a spontaneous semiotics that orchestrates regulated improvisation of practices whose regions of performance lie somewhere between the seemingly open set of mundane practices of everyday life and the more constrained practices of custom, ceremony and ritual, between individual style and social custom.15

It’s important to note that, for Bourdieu, such improvisational performances only appear to be free and easy.16 In fact, an apparently improvisational process has its play regulated by a more or less definite set of precepts, aphorisms, formulae and codes. Improvisation is not random, unprecedented free activity, but rather innovative play both of and on conventionalized forms. Conversations consist of those micropractices for being carried along by, and on occasion being carried away with—or for being carried beyond—practical knowledges, which are the practical resources of and for the performance of conversational discourse.

Consider Bourdieu’s notion of the material installation of *habitus* (which is always italicized). *Habitus*—or *opus operatim* (i.e., a product of practice)—consists of the structures constitutive of a particular environment whereas *disposition*—modus operandi (i.e., modes of practice)—is both the distinctive mark of *habitus* and a way or style of being. The domestic organization of the house, the social organization of the agrarian calendar and the sexual organization of labor, for example, are homologues constituting the *habitus*.

*Disposition* expressed first the result of an organizing action, with a meaning close to that of structure; it also designates a way of being, a *habitual state* (especially of the body) and a predisposition, tenacity, propensity, or inclination.

Consider the practices of children’s performances of games, which occur in all societies to structurally exercise children’s practical mastery of the dispositions necessary for them to participate in an assortment of exchange systems. Here—in the riddle, the challenge, the duel, the put-on, the tease, the dare, the con—children learn the logics of challenge/respose, the *modus operandi* of a protan *habitus*.

Before newborn homo sapiens enter onto the *habitus* of eventual sociocultural formations, they are readied, more or less, in the *habitus* of family. An infant enters a family system as a sociocultural signifier with its status and oppositionality already largely fixed. Already, it has been overdetermined, largely without explicit deliberation, how a newborn is to be raised and...
tended, by whom, for how long, in what places, at what times, and in relation to whom. An infant immediately, and not usually as a result of conscious intention, becomes an emerging and developing embodiment of **habitus**, the material locus of dispositions and their principles of regulated improvisation:

... it is in the dialectical relationship between the body and a space structured, according to the mythico-ritual oppositions that one finds the form of the structural apprenticeship which leads to the embodying of the structure of the world—the appropriating by the world of a body thus enabled to appropriate the world.

(89)

The domestic organization of the house, or whatever the structure of domestic space in which an infant finds itself, is both engendered and sexualized, both spatialized and temporalized, and politicized through and through.

The house, an *opus operatum*, lends itself to a deciphering which does not forget that the “book” from which the children learn their version of the world is read with the body, in and through the movements and displacements which make the space within which they are enacted as much as they are made by it.

(90)

To summarize his argument, and thereby to compress it drastically, Bourdieu contends that social space in general, and its primordially minimalist Foucauldian gesture—the house—in particular, is organized according to an ensemble of homologous relations—fire:water :: cooked:raw :: high:low :: light:shade :: night:day :: male:female :: inside:outside. The primal *habitus* of house marks the infant with these homologous signs and the child becomes the embodied dispositions reproducing the structured relations into which it was born. A socioculturally embodied subject reproduces practices which are products of a *modus operandi* over which the subject has little discursive consciousness. The *modus operandi* often has an objective intention or logic which is both larger than and outruns a subject’s partial consciousness. For Baudrillard, this would be a matter of the subject-as-code being collapsed and closed off short of decoding its history as that *habitus* of which it finds itself materially ensconced. Contradictions are inevitable among homologous relations organizing the social cosmology and the bodily cosmogony.

One of the suggestive implications of this line of theorizing is that corporeality, as sociocultural embodiment, as the object of the seemingly trivial and inconsequential practices of dress, demeanor, bearing, manners and style, is the materiality of memory. The body, as the text of signs written by experience and recorded as marks of character, is a mnemonic medium in which are inscribed the principles of the content of culture.

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**BECOMING-OFFER-WISE**

The principles embodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit; nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and, therefore, more precious, than the values given body, made by the transubstantiation achieved by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy, capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysics, a political philosophy, through injunctions as insignificant as “stand up straight” or “don’t hold your knife in your left hand.”

(Bourdieu 94)

**The political-economics of conversational turn-taking**

A *turn* is self-reflexive; it materializes as itself only in relation to another turn. And such a self-reflexive relationship is the basis of ideological transparency. An alternative formulation of conversation is a mimetic form. The Greek term *mimesis* captures the existential validity of transparency. *Mimesis* translates as self-imitation or self-present-in-motion. Here is Mcintyre’s thinking of it:

In conversations we do not only elaborate thoughts, arguments, theories, poems, dramas; we gesture, we draw, we paint, we sing. In so doing we give structure to our thought; we interpret a reality that was already partially constituted by the interpretation of the agents engaged in the transaction and our interpretation is more or less adequate, approaches or fails to approach truth more nearly. What was the free play of conversational transaction becomes structured *mimesis* and *mimesis* always claims truth.

(43)

Given *turn* as a constitutive feature of conversation, and given the self-reflexiveness of a *turn*, that which is constituted in and through the taking of turns is itself self-reflexive. Conversation imitates itself by inscribing itself in the movement of a turn’s *taking place*. To take a *turn* is to orient and attend to a sociocultural lifeworld by inscribing spacetim in and through the acoustic *kinesthetic* movements of *conversing*. A turn and its space, time, and movement are co-extensive. A conversational move is to take a turn, and the micropractices of taking turns inscribe worlds of subjects, objects, and their interpenetrated relations of power. Turns are values, and as such are sought, avoided, given, and taken, and the ways in which turn-taking distributes its participating members can be thought through in political-economic terms. As with any political-economy, the organization of turn-taking reproduces the very distributional structures of that which it organizes.

Conversational micropractices are the structures of sharing and community, as well as of hoarding and alienation—turns are distributive. Much of
Conversational micropractices articulate conventional wisdom with circumstantially punctuated experience. The property of conversational micropractices most responsible for the production and reproduction of this ordinariness and mundaneness are their transparent methods of cutting out and turning over—of both informing and performing—sociocultural forms of life. In his critique of Foucault’s microphysics of power and of Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, de Certeau argues that each theoretical discourse cuts out a particular phenomenon from its context and inverts it or turns it over. In Foucault’s case, the “it” is the microphysical practices of surveillance and discipline, and in Bourdieu’s case, “it” is the domestic practices of habitus. The discourse takes one of its features out of its context and turns it into a principle that explains (almost) everything. Turn-taking is a (universalizing) practice for locally and micropractically producing, allocating and regulating power and desire. Such forms regulate patterns of dominance and submission by means of enforcing codes of rights and obligations. So, a turn takes what it finds—and what it finds are living relations to the real conditions of existence, interpellated subjects as interlocutors, subjects cut out as speakers and conversed as authorities—and it fashions an utterance, which necessarily rearranges those everyday material conditions.

Once the analogic relations of practical consciousness are digitalized by way of their transfiguration into the discursive practices of conversation, different gaps and absences become apparent—speech digitalizes the analogy of semiosis. But speech cannot exhaust language; conversational cannot exhaust discourse, any more than a digital recording can exhaust an analogue signal. The continuity of practical consciousness becomes the discontinuity of discursive practice. The turning and reversing of conversational breaks up analogic experience into digital, circumstantial experience the codes and formats of which are the performative structures of conversation. What must be said and done to fill in the gaps and ruptures between formats of changing circumstances, and what stitches together the seams of temporary coherence into transparent common sense, changes with each utterance, necessitating another turn to address and redress the newly produced gaps. Utterance, here, is the name for the ways and means—the styles—of turning; it’s the name for the practices of making time take place in the conjunctures and fissures of everyday circumstances.

Taking a turn by producing an utterance is at one and the same moment radical assertion and repressive conformity. It asserts change and difference in the same movement as it punctuates reality in formats of tradition and convention. The conversational micropractices of making time take place are simultaneously fascistic and anarchic. They are fascistic insofar as individuals are obligated to be subjects of conventional turns as emblems of membership and good faith. And they are anarchic insofar as turns can be taken to violate convention and foundationally transform both practical and discursive consciousness. Barthes puts it this way:
Language, as performance of the language system (language), is neither reactionary nor progressive. It is quite simply fascist; for fascism is not the prohibition of saying things; it is the obligation to say them... (Barthes in Baudrillard 26)

Ways of inscribing time in place are, then, both presences and absences, both assertions and repressions. As such, turns are made in relations of power. Romanticizing coded rituals and ceremonies takes on the appearances of relationships and communities. From this vantage, rules of politeness can be read as the specification of rules for what must be articulated so that face-threatening circumstances either are avoided altogether, or are blunt and camouflaged simultaneously. Unstated in Brown and Levinson’s catalogue of conversational relations, for example, is the hegemonic power lying dormant, but always at the ready, to ensure that only that appropriate is articulated with practice. To violate the rules of politeness is to risk embarrassment and shame, certainly, but also madness and death at the extreme hegemonic edges.

Power relations, then, materialize in the most microscopic of sociocultural practices, realized as collective living articulates differences that become, upon their materialization, signs of values, commodities marking status differences and thereby power relations. To live in the everyday world of late, postmodern capitalism is to live in a world of constantly shifting alliances among signs. Conversational micropractices are ways of modifying one’s positionality among signs of power, means of shifting alliances, methods of accommodating individuated benefits and of taking care of practical affairs.

The embodiment of memory and practical consciousness

To take part in the turn-taking political-economy of conversation is to trust in some kind of covenant of sociability. And that trust presupposes memory and imagination; they both remember and represent. Illuminating the outlines of memory and imagination, conversation’s taking place in turns re-affirms the covenant(tense) of the present. As an infant enters the symbolic realm, the analogic world of the semiotic begins to break up, to digitalize, into discontinuous experience. The gaps marking off these discontinuities are the spaces in practical consciousness that summon(interpellate) the voices of discursive consciousness. Such spaces are the locations for turns to take place, for discursive consciousness to be performed in and through the formats of conversational micropractices, and for those formats to interpellate their interlocutors onto the landscapes of practical affairs.

Circumstances play on the bodies of subjects who may, in turn, respond to these material and spiritual conditions by giving voice to them. Imminent circumstances give voice to the wisdom and folly of memory, which is not simply some recording, storage and retrieval apparatus. Rather, memory is played by the presences and absences of circumstances. Material and spiritual circumstances play the bodies of its subjects as the embodiments of practical consciousness. Circumstances disclose the ruptures that summon conversation to take time place, and to transform circumstance into experience. In the same moment as they bridge circumstantial gaps in practical consciousness, conversational micropractices produce ruptures, as circumstances, again to be transformed into the formatted experiences of conversing subjects. Memory’s voices are repeated as conversational micropractices that interpellate interlocutors as the embodiments of experience.

The Greek term *metis* captures many of the connotations intended by *practical consciousness*. De Certeau discusses it as a form of consciousness immerses or embodied in practice.21 Conversational micropractices are discursive formats for practical consciousness insofar as practice is what it does, and, as such, has three defining characteristics. First, micropractices are primarily temporal techniques; their appropriateness is demonstrated in their appearing in just the right moment. Second, in appearing at just the right moment, they undo proper places by changing forms via metaphorical transformations. And third, they disappear into their own actions; they dissolve in their very production; they have no reflection or echo. Put more bluntly, conversational micropractices are predominantly tactical (i.e., temporal) rather than strategic (i.e., spatial).22 Conversation is, in this sense, the speaking of and listening to discourse at its proper times. De Certeau develops *metis* into his notion of memory, a tactical phenomenon with no proper place, a phenomenon that moves through events without possessing them. I want to suggest that *conversational micropractices are performed memory*, and are responsible for reproducing the infrastructures of sociocultural formations.

Memory is neither a general nor an abstract idea. A master, for example, is a subject surrendered to experience, someone whose experience produces micropractices demonstrating principles of economy. Experienced micropractices obtain maximum effect from minimum effort. A master makes it look easy. An experienced pianist, for example, is one whose discursive practices evidence practical consciousness; she knows her way around the keyboard.23 Memory is embodied in the temporality of its micropractices, in the discursive formats of practical consciousness. It is the micropractical body that knows, and the experience of such embodied knowledge takes place in time. The same can be said to be true of conversational micropractices. As an interlocutor, an I speaks what an 1 thinks, and it thinks what it knows; and an I knows its own experience as memory that is formatted in the very conversational micropractices it speaks. An I is unable to converse out of or beyond what it knows—acknowledging for the moment the multiple ways of knowing. An I speaks prior experience as thoughts, and an I experiences those structures of feeling as the continuity of an I’s own identity. Memory, materialized as conversational micropractices, reproduces itself in the spaces of time as continuity and identity. Improvisation consists of performing.
aesthetically pleasing variations on the structures themselves, already known to memory. What is outside memory is no-thing and non-sense—Kristeva’s *semiotic chora*—it is unthinkable and unspeakable.  

Insofar as memory is embodied in the temporality of practice and a turn is the material embodiment of memory in circumstance. Micropractices carry memory into the spaces in which an I finds subject-positions for living its everyday life. Memory temporarily animates those spaces, promising to weave them together into moments of coherence. It is in this manner that continuity and tradition are reproduced. Current circumstances play memory and call up micropractices whose formats reproduce sociocultural formations in time. De Certeau models the occasion of memory as follows:

![Diagram of space and time](image)

**Quadrant I** represents the initial circumstantial place; **quadrant II** is the domain of memory that times in quadrant III erupts and intervenes at just the right moment (the Greek term for this “appropriate moment” is *kairos*). **Quadrant IV**, then, represents the modification of circumstances as a result of the intervention of memory. **Quadrants I and IV** represent two spatial equilibria whereas **quadrants II and III** represent a temporal intervention that produces the spatial transition, the experience, the change of spatial circumstances. **Time** momentarily and temporally, *takes place*, transforming place by means of memory’s practices, and producing circumstantial experience.

The question remains unanswered, however, as to how memory and the domain of time break through at just the right moment into the domain of material circumstances to effect spatial transformations and produce experiential occasion. De Certeau contends that *kairos* relies on a sense of tactics: it is the moment of art. He reminds us that memory has no prefabricated, ready-made, or totalizing organizational structure, but rather is mobilized relative to what happens. Memory plays on and is played by circumstances that produce experience in places that belong to the other. The places memory erupts into, and occupies temporarily, are gaps in the boundaries of the codes of practical consciousness. They digitalize language, and memory erupts into

and plays on these indexical spaces that beckon conversational practices to bridge the gaps. These gaps and fissures, which turns produce, are the places of the other. Speaking breaks out experience that produces other gaps and spaces. The process is infinitely self-referential.

Memory calls for practices that edit circumstance into experience which, in turn, promise the satisfaction of desire and the possibility of power. Here is de Certeau:

> ... an art of memory develops an aptitude for always being in the other’s place without possessing it, and from profiting from this alteration without destroying itself through it. This ability is not a power. It has been given the name of *authority*: what has been “drawn” from the collective or individual memory and authorizes (makes possible) a reversal, a change in order or place, a transition into something different, a metaphor for practice of discourse.

(87)

It is these practices of memory that are responsible for organizing the occasions of everyday modes of action, for transforming ways of thinking into styles of doing, for evidencing experience in practice and for discursivising practical consciousness.

**Multiple voices of the truth of tactical and strategic experience**

In the course of theorizing the space/time binary, de Certeau is concerned with the question of how everyday life can be lived increasingly tactically in more fully spatialised and strategic worlds. In theorizing *The Practices Of Everyday Life*, he distinguishes between tactic and strategy as follows:

I call a “strategy” the calculus of force-relationships which become possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an “environment.” A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (proper) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, “clientele”, “targets”, or “objects” of research). . . . I call a “tactic” on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on a “proper” (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other.

(xix)

Tactics constitute the practical intelligence of time-binding relations whereas strategies constitute the practical intelligence of space-binding relations. The medium of tactics is time; the medium of strategies is space.
There is a certain structural similarity between Bourdieu's *theory/practice* and de Certeau's *strategy/praxis*. For Bourdieu, the social and human sciences collapse irreversible temporal relations into reversible structural relations; they privilege spatial models over temporal ones. Everyday practices of living are tactical insofar as they are ways of using and consuming, in time, the spatial conditions and commodities imposed by the relations of power defining the proper strategies of the relations in dominance. Consider Stuart Hall's distinction between structure and practice:

We may say that a structure is what previously structured practices have produced as a result. These then constitute the "given conditions," the necessary starting point, for new generations of practice. In neither case should "practice" be treated as transparently intentional: we make history, but on the basis of anterior conditions which are not of our making. Practice is how a structure is actively reproduced.

(95, 6)

The mistake of Foucault and the other more conventional post-structuralists, according to de Certeau, is that they privilege the determinate-ness of anterior conditions. Foucault, like de Certeau, is concerned about the micro-physics of power in the forms of disciplinary and surveillance practices and technologies. But whereas Foucault produces a dying, if not dead subject, more or less locked into overdetermined structuralizing practices of institutionalized everyday life, de Certeau's subject is an artful dodger, a pouch of spatializing forms. For de Certeau, there is a tactical response to, and a temporally capitalization of, if not an outright escape from, the Foucauldian-Weberian iron cage of historical overdetermination. Tactics-becoming are the temporal practices that take place in the gaps and slippages of free-play, in the active reproduction of the anterior strategic structures into which we are born and against whose contradictions we seem destined to resist, surrender and perform.

As is true for Baudrillard, the subject for de Certeau is a producer-consumer in a commodified world of sign-objects. In fact, the distinctions between production and consumption are blurred: consumers produce consumption-production. De Certeau is concerned specifically with the uses made of consumption, the practices of consumption, whereas Baudrillard's consumer is a more passive structural victim. Baudrillard's consumer is adrift in a sea of commodified codes: a subject as a bricoleur of signs. For de Certeau, a producer-consumer makes use of the commodities and thereby subverts them for self-interested purposes. Interlocutors are tacticians, performance-artists making improvisational use of what's available and appropriable.10

For Foucault, society is organized by dominant practices that shape its normative institutions; countless other minor practices do not themselves organize discourse but preserve non-discursive practices that differ across cultural formations. These minor practices organize both space and time in subordinate and indirect ways. Practices that become dominant, such as Foucault's panoptical technology, become the organizing principles of entire technologies of power. De Certeau is concerned with the minor practices that never attain such dominance. His concern is with the tactical practices that infiltrate, erode and subtly transpose dominant strategic practices.

The minor practices of ripping off (de Certeau's *la perruque*) may be the inevitable and perpetual encroachment of symbolic-exchange and meaning onto the dominant, hegemonic territory of sign-exchange and signification. Time and space are crucially co-ordinated in the bureaucratised world of cellular grids, and bodies become social embodiments of, and the temporary anchors for, the cellular grids by locating themselves appropriately in space and time—by staying in their spaces over time. A rip-off appropriates the space of an other for a time; it is the operation of the symbolic-exchange system in codified, shifting circuits of sign-value. For Baudrillard, a gift is a symbol whose meaning is the relationship its exchange defines and affirms in its own material insignificance as a sign-object. The everyday world of work is the experience of being in the place of the other; it's the employer's materials and technologies being used by an employee, but it's the employee's time, not the employer's. An employer, of course, would not agree: that's the crux of the contestation—whose time is it, and whose space?—questions of willingness and power.

### Micropractical production and reproduction of ideology of everyday life

The configurations of cultural contradictions and paradoxes are suppressed and camouflaged at this micropractical level of conversation. The seemingly obvious, mundane, routine, normalizing practices and knowledges of everyday life constitute the ontological and epistemological infrastructures of common sense. And common sense is hegemony's material manifestation at the micropractical level. The critical study of conversation and the critical study of hegemony at this point become one and the same enterprise. The silences of what cannot be spoken mark the boundaries of conversation. Conversational micropractices, in other words, perform and reproduce ideological codes that normalize the contradictions contained within hegemonic boundaries, usually without calling them into question. Any given embodied subject, as interlocutor, however, is in process. Conversation works to epistemologically punctuate ontology, producing momentary appearances of autonomous subjects of intersubjectivity.

Volosinov argues that the notion of a qualitative difference between the "inner" and the "outer" is invalid. The structure of experience is as social as is the structure of ideology. An utterance is a two-sided act; it is directed
simultaneously toward the addressee and toward the addressee. The two sides constitute the two poles of a continuum along which experience can be apprehended and structured ideologically. The "I-experience," at its extreme, loses its ideological structuredness and with it, its apprehendability. It approaches the physiological reaction of animality in losing its verbal delineation. At the other extreme is what Volosinov calls the "we-experience," characterized by a high degree of differentiation, the mark of a change/expansion of consciousness. The more differentiated the collective in which an individual orients herself, the more vivid and complex her consciousness.

For Bakhtin's essay, "The Problem of Speech Genres," the editors write:

Ideology should not be confused with the politically oriented English word. Ideology as it is used here is essentially any system of ideas.

But ideology is semiotic in the sense that it involves the concrete exchange of signs in society and history. Every word/discourse betrays the ideology of its speaker; every speaker is thus an ideologue and every utterance an ideologeme.

Native language learning is an infant's gradual immersion into verbal communication, and very quickly, if not immediately, conversation, which performs intersubjectivity, in effect. Volosinov argues that experience and its outward objectifications are articulated in embodied signs. Again, experience does not exist independent, somehow, of its embodiment as signs. It's not a matter of experience organizing utterances; rather, the reverse. Utterances organize experience. And it is the immediate social situation and its broader sociocultural milieu that determine, from within themselves, the structure of each utterance. Utterances then form up and orient to experiences of its speaker's partial consciousness.

Coward and Ellis define ideologues as representational practices that close off meanings and produce subjects as the supports and supporters of meanings. It is meaning closure that delimits and fixes the subject as an individual in discourse—an interlocutor. The work of ideology is the production of the continuity of the unitary ego as subject. By closing off the inherent openness of discourse and its contradictions, ideology produces the appearance of the unity of the subject and of world. But the subject, as sign, is in process. Ideology works, then, to punctuate the being of becoming, producing the form of an autonomous subject speaking with a unitary voice. Similarly, for Volosinov, discourse is not reified language conceptualized synchronically, but rather it is the stream of verbal communication:

In actual fact, however, language moves together with that stream and is inseparable from it. Language cannot properly be said to be

hand edown—it endures, but it endures as a continuous process of becoming. Individuals do not receive a ready-made language at all, rather they enter upon the stream of verbal communication; indeed, only in this stream does their consciousness first begin to operate.

Bakhtin works from the theory and history of literature to develop the concept of dialogical consciousness. In his study of Dostoevsky's poetics, hero (subject) is neither character nor personality; it is rather discourse about itself and its world.

Dostoevsky's hero is not an objectified image but an autonomous discourse, pure voice; we do not see him, we hear him; everything that we see and know apart from his discourse is nonessential and is swallowed up by discourse as its own material, or else remains outside it as something that stimulates and provokes.

Dostoevsky's heroes speak themselves into consciousness in the process of experiencing living. Rather than creating a finalized and complete monologist, Dostoevsky writes heroes who speak themselves into at least partial consciousness in a world inhabited by others in the process of becoming conscious—becoming-other-wise—in the ongoing stream of speech-communication. Subjects speak utterances structured by their material circumstances, which then structure and flesh out their experience.

Speaking dialogically, for Bakhtin, is speaking with a multiplicity of other voices rather than speaking for others and about their experience. Dialogical discourse is speech that is open and on the threshold of crisis and possibility at every moment. Its speaker is not a finalized and determinate subject but an interlocutor in process, a subject coming to partial consciousness in a world of other unfinished subjects, working to speak the truth of their experience. From such a theoretical vantage point, speaking dialogically is consciousness-becoming. Speaking dialogically clarifies events and experience for a subject such that the truth at which it is arriving is the truth of its own partial consciousness. It is self-reflexive speech coming to consciousness.

Conversation, in short, is inherently ideological. It is in and against this ideological world that speaking subjects come to partial consciousness. Realized utterances, as gesture and speak, influence experience by tying inner life together and sharpening differentiations. Volosinov uses the term "behavioral ideology" to delineate our unsystematized speech, which endows every act, and therefore our every conscious state, with meaning.
Language acquires life and historically evolves precisely here (in its concrete connection with a situation) in concrete verbal communication, and not in the abstract linguistic system of language forms, nor in the individual psyche of speakers.

Consequently, "Marxist philosophy of language should and must stand squarely on the utterance as the real phenomenon of language-speech and as the socioideological structure." (97)

Let me now turn to the sociological side of discourse and the matter of ideology. Complementing the conception of consciousness as dialogical is Thompson's conception of ideology as the thought of the other, the thought of someone other than oneself, thought that serves to sustain relations and structures of domination:

To characterize a view as "ideological" is already to criticize it, for ideology is not a neutral term. Hence, the study of ideology is a controversial, conflict-laden activity. It is an activity which plunges the analyst into a realm of claim and counter-claim, of allegation, accusation and riposte.

To characterize conversation as ideological is to grant it its own agency and autonomy. Conversation is no more neutral than is ideology. Utterances of the ongoing stream of conversation are, by their very existence, ideological, and when conversation is dialogical, and more truly heteroglossic, as it is for Dostoevsky's heroes, then it summons a response. An utterance stands as a summons or challenge to precedent; it summons a response from an other interlocutor giving voice to partial consciousness. Behavioral ideology entails the speaking of experience into autonomous self-consciousness, and such self-consciousness rests on a foundation of opposition, difference, contradiction, claim and counter-claim. In these ways, Thompson and Volosinov concur on the relations between conversation and ideology:

To explore the interrelations between language and ideology is to turn away from the analysis of well-formed sentences or systems of signs, focusing instead on the ways in which expressions serve as a means of action and interaction, a medium through which history is produced and society reproduced. The theory of ideology invites us to see that language is not simply a structure which can be employed for communication or entertainment but a sociohistorical phenomenon which is embroiled in human conflict.

Recall that for Bourdieu, dispositions are learned—without being explicitly modeled, taught, or instructed—in the course and practice of everyday life. They are the material embodiments of everyday practices. A complimentary notion is Hall's formulation of the "double articulation" of structure and practice:

By "double articulation" I mean that the structure—the given conditions of existence, the structure of determinations in any situation—can also be understood, from another point of view, as simply the result of previous practices. We may say that a structure is what previously structured practices have produced as a result. These then constitute the "given conditions," the necessary starting point for new generations of practice.

As discursive practices, conversation articulates the experience of subjects' consciousness with the meanings of sociohistorical conditions. And it is the articulation of meaning with experience, and thereby the closing off of meaning, that constitutes the ideological nature of dialogical conversation. Insofar as ideology consists in the way meanings and significations serve to sustain relations and structures of domination, conversing articulates meaning with experience, which produces consciousness as embodied subjects at the same time it produces history and reproduces sociocultural formations. Dialogical conversation is a double articulation; it mediates consciousness and ideology.

Conversational micropractices articulate meaning and signification in any determinate sense but rather in the sense of momentarily arresting the slipage of the field of signifiers. According to Hall's reading of Althusser's formulation of ideology, it is ideology's function to fix meaning and signification by establishing a chain of equivalences in the field of perpetually slipping and shifting signifiers. Insofar as ideologies are maps of worlds, their formats are discursive, read as the strategies of common sense regarding a material and spiritual world. Discourse, as the semiotic domain of meaning and representation, then, is the material modality of the functioning of ideology—as formatted common sense—and conversational micropractices are the material devices for putting the practical consciousness of ideology into the material practices of everyday living. Hall writes:

Language and behavior are the media. So to speak, of the material registration of ideology, the modality of its functioning. That is why we have to analyze or deconstruct language and behavior in order to decipher the patterns of ideological thinking which are inscribed in them.
are autoethnographic—self-reflexive, self-implicative investigations of the conversational politics of experience.” It’s work predicated on the assumption that other is interior and exterior; here and there; now and then. Trinh T. Minh-Ha addresses this self-reflexive turn:

A critique from the interior always helps to sow doubts in a way that cannot be merely discarded as “other”.... To make things even more complex and prone to critical investigation, “western” and “nonwestern” must be understood not merely in terms of oppositions and separations but rather in terms of differences. This implies a constant to-and-fro movement between the same and the other.

The search for the exotic other is futile. Histories are projections of the unwanted and the unforgiven onto other, then alienating—or worse—other only to be deeply disturbed by the disquiet, the longings, the absences, the violences. 38

Separating, evaluating, rejecting and projecting masculinity onto other, for example, perpetuates a more or less open state of conflict. Alienation and fragmentation are all but inevitable. My critical and theoretical interests are to show how conversations map the landscapes of practical consciousness as discursive consciousness; how conversations separate possibility from impossibility; how they articulate subject and object. And other is doing some version of the same, even though both may assume that self is, in fact, addressing other. And at the same time, there are the abject fears of nihilism, of dissolving. 39 Each conversational study based on these interests involves a subject audiotaping a conversation with another. Once audiotaped, authors listen, transcribe, edit, re-transcribe, analyze, critique and implicate their discursive selves. This critical self-reflexivity is a double-reflection; it is the dialectical partner of narcissism; it is a becoming-other-wise.

The analytic procedures involved in each study are analogous to watching a film or video of one’s self, repeatedly, in slow-motion, with stop-action, and pause. Subjects begin to hear conversational details, often for the first time. As I become increasingly involved in the micropractices of transcribing, I come to questions of the dialogics and dialectics of the more or less conventional configurations of conversation, consciousness, experience and meaning. Mikhail Bakhtin’s various treatments of utterance, creative understanding, hero, carnival, heteroglossia, polyvocality, centripetal and centrifugal forces, outsidedness and superaddresser are the conceptual thematiques through which I come to understand these conversations. 40

This progression across analytic and performative boundaries is a stripping away of familiarity, a setting aside of the ordinary, a self-reflexive move that accomplishes the experience of what Bakhtin calls outsidedness. 41 Foucault specifies experience in terms of three modes of objectification in and through

Autoethnography: self-implication and self-reflexivity

The focus of my conversational studies has been on critical ontology, conversational dialogics and performance. Rather than traveling to an other place in order to investigate other ways of life lived by exotic others, these studies

98

99
which individuals become articulated with knowledge/power as subjects: fields of knowledge with concepts: rules or dividing practices, and the relationship to oneself. This contextualising is an explicit affirming of multiple voices that constitute conversational selves. Outsiders disassociate into intersubjectivity as authors hear the voices of selves in the utterances of others. In the process of transcribing, authors attend to conversational tactics for inverting expectations, questioning oppositions, refusing troubles, resisting labels, voicing meanings, laughing, crying, shouting, and perhaps even listening in silence. Transcribing conversations and identifying discursive tactics create gaps between subject and object, self and other. These gaps are the tactical spaces of and for critical self-reflexivity. Authors recognize selves’ voices on tape, and yet the experience of listening repeatedly to short bits and bursts of their audiotaped conversations, and seeing what transcribed conversations look like, is sometimes surprisingly destabilizing process.

Richard Schechner writes of the liminaloid space of the not(me)... not(not me) produced during a performance following workshop and rehearsal preparation. Authors get senses of this liminaloid space as they experience being at odds with their recorded voices. One begins to hear and to recognize the voices that articulate self with other voices, that speak presuppositions of a univocal, singular, identical. Bakhtin's treatments of polyvocality and the inherent finalizability of the subject can be understood this way. Authors begin to realize these multiplicities and this destabilizing, decentering experience is both unnerving and empowering. Schechner claims that restored behavior is not a discovery process, but rather a process of research and fieldwork, and of rehearsals in the most profound sense. Theater, for him, is the art of specializing in the concrete techniques of restoring behavior. Critical ontology and conversation dialogues also aim at producing conversational dialogues that restore behavior, and create differences and possibilities.

Conclusion

One of the objectives of this work is to politicize details and features of everyday discursive practices, and thereby politicize the consciousnesses that are partially reproduced and imperfectly evidenced conversationally. Strategic ingenuity evidences itself in the political economies of space, in the ways space is acquired, defended, traded, and used to enhance the control of scarce resources. Tactical ingenuity evidences itself in the political economies of time, in ways to live temporarily, in the timing of interventions into space, in the styles of making time stand still, accelerate, and decelerate. The art involved is a matter of playing a balance of space and time by being adroit both strategically and tactically. Such is the predicament of making-do, what some refer to as a postmodern world of late consumer capitalism. And such is the paradoxical predicament of conversing: conversing is a discursive performance played in the tension of a present moment that covers a wide variety of possible spaces. Popular culture increasingly requires each of us to live tactically in the forms of contemporaneity and to cultivate alternative aesthetics and spiritualities fited to such conditions. Conversations are the material media through which much of this gets worked out, even if never finally accomplished.

Notes

10. Anita Pomerantz makes a clear distinction between two different frameworks for analyzing conversation as she reviews a collection of conversation analytic studies: the Sequence framework, and the Interacts' World framework. They are two different ways of writing conversation analytic work. The former can be thought of in more structuralist terms whereas the latter makes more sense as phenomenology. The former positions itself outside of the phenomenon and describes its structural features and properties. The latter positions itself within a phenomenon and works to describe it from an interactants' subject position.
11. For a variety of approaches to dialogue and dialogues, some of which is derivative of Bakhtin, see Michael Hardman, The Dialogics of Critique: M. M. Bakhtin & the Theory of Ideology (London: Routledge, 1992); Peter Hitchcock, Dialogues of the


14 Reading both Bourdieu and de Certeau on this matter of time and space is extremely valuable, even if they use strategy in seemingly opposite ways. Later in this essay, I develop de Certeau’s thinking on strategies and tactics for living ordinary and extraordinary everyday lives.


16 The object of Gregory Bateson’s theorizing of play, for example, is this very domain of the meta-communication of the practical knowledge of micropactices that enable subjects to act on the differences between for play for real. See, Gregory Bateson, *Naven* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1936), and *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1972, 159–239).

17 I’m referring here to a kind of “circular organization” that theoretical biologists and cognitive scientists call *autopoiesis*, a term coined to refer to the dynamics of the autonomy proper to living systems, systems that reproduce themselves. Francesco Varela, in *Principles of Biological Autonomy* (New York: Elsevier North Holland, 1979), defines autopoiesis as:

...a network of processes of production (transformation and destruction) of components that produce the components that (1) through their interactions and transformations continuously regenerate and realize the network of processes (relations) that produced them, and (2) constitute it (the machine) as a concrete unity in the space in which they exist by specifying the topological domain of its realization as such a network.


References


brother or his sister's son. The chain of authority, therefore, demands that, sooner or later, a headman's sister's sons will leave their paternal villages and dwell with their maternal uncle. It is easier to do this if a young man is residing with his stepfather, not the father who begat him. Thus divorce works in various ways to reassert the ultimate paramountcy of the maternal line, despite the masculine attempt to preempt the present through virilocality.

It is my purpose to show here how certain entrenched features of a given society's social structure influence both the course of conduct in observable social events and the scenarios of its genres of cultural performance—ranging from ritual to märchen. To complete the simplified picture of Ndembu social structure I should mention, however, that in several books I have tried to work out how stresses between matrilineal succession and other principles and the processes to which they give rise have affected various mundane and ritual phenomena, processes, and institutions of Ndembu society—such as village size, composition, mobility, fission, marital stability, relations between and within genealogical generations, the role of the many cult associations in countering village cleavages, lineage and similarities, the strong masculine stress on complex hunting and circumcision rites in a system ultimately dependent on women's agricultural and food-processing activities, and the patterning of witchcraft accusations, which are often directed against matrilineal rivals for office or prestige.

I suppose that if I had confined myself to the analysis of numerical data, guided by knowledge of salient kinship principles and political, legal, and economic contexts, I would have construed an anthropological narrative informed by what Hayden White in *Metahistory* surely would have called "mechanistic" presuppositions. Indeed, this was standard practice in the British school of structuralist-functionalist anthropology in which I was nurtured in the late forties and early fifties. One of its main aims was to exhibit the laws of structure and process which, in a given preliterate society, determine the specific configurations of relationships and institutions detectable by trained observation. The ultimate intent of this school, as formulated by Radcliffe-Brown, was to seek out by the comparative method general laws by successive approximation. Each specific ethnography sought for general principles that appeared in the study of a single society. In other words, idiosyncratic procedures, detailed descriptions of what I actually observed or learned from informants, were pressed into the service of the development of laws. Hypotheses developing out of idiographic research were tested hypothetically, that is, for the purpose of formulating general sociological laws.

There are, of course, many virtues in this approach. My figures did give me some measure of the relative importance of the principles on which Ndembu villages are socially constructed. They pointed to trends of individual and corporate spatial mobility. They indicated how in some areas particularly exposed to the modern cash economy a smaller type of residential unit based
on the polygynous family, called a "farm," was replacing the traditional circular village whose nucleus was a sibling group of matrilineal kin. The method I used was also employed by colleagues working from the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute and facilitated controlled comparison of village structures belonging to different central African societies. Differences of kinship and local structures were compared with differences in such variables as the divorce rate, the amount of bride wealth, the mode of subsistence, and so forth.

Nevertheless, this approach has its limitations. As George Spindler has argued, "the ethnography of ethnography may be distorted by the nomothetic orientation of the ethnographer." In other words, the general theory you take into the field leads you to select certain data for attention but blinds you to other, perhaps more important, data for the understanding of the people studied. As I came to know Ndembu well both in stressful and uneventful times as "men and women alive" (to paraphrase D. H. Lawrence), I became increasingly aware of this limitation. Long before I had read a word of Wilhelm Dilthey's I had shared his notion that "structures of experience" are fundamental units in the study of human action. Such structures are irrefragably threelfold, being at once cognitive, conative, and affective. Each of these terms is itself, of course, a shorthand for a range of processes and capacities.

Perhaps this view was influenced by Edward Sapir's celebrated essay "The Emergence of the Concept of Personality in a Study of Cultures," in which he wrote: "In spite of the oft asserted impersonality of culture, a humble truth remains that vast reaches of culture, far from being 'carried' by a community or group, ... are discoverable only as the peculiar property of certain individuals, who cannot but give these cultural goods the impress of their own personality." Not only that but persons will, desire, and feel, as well as think, and their desires and feelings impregnate their thoughts and influence their intentions. Sapir assailed cultural overdeterminism as a refined cognitive construct of the anthropologist, whose "impersonalized" culture is hardly more than "an assembly or mass of loosely overlapping ideal[s] and action systems which, through verbal habit, can be made to assume the appearance of a closed system of behavior" (p. 412), a position corresponding to some extent with White's incipient paradigm—as prestigious among American anthropologists as functionalism was among their British contemporaries. It became clear to me that an "anthropology of experience" would have to take into account the psychological properties of individuals as well as the culture which, as Sapir insists, is "never given" to each individual but, rather, "gropingly discovered," and, I would add, some parts of it quite late in life. We never cease to learn our own culture, which is always changing, let alone other cultures.

It also became clear that among the many tasks of the anthropologist lay the duty not only to make structuralist and functionalist analyses of statistical and textual data (censuses and myths) but also to pretend experiential structures in the actual processes of social life. Here my own approach, and that of many other anthropologists, conforms to some extent with White's contextualist model. White, using Stephen Pepper's term, sees contextualism as the isolation of some element of the historical field (or, in the anthropological instance, the sociocultural field) as the subject of study, "whether the element be as large as 'the French Revolution' or as small as one day in the life of a specific person." The investigator then proceeds to pick out the 'threads' that link the event to be explained to different areas of the context. The threads are identified and traced outward, into the circumambient natural and social space within which the event occurred, and both backward in time, in order to determine the 'origins' of the event, and forward in time, in order to determine its 'impact' and 'influence' on subsequent events. This tracing operation ends at the point at which the 'threads' either disappear into the 'context' of some other 'event' or converge to cause the occurrence of some new 'event.' The impetus is not to integrate all the events and trends that might be identified in the whole historical field, but rather to link them together in a chain of provisional and restricted characterizations of finite provinces of manifestly 'significant' occurrence (White, pp. 18-19).

It is interesting to pause here for a moment and compare how Sapir and White use the metaphor of "thread." For Sapir points out that the "purely formalized and logically developed schemes" we call ethnographies do not explain behavior until "the threads of symbolism or implication [that] connect patterns or parts of patterns with others of an entirely different formal aspect" are discovered (p. 412; my emphasis). For Sapir these threads are internal to the sociocultural space studied and relate to the personality and temperament of individuals, while for White and Pepper threads describe the nature of connections between an "element" or "event" and its significant enironing sociocultural field viewed, according to White, "synchronically" or "structurally" (p. 19). I find fascinating Sapir's notion that his threads are symbolic and implicating: for symbols, the spawn of such tropes as arise in the interaction of men and women alive, metaphors, synecdoches, metonymies new minted in crises, so to speak, really do come to serve as semiotic connects among the levels and parts of a system of action and between that system and its significant environment. We have been neglecting the role of symbols in establishing connexity between the different levels of a narrative structure.

But I am anticipating. I shall shortly call attention to a kind or species of "element of the historical field" or "event," in White's terminology, which is cross-culturally isolable and which exhibits, if it is allowed to come to full term, a characteristic processual structure, a structure that holds firm whether one is considering a macro- or microhistorical event of this type. Before I discuss this unit, which I consider to be the social ground of many types of "narrative" and which I call "social drama," I must first mention for the benefit of my nonanthropological readers another useful distinction made by anthropologists, that between "emic" and "etic" perspectives; these terms
are derived from the distinction made by linguists between "phonemic" and "phonetic," the former being the study of sounds recognized as distinct within a specific language, the latter being the cross-lingual study of distinguishable human sound units. Kenneth Pike, who propounded this dichotomy, should be allowed to formulate it: "Descriptions of analyses from the etic standpoint are 'alien,' with criteria external to the system. Emic descriptions provide a horizontal view (or an "inside view") in Hoekk's terms), with criteria chosen from within the system. They represent to us the view of one familiar with this system and who knows how to function within itself." From this standpoint all four of the strategies of explanation proposed by White drawing on Pepper—formism, organicism, mechanism, and contextualism—would produce etic narratives if they were used to provide accounts of societies outside that Western cultural tradition generatively triangulated by the thinking of Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome and continued in the philosophical, literary, and social-scientific traditions of Europe, North America, and their cultural offshoots. Indeed, members of such societies (the so-called Third World) have protested, as recently as 1973, that Western attempts to explain their cultures amount to no more than "cognitive ethnocentrism," diminishing their contribution to the global human reflexivity which modern communicational and informational systems are now making possible, if hardly easy. In other words, what we in the West consider etic, that is, "non-nomothetic," "non-culture-bound," "scientific," "objective," they are coming to regard as emic.

There are then both etic and emic ways of regarding narrative. An anthropologist, embedded in the life of an at-first-wholly-other culture and separated, save in memory, from his own, has to come to terms with that which invests and invades him. The situation is odd enough. He is tossed into the ongoing life of a parcel of people who not only speak a different language but also classify what we would call "social reality" in ways that are at first quite unexpected. He is compelled to learn, however haltingly, the criteria which provide the "inside view."

I am aware of White's "theory of the historical work" and that it bears importantly upon how to write ethnographies as well as histories; but I am also aware that any discussion of the role of narrative in other cultures requires that an emic description of narrative be made. For the anthropologist's work is deeply involved in what we might call "tales," "stories," "folktales," "histories," "gossip," and "informants' accounts"—types of narrative for which there may be many native names, not all of which coincide with our terms. Indeed, Max Gluckman has commented that the very term "anthropologist" means in Greek "one who talks about men," in other words, a "gossip." In our culture we have many ways of talking about men, descriptive and analytical, formal and informal, traditional and open-ended. Since ours is a literate culture, characterized by a refined division of cultural labor, we have devised numerous specialized genres by means of which we scan, describe, and interpret our behavior toward one another. But the impulse to talk about one another in different ways, in terms of different qualities and levels of mutual consciousness, precedes literacy in all human communities. All human acts and institutions are enveloped, as Clifford Geertz might say, in webs of interpretive words. Also, of course, we mime and dance with one another—we have webs of interpretive nonverbal symbols. And we play one another—beginning as children—and continue through life to learn new roles and the subcultures of higher statuses to which we aspire, partly seriously, partly ironically.

Ndembu make a distinction, akin to White's division between "chronicle" and "story" as levels of conceptualization in Western culture, between nsung'u and kaheka. Nsung'u, chronicle, may refer, for example, to a purportedly factual record of the migration of the Lunda chiefs and their followers from the Katanga region of Zaire on the Nkalanyi River, to their encounter with the autochthonous Mbwela or Lukolwe peoples in Mwininga District, to battles and marriages between Lunda and Mbwela, to the establishment of Ndembu-Lunda chieftoms, to the order of chiefly incumbents down to the present, to the raids of Lvale and Tchokwe in the nineteenth century to secure indentured labor for the Portuguese in San Tome long after the formal abolition of the slave trade, to the coming of the missionaries, followed by the British South Africa Company, and finally to British colonial rule. Nsung'u may also denote an autobiographical account, a personal reminiscence, or an eyewitness report of yesterday's interesting happening. Nsung'u, like chronicle, in White's words, arranges "the events to be dealt with in the temporal order of their occurrence" (p. 5). Just as a chronicle becomes a "story," in White's usage, "by the further arrangement of the events into the components of a 'spectacle' or process of happening, which is thought to possess a discernible beginning, middle, and end ... in terms of inaugural motifs ... terminating motifs ... and transitional motifs," so nsung'u becomes kaheka.

The term kaheka covers a range of tales which our folklorists would no doubt sort out into a number of etic types: myth, folktale, Märchen, legend, ballad, folk epic, and the like. Their distinctive feature is that they are partly told, partly sung. At key points in the narration the audience joins in a sung refrain, breaking the spoken sequence. It depends on the context of the situation and the mode of framing whether a given set of events is regarded as nsung'u or kaheka. Take, for example, the series of tales about the ancient Lunda chief Yala Mwaku, his daughter Lwezi Ankonde, her lover the Luban hunter-prince Chibinda Ilung'a, and her brothers Ching'uli and Chinymao: their loves, hates, conflicts, and reconciliations led, on the one hand, to the establishment of the Lunda nation and, on the other, to the ascension and diaspora of dissident Lunda groups, thereby spreading knowledge of central-
this chronicle may be transformed into stories, that is, *tshukar* (plural of *kaheka*), and told by old women to groups of children huddled near the kitchen fire during the cold season.

A particular favorite story, analyzed recently by the distinguished Belgian structuralist Luc de Heusch, relates how the drunken king Yala Mwaku was derided and beaten by his sons but cared for tenderly by his daughter Lweji Ankonde, whom he rewarded by passing on to her, on his death, the royal bracelet, the *lukana* (made of human genitalia for the magical maintenance of the fertility of humans, animals, and crops in the whole kingdom), thus rendering her the legitimate monarch of the Lunda. Another story tells how the young queen is informed by her maidens that a handsome young hunter, Chibinda, having slain a waterbuck, had camped with his companions on the far side of the Nkalanye River. She summons him to her presence, and the two fall in love at once and talk for many hours in a grove of trees (where today a sacred fire, the center of an extensive pilgrimage, burns constantly). She learns that he is the youngest son of a great Luba chief but that he prefers the free life of a forest hunter to the court. Nevertheless, he marries Lweji out of love and, in time, receives from her the *lukana*—she has to go into seclusion during menstruation and hands Chibinda the bracelet lest it become polluted—making him the ruler of the Lunda nation. Lweji’s turbulent brothers refuse to recognize him and lead their people away to carve out new kingdoms for themselves and consequently spread the format of political centralization among stateless societies.

Jan Vansina, the noted Belgian ethnologist, has discussed the relationship between this foundation narrative and the political structures of the many central African societies who claim that they “came from Mwantiyanwa,” as the new dynasty came to call itself. He finds in this corpus of stories more than myth, although Heusch has illuminatingly treated it as such: Vansina finds clues to historical affinities between the scattered societies who assert Lunda origin—indications corroborated by other types of evidence, linguistic, archaeological, and cultural. As in other cultures, the same events may be framed as *nsang’u* or *kaheka*, chronicle or story, often according to their nodal location in the life process of the group or community that recounts them. It all depends where and when and by whom they are told. Thus, for some purposes the foundation tales of Yala Mwaku and Lweji are treated as chronicle to advance a political claim, for example, a claim to “Lundahood,” as Ian Cunnison calls their assertion of descent from prestigious migrants. For the purpose of entertainment, the same tales are defined as stories, with many rhetorical touches and flourishes as well as songs inserted as evocative embellishment. Incidents may even be cited during processes of litigation to legitimate or reinforce the claims of a plaintiff in a dispute over boundaries or succession to office.

For the anthropologist, however, who is concerned with the study of social action and social process, it is not these formal genres of tale-telling and

talebearing that most grip his attention but, rather, as we have seen, what we would call gossip, talk and rumors about the private affairs of others, what the Ndembu and their neighbors, the Luvale, call *kudiyong aha*, related to the verb *kuvong’a*, “to crowd together,” for much gossip takes place in the central, walled shelter of traditional villages, where the circumcised, hence socially “mature,” males gather to discuss community affairs and hear the “news” from wayfarers of other communities. Frank Kermode once defined the novel as consisting of two components: scandal and myth. Certainly gossip, which includes scandal, is one of the perennial sources of cultural genres. Gossip does not occur in a vacuum among the Ndembu; it is almost always “plugged in” to social drama.

Although it might be argued that the social drama is a story in White’s sense, in that it has discernible inaugural, transitional, and terminal motifs, that is, a beginning, a middle, and an end, my observations convince me that it is, indeed, a spontaneous unit of social process and a fact of everyone’s experience in every human society. My hypothesis, based on repeated observations of such processual units in a range of sociocultural systems and on my reading in ethnography and history, is that social dramas, “dramas of living,” as Kenneth Burke calls them, can be aptly studied as having four phases. These I label breach, crisis, redress, and either reintegation or recognition of schism. Social dramas occur within groups of persons who share values and interests and who have a real or alleged common history. The main actors are persons for whom the group has a high value priority. Most of us have what I call our “star” group or groups to which we owe our deepest loyalty and whose fate is for us of the greatest personal concern. It is the one with which a person identifies most deeply and in which he finds fulfillment of his major social and personal desires. We are all members of many groups, formal or informal, from the family to the nation or some international religious or political institution. Each person makes his or her own subjective evaluation of the group’s respective worth: some are “clear” to one, others it is one’s “duty to defend,” and so on. Some tragic situations arise from conflicts of loyalty to different star groups.

There is no objective rank order in any culture for such groups. I have known academic colleagues whose supreme star group, believe it or not, was a particular faculty administrative committee and whose families and recreational groups ranked much lower, others whose love and loyalty were toward the local philatelic society. In every culture one is obliged to belong to certain groups, usually institutionalized ones—family, age-set, school, firm, professional association, and the like. But such groups are not necessarily one’s beloved star groups. It is in one’s star group that one looks most for love, recognition, prestige, office, and other tangible and intangible benefits and rewards. In it one achieves self-respect and a sense of belonging with others for whom one has respect. Now every objective group has some members who see it as their star group, while others may regard it with indifference,
even dislike. Relations among the star groupers are often highly ambivalent, resembling those among members of an elementary family for which, perhaps, the star group is an adult substitute. They recognize one another's common attachment to the group but are jealous of one another over the relative intensity of that attachment or the esteem in which another member is held by the group as a whole. They may contend with each other for the incumbency of high office in the group, not merely to seek power but out of the conviction that they, and they alone, really understand the nature and value of the group and can altruistically advance its interests. In other words, we find symbolic equivalents of sibling rivalry and parent-child competition among star groupers.

In several books I have discussed social dramas at some length, both in small-scale societies, such as Ndembu, at the village level and in complex nations, as in the power struggle between Henry II of England and Archbishop Thomas Becket. Whether it is a large affair, like the Dreyfus affair or Watergate, or a struggle for village headmanship, a social drama first manifests itself as the breach of a norm the infractions of a rule of morality, law, custom, or etiquette, in some public arena. This breach is seen as the expression of a deeper division of interests and loyalties than appears on the surface. The incident of breach may be deliberately, even calculatedly, contrived by a person or party disposed to demonstrate or challenge entrenched authority—for example, the Boston Tea Party—or emerge from a scene of heated feelings. Once visible, it can hardly be revoked. Whatever may be the case, a mounting crisis follows, a momentous juncture or turning point in the relations between components of a social field—at which seeming peace becomes overt conflict and covert antagonisms become visible. Sides are taken, factions are formed, and unless the conflict can be sealed off quickly within a limited area of social interaction, there is a tendency for the breach to widen and spread until it coincides with some dominant cleavage in the widest set of relevant social relations to which the parties in conflict belong. We have seen this process at work in the Iranian crisis following the breach precipitated by the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Teheran. During the phase of crisis, the pattern of current factional struggle within the relevant social group—be it village or world community—is exposed; and beneath it there becomes slowly visible the less plastic, more durable, but nevertheless gradually changing basic social structure, made up of relations which are relatively constant and consistent.

I found that among the Ndembu, for example, prolonged social dramas always revealed the related sets of oppositions that give Ndembu social structure its tensile character: matriliney versus virilocality; the ambitious individual versus the wider interlinking of matrilineal kin; the elementary family versus the uterine sibling group (children of one mother); the forwardness of youth versus the domineering elders; status-seeking versus responsibility; sorcery (wuluji) that is, hostile feelings, grudges, and intrigues—versus friendly respect and generosity toward others. In the Iranian crisis the divisions and coalitions of interests have become publicly visible, some of which are surprising and revelatory. Crisis constitutes many levels in all cultures. In social dramas, false friendship is winnowed from true communality of interests; the limits of consensus are reached and realized; real power emerges from behind the façade of authority.

In order to limit the contagious spread of breach, certain adjustable and reducible mechanisms, informal and formal, are brought into operation by leading members of the disturbed group. These mechanisms vary in character with such factors as the depth and significance of the breach, the social inclusiveness of the crisis, the nature of the social group within which the breach took place, and the group's degree of autonomy in regard to wider systems of social relations. The mechanisms may range from personal advice and informal arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery and, to resolve certain kinds of crises, to the performance of public ritual. Such ritual involves a literal or moral "sacrifice," that is, a victim as scapegoat is offered for the group's "sin" of repressive violence.

The final phase consists either in the reintegration of the disturbed social group—though the scope and range of its relational field will have altered, the number of its parts will be different, and their size and influence will have changed—or the social recognition of irreparable breach between the contesting parties, sometimes leading to their spatial separation. This may be on the scale of the many exodus of history or merely a move of disgruntled villagers to a spot a few miles away. This phase, too, may be registered by a public ceremony or ritual, indicating reconciliation or permanent cleavage between the involved parties.

I am well aware that the social drama is an agonistic model drawn after a recurrent agonistic situation, and I make no claim that there are no other types of processual units. Philip Gulliver, for example, studying another central African society, the Ndendeulé of Tanzania, directs attention to the cumulative effect of an endless series of minor incidents, cases, and events that might be quite as significant in affecting and changing social relationships as the more overtly dramatic encounters. Raymond Firth discusses "harmonic" processual units—which I call "social enterprises"—that have recognizable phase structure—which stress "the process of ordering of action and of relations in reference to given social ends" and are often economic in type. Quite often, though, such enterprises—as in the case of urban renewal in America—become social dramas if there is resistance to the aims of their instigators. The resisters perceive the inauguration of the enterprise as breach, not progress. Nor does the course of a social drama, like "true love," always "run smooth." Redressive procedures may break down, with reversion to crisis. Traditional machinery of reconciliation or coercion may prove inadequate to cope with new types of issues and problems and new roles and statuses. And, of course, reconciliation may only seem to have been achieved.
in phase four, with real conflicts glossed over but not resolved. Moreover, at certain historical junctures, in large-scale complex societies, redress may be through rebellion, or even revolution, if the societal value-consensus has broken down and new unprecedented roles, relationships, and classes have emerged.

Nevertheless, I would insist in arguing that the social drama is a well-nigh universal processual form and represents a perpetual challenge to all aspirations to perfection in social and political organization. In some cultures its profile is clear-cut and its style abrasive; in others, agonistic (contestative) action may be muted or deflected by elaborate codes of etiquette. In yet others conflict may be-to cite Richard Antoun on Arab village politics in Jordan—"low-key," eschewing direct confrontation and encounter in its style. Social dramas are in large measure political processes, that is, they involve competition for scarce ends-power, dignity, prestige, honor, purity-by particular means and by the utilization of resources that are also scarce-goods, territory, money, men and women. Ends, means, and resources are caught up in an interdependent feedback process. Some kinds of resources, for example, land and money, may be converted into other kinds, for instance, honor and prestige (which are simultaneously the needs sought). Or they may be employed to stigmatize rivals and deny them these ends. The political aspect of social dramas is dominated by star groupers; they are the main protagonists, the leaders of factions, the defenders of the faith, the revolutionary vanguard, the arch-reformers. They are the ones who develop to an art the rhetoric of persuasion and influence, who know how and when to apply pressure and force, and who are most sensitive to the factors of legitimacy. In phase three, redress, it is the star groupers who manipulate the machinery of redress, the law courts, the procedures of divination and ritual, and impose sanctions on those adjudged to have precipitated crisis, just as it may well be disgruntled or dissident star groupers who lead rebellions and provoke the initial breach.

The fact that a social drama, as I have analyzed its form, closely corresponds to Aristotle's description of tragedy in the Poetics—in that it is "the imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude...having a beginning, a middle, and an end"—is not, I repeat, because I have tried inappropriately to impose an atelic Western model of stage action upon the conduct of an African village society but because there is an interdependent, perhaps dialectic, relationship between social dramas and genres of cultural performance in perhaps all societies. Life, after all, is as much an imitation of art as the reverse. Those who, as children in Ndembu society, have listened to innumerable stories about Yula Mwaku and Lweji Ankonde know all about inaugural motifs—"when the king was drunk and helpless, his sons beat and reviled him"—transitional motifs—"his daughter found him near death and comforted and tended him"—and terminal motifs—"the king gave his daughter the ikumu and excluded his sons from the royal succession." When these same Ndembu, now full-grown, wish to provoke a breach or to claim that some party has crucially disturbed the placid social order, they have a frame available to "inaugurate" a social drama, with a repertoire of "transitional" and "ending" motifs to continue the framing process and channel the subsequent agonistic developments. The story itself still makes important points about family relationships, and about the stresses between sex and age roles, and appears to be an emic generalization, clothed in metaphor and involving projection, of innumerable specific social dramas generated by these structural tensions; so does the story feed back into the social process, providing it with a rhetoric, a mode of emplotment, and a meaning. Some genres, particularly the epic, serve as paradigms which inform the action of important political leaders-star groupers of encompassing groups such as church or state—giving them style, direction, and sometimes compelling them subliminally to follow in major public crises a certain course of action, thus emplotting their lives.

I tried to show in chapter 2 of Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors how Thomas Becket, after his antagonistic confrontation with both Henry II and the bench of bishops at the council of Northampton, seemed to have been almost "taken over," "possessed" by the action-paradigm provided by the via crucis in Christian belief and ritual, sealing his love-hate relationship with Henry in the conjoined image of martyr and martyrizer—and giving rise to a subsequent host of narratives and aesthetic dramas. By paradigm I do not mean a system of univocal concepts, logically arrayed. I do not mean either a stereotyped set of guidelines for ethical, aesthetic, or conventional action. A paradigm of this sort goes beyond the cognitive and even the moral to the existential domain; and in so doing becomes clothed with allusiveness, implications, and metaphor—for in the stress of action firm definitional outlines become blurred by the encounter of emotionally charged wills. Paradigms of this type, cultural root paradigms, so to speak, reach down to irreducible life stances of individuals, passing beneath consciousprehension to a fiduciary hold on what they sense to be axiomatic values, matters literally of life and death.

Richard Schechner has recently sought to express the relationship between social drama and aesthetic or staged drama in the form of a figure eight placed in a horizontal position and then bisected through both loops.
The left loop represents the social drama; above the line is the overt drama, below it, the implicit rhetorical structure; the right loop represents stage drama; above the line is the manifest performance, below it, the implicit social process, with its structural contradictions. Arrows pointing from left to right represent the course of action. They follow the phases of the social drama above the line in the left loop, descending to cross into the lower half of the right loop where they represent the hidden social infrastructures. The arrows then ascend and, moving now from right to left, pass through the successive phases of a generalized stage drama. At the point of intersection between the two loops, they descend once more to form the hidden aesthetic model underpinning, so to speak, of the overt social drama. This model, though effective, is somewhat equilibrist in its implications, for my taste, and suggests cyclical rather than linear movement. But it has the merit of pointing up the dynamic relation between social drama and expressive cultural genres.

The social drama of Watergate is full of "stage business" during every phase, from the Guy Fawkes-like conspiratorial atmosphere of the breach episode, signaled by the finding of the incriminating tape on the door, through the tough-minded fiction of the cover-up and all that went into the crisis phase of investigation, with its Deep Throat revelations and combinations of high-minded principle and low-minded political opportunism. The repressive phase was less implicitly scripted by theatrical and fictional models. I need not describe the hearings and the Saturday Night Massacre. Now we have plays, films, and novels about Watergate and its natural dramatis personae, which are shaped—to use the aesthetic language of social science—in accord with the structure and properties of the social field environing and penetrating their authors at the time of writing. At the deepest level we may anticipate an interpretive shift toward accommodation of the most acceptable texts to some deeply entrenched paradigm of Americana. The American "myth," as Sausten Bercovitch has recently argued in The American Jeremiad, periodically produces "jeremiads" (polemical homilies in various cultural genres) against declension into ways of life which reek of the static, corrupt, hierarchical Old World and obviate movement toward an ever receding but ultimately reachable promised land to be carved from some unsullied wilderness, where an ideal, prosperous democracy can thrive "under God." Watergate is a superb target for the American jeremiad. Paradoxically, many of its personages have become celebrities, but this, after all, may not be so surprising. Pontius Pilate was canonized by the Ethiopian church, and if Dean and Ehrlichman will never perhaps be seen as saints, their mere participation in a drama which activated a major cultural paradigm has conferred on them an ambiguous eminence they might otherwise have never achieved.

The winners of social dramas positively require cultural performances to continue to legitimate their success. And such dramas generate their "symbolic types": traitors, renegades, villains, martyrs, heroes, faithfuls, infidels, deceivers, scapegoats. Just to be in the cast of a narrated drama which comes to be taken as exemplary or paradigmatic is some assurance of social immortality.

It is the third phase of a social drama, redress, that has most to do with the genesis and sustentation of cultural genres, both "high" and "folk," oral and literate. In Schism and Continuity, I argued that in Ndembu society when conflict emerges from the opposed interests and claims of protagonists acting under a single social principle, say, descent from a common ancesstress, judicial institutions can be invoked to meet the crisis, for a rational attempt can be made to adjust claims that are similarly based. But when claims are advanced under different social principles, which are inconsistent with one another even to the point of mutual contradiction, there can be no rational settlement. Here Ndembu have recourse to divination of sorcery or ancestral wrath to account for misfortune, illness, or death occurring before or during the social drama. Ultimately, rituals of reconciliation may be performed, which, in their verbal and nonverbal symbolism, reassert and reanimate the over-arching values shared by all Ndembu, despite conflicts of norms and interests on the ground level.

Whether juridical or ritual processes of redress are invoked against mounting crises, the result is an increase in what one might call social or plural reflexivity, the ways in which a group tries to scrutinize, portray, understand, and then act on itself. Barbara Myerhoff has recently written of cultural performances in Life History among the Elderly: Performance, Visibility, and Remembering that they are "reflective in the sense of showing ourselves to ourselves. They are also capable of being reflective, arousing consciousness of ourselves as we see ourselves. As heroes in our own dramas, we are made self-aware, conscious of our consciousness. At once actor and audience, we may then come into the fullness of our human capability—and perhaps human desire to watch ourselves and enjoy knowing that we know." I tend to regard the social drama in its full formal development, its full phase structure, as a process of converting particular values and ends, distributed over a range of actors, into a system (which is always temporary and provisional) of shared or consensual meaning. It has not yet reached the stage of Myerhoff's enjoying that we know ourselves, but it is a step in that direction. I am inclined to agree with Diltzy that meaning (Bedeutung) arises in memory, in cognition of the past, and is concerned with negotiation about the "fit" between past and present; and value (Wert) inheres in the affective enjoyment of the present, while the category of end (Zweck) or good (Gut) arises from volition, the power or faculty of using the will, which refers to the future. The redressive phase, in which feedback on crisis is provided by the scanning devices of law (secular ritual) and religious ritual, is a liminal time, set apart from the ongoing business of quotidian life, when an interpretation (Bedeutung) is constructed to give the appearance of sense and order to the events leading up to and constituting the crisis.
It is only the category of meaning, so Dilthey tells us, that enables us to conceive of an intrinsic affinity between the successive events of life or, one might add, of a social drama. In the repressive phase, the meaning of the social life informs the apprehension of itself, while the object to be apprehended enters into and reshapes the apprehending subject. Pure anthropological functionalism, whose aim is to state the conditions of social equilibrium among the components of a social system at a given time, cannot deal with meaning, for meaning always involves retrospection and reflexivity, a past, a history. Meaning is the only category which grasps the full relation of the part to the whole in life, for value, being dominantly affective, belongs essentially to an experience in a conscious present. Such conscious presents, regarded purely as present moments, totally involve the experiencer, even to the extent that these moments have no intrinsic connection with one another, at least of a systematic, cognitive kind. They stand behind one another in temporal sequence, and, while they may be compared as “values,” that is, as having the same epistemological status, they do not form anything like a coherent whole, for they are essentially momentary, transient, insofar as they are values alone; if they are interconnected, the figurations that bind them belong to another category—that of meaning, reflexivity arrived at. In stage drama, values would be the province of actors, meaning that of the producer. Reflexivity articulates experience. Dilthey eloquently hits off the unarticulated quality of value: “From the standpoint of value, life appears as an infinite assortment of positive and negative existence-values. It is like a chaos of harmonies and discords. Each of these is a tone-structure which fills a present; but they have no musical relation to one another” (my emphasis). To establish such a musical relation, the liminal reflexivity of the repressive phase is necessary if a crisis is to be rendered meaningful. Since crises are “like a chaos of harmonies and discords,” some modern modalities of music try to replicate this chaos and let it stand as it is; for the meaning—figurations inherited from the past—no longer bind. Here we must return to narrative.

For both legal and ritual procedures generate narratives from the brute facts, the mere empirical coexistence of experiences, and endeavor to lay hold of the factors making for integration in a given situation. Meaning is apprehended by looking back over a temporal process: it is generated in the narrative constructed by lawmakers and judges in the process of cross-examination from witnesses’ evidence or by diviners from their intuitions into the responses of their clients as framed by their specific hermeneutic techniques. The meaning of every part of the process is assessed by its contribution to the total result.

It will be noted that my basic social drama model is agonistic, rife with problem and conflict, and this is not merely because it assumes that sociocultural systems are never logical systems or harmonious gestalten but are fraught with structural contradictions and norm-conflicts. The true opposition should not be defined in these “objectivized” terms for it lies between indeterminacy and all modes of determination. Indeterminacy is, so to speak, in the subjunctive mode, since it is that which is not yet settled, concluded, and known. It is all that may be, might be, could be, perhaps even should be. It is that which terrifies in the breach and crisis phases of a social drama. Sally Falk Moore goes so far as to suggest that “the underlying quality of social life should be considered to be one of theoretical absolute indeterminacy.” Social reality is “fluid and indeterminate,” though, for her, “regularizing processes” and “processes of situational adjustment” constantly represent human aspirations to transform social reality into organized or systematic forms. But even where ordering rules and customs are strongly sanctioned, “indeterminacy may be produced and ambiguities within the universe of relatively determinate elements.” Such manipulation is characteristic of breach and crisis. It may also help to resolve crises.

The third phase, repress, reveals that “determining” and “fixing” are indeed processes, not permanent states or givens. These processes proceed by assigning meanings to events and relationships in reflexive narratives. Indeterminacy should not be regarded as the absence of social being; it is not negation, emptiness, privation. Rather, it is potentiality, the possibility of becoming. From this point of view social being is finitude, limitation, constraint. Actually it only exists as a set of cognitive models in actors’ heads or as more or less coherent objectivized doctrines and protocols. Ritual and legal procedures mediate between the formed and the indeterminate. As Moore and Myerhoff argue, “ritual is a declaration of form against indeterminacy, therefore indeterminacy is always present in the background of any analysis of ritual.”

The social drama, then, I regard as the experiential matrix from which the many genres of cultural performance, beginning with repressive ritual and juridical procedures and eventually including oral and literary narrative, have been generated. Breach, crisis, and reintegrative or divisive outcomes provide the content of such later genres, repressive procedures their form. As society complices, as the division of labor produces more specialized and professionalized modalities of sociocultural action, so do the modes of assigning meaning to social dramas multiply—but the drama remains to the last simple and ineradicable, a fact of everyone’s social experience and a significant node in the developmental cycle of all groups that aspire to continuance. The social drama remains humankind’s thorny problem, its undoing worm, its Achilles’ heel—one can only use clichés for such an obvious and familiar pattern of sequentiality. At the same time it is our native way of manifesting ourselves to ourselves and of declaring where power and meaning lie and how they are distributed.

Rites of passage, like social dramas, involve temporal processes and agonistic relations—novices or initiates are separated (sometimes real or symbolic force is used) from a previous social state or status, compelled to remain in seclusion during the liminal phase, submitted to ordeal by initiated seniors or
serves to communicate information about a culture's most cherished values. I find it useful because I like to think of ritual essentially as performance, as enactment, and not primarily as rules or rubrics. The rules frame the ritual process, but the ritual process transcends its frame. A river needs banks or it will be a dangerous flood, but banks without a river epitomize aridity. The term “performance” is, of course, derived from Old English *parfornien*, literally, “to furnish completely or thoroughly.” To perform is thus to bring something about, to consummate something, or to “carry out” a play, order, or project. But in the carrying out, I hold, something new may be generated. The performance transforms itself. True, as I said, the rules may frame the performance, but the flow of action and interaction within that frame may conduce to hitherto unprecedented insights and even generate new symbols and meanings, which may be incorporated into subsequent performances. Traditional framings may have to be reframed—new bottles made for new wine. It is here that I find the notion of orientation to preternatural and invisible beings and powers singularly apposite. For there is indubitable transformative capacity in a well-performed ritual, implying an ingress of power into the initial situation; and “performing well” implies the coinvolvement of the majority of its performers in a self-transcending flow of ritual events. The power may be drawn from the persons of the drama but drawn from their human depths, not entirely from their cognitive, “indicative” hold on cultural skills. Even if a rubrical book exists prescribing the order and character of the performance of the rites, this should be seen as a source of channelings rather than of dictates. The experience of subjective and intersubjective flow in ritual performance, whatever its sociobiological or personological concomitants may be, are often convinces performers that the ritual situation is indeed informed with powers both transcendent and immanent.

Most anthropological definitions of ritual, moreover, including my own earlier attempts, have failed to take into account Arnold van Gennep’s discovery that rituals nearly always “accompany transitions from one situation to another and from one cosmic or social world to another.”

As is well known, van Gennep divides these rituals into rites of separation, threshold rites, and rites of reaggregation, for which he also employs the terms “preliminal,” “liminal,” and “postliminal.” The order in which the ritual events follow one another and must be performed, van Gennep points out, is a religious element of essential importance. To exist at all, writes Nicole Belmont about van Gennep’s notion, “a ritual must first and foremost be inscribed in time and space or, rather, be reinscribed” if it follows “a prior model given in myth.” In other words, performative *sequencing* is intrinsic and should be taken into account in any definition of ritual. Here I would query the formal structuralist implication that sequence is an illusion and all but a permutation and combination of rules and vocabularies already laid down in the deep structures of mind and brain. There is a qualitative distinction between successive stages in social dramas and rites of passage which
renders them irreversible—they make the unidirectional movement transformative. I have written at some length about the threshold or liminal phase of ritual and found it fruitful to extend the notion of liminality as metaphor beyond ritual to other domains of expressive cultural action. But liminality must be taken into account in any serious formulation of ritual as performance, for it is in connection with this phase that emic folk characterizations of ritual lay strongest stress on the transformative action of "invisible or supernatural beings or powers regarded as the first and final causes of all effects." Without taking liminality into account, ritual becomes indistinguishable from "ceremony," "formality," or what Myerhoff and Moore, in their introduction to Secular Ritual, indeed call "secular ritual."

The liminal phase is the essential, antiseismatic component in true ritual, whether it be labeled "religious" or "magical." Ceremony indicates, ritual transforms, and transformation occurs most radically in the ritual "pupation" of liminal seclusion—at least in life-crisis rituals. The public liminality of great seasonal feasts exhibits its fantasies and "transforms" to the eyes of all—and so does postmodern theater, but that is a matter for a different essay.

I have also argued that ritual in its performative plenitude in tribal and many post-tribal cultures is a matrix from which several other genres of cultural performance, including most of those we tend to think of as "aesthetic," have been derived. It is a late modern Western myth, encouraged perhaps by depth psychologists and, lately, by ethnologists, that ritual has the rigid precision characteristics of the "ritualized" behavior of an obsessive neurotic or a territory-marking animal or bird, and it is also encouraged by an early modern Puritan myth that ritual is "merely empty form without true religious content." It is true that rituals may become mere shells or husks at certain historical junctures, but this state of affairs belongs to the senescence or pathology of the ritual process, not to its "normal working." Living ritual may be better likened to art than to neurosis. Ritual is, in its most typical cross-cultural expressions, a synchronizing of many performative genres and is often ordered by a dramatic structure, a plot, frequently involving an act of sacrifice or self-sacrifice, which energizes and gives emotional coloring to the interdependent communicative codes which express in manifold ways the meanings inherent in the dramatic leitmotiv. Insofar as it is "dramatic," ritual contains a distanced and generalized reduplication of the agonistic process of the social drama. Ritual, therefore, is not "threadbare" but "richly textured" by virtue of its various interweavings of the productions of mind and senses.

Participants in the major rituals of vital religions, whether tribal or post-tribal, may be passive and active in turn with regard to the ritual movement, which, as van Gennep and, more recently, Roland Delattre have shown, draws on biological, climatic, and ecological rhythms, as well as on social rhythms, as models for the processual forms it sequentially employs in its episodic structure. All the senses of participants and performers may be engaged: they hear music and prayers, see visual symbols, taste consecrated foods, smell incense, and touch sacred persons and objects. They also have available the kinesthetic forms of dance and gesture and perhaps cultural repertoires of facial expression to bring them into significant performative rapport. I should mention in this connection Judith Lynne Hanna's useful book To Dance Is Human: A Theory of Non-verbal Communication in which she attempts to construct a sociocultural theory of dance. In song, participants merge (and diverge) in other ordered and symbolic ways. Moreover, few rituals are so completely stereotyped that every word, every gesture, every scene is authoritatively prescribed. Most often, invariant phases and episodes are interdigitated with variable passages in which, both at the verbal and nonverbal levels, improvisation may not be merely permitted but required. Like the black and white keys of a piano, like the yin and yang interplay in Chinese religious cosmology and Taoist ritual, constancy and mutability make up, in their contrariety, a total instrument for the expression of human meaning—joyous, sorrowful, and both at once, "woven fine," in William Blake's words. Ritual, in fact, far from being merely formal, or formulaic, is a symphony in more than music. It can be, and often is, a symphony or synesthetic ensemble of expressive cultural genres or a synergy of varied symbolic operations, an opus which unlike "opera" escapes opera's theatricality, though never life's inextricable social drama, by virtue of the seriousness of its ultimate concerns.

The "flat" view of ritual must go. So also must the notion, beloved until recently by functionalist anthropologists, that ritual could be best understood as a set of mechanisms for promoting a gross group solidarity, as a "sort of all-purpose social glue," as Robin Horton characterized this position; its symbols are not merely "reflections or expressions of components of social structure." Ritual, in its full performative flow, is not only many-leveled, "differentiated," but also capable, under conditions of societal change, of creative modification on all or any of its levels. Since it is tacitly held to communicate the deepest values of the group regularly performing it, it has a "paradigmatic" function, in both of the senses argued for by Geertz. As a "model for," ritual can anticipate, even generate, change, as a "model of," it may inscribe order in the minds, hearts, and wills of participants.

Ritual, in other words, is not only complex and many-layered; it has an abyss in it and, indeed, it is an effort to make meaningful the dialectical relation of what the Silesian mystic Jakob Boehme, following Meister Eckhart, called "Ground and Unergound," "Byss and Abyss" (= the Greek a-basis, "the void," 0[?], from a ["without"] and the Ionic variant of the Attic archos, 0[?], meaning "bottom" or, better, "depth" [finite], especially something less than the "sea." So "byss" is deep but "abyss" is beyond all depth). Many definitions of ritual contain the notion of "depth" but few of "infinite" depth. In other words, such definitions are concerned with finite structural depth but not with infinite "antistructural" depth. A homelier analogy, drawn from linguistics, would be to say that the passage form of ritual, as elicited by van Gennep, postulates a unidirectional move from the "indicative" mood of cultural process through
cultural "subjunctive" mood back to the "indicative" mood, though this recovered mood has now been tempered, even transformed, by immersion in subjunctivity; this process roughly corresponds with van Gennep's prelimin, liminal, and postliminal phases.

In preliminial rites of separation the initiand is moved from the indicative quotidian social structure into the subjunctive antistructure of the liminal process and is then returned, transformed by liminal experiences, by the rites of reintegration to social structural participation in the indicative mood. The subjunctive, according to Webster's Dictionary, is always concerned with "wish, desire, possibility, or hypothesis"; it is a world of "as if," ranging from scientific hypothesis to festive fantasy. It is "if it were so," not "it is so." The indicative prevails in the world of the West we call "actual fact," though this definition can range from a close scientific inquiry into how a situation, event, or agent produces an effect or result to a layperson's description of the characteristics of ordinary good sense or sound practical judgment.

Moore and Myerhoff, in Secular Ritual, did not use this pair of terms, "subjunctive" and "indicative," but, rather, saw social process as moving "between the formed and the indeterminate" (p. 17). They are, however, mostly discussing "ceremony" or "secular ritual," not pure ritual. I agree with them, as I said earlier, that "all collective ceremony can be interpreted as a cultural statement about cultural order as against a cultural void" (p. 16) and that "ceremony is a declaration against indeterminacy. Through form and formality it celebrates man-made meaning, the culturally determinate, the regulated, the named, and the explained. It banishes from consideration the basic questions raised by the made-upness of culture, its malleability and alterability. . . . [Every ceremony] seeks to state that the cosmos and social world, or some particular small part of them are orderly and explicable and for the moment fixed. A ceremony can allude to such propositions and demonstrate them at the same time. . . . Ritual [really "ceremony"] is a declaration of form against indeterminacy, therefore indeterminacy is always present in the background of any analysis of ritual" (pp. 16-17). Roy Rappaport in his recent book, Ecology, Meaning, and Religion, adopts a similar standpoint when he writes: "Liturgical orders [where "sequential dimension," he says, is ritual] bind together disparate entities and processes, and it is this binding together, rather than what is bound together, that is peculiar to them. Liturgical orders are meta-orders, or orders of orders. . . . they mend ever again worlds forever breaking apart under the blows of usage and the slashing distinctions of language." 21

While I consider these to be admirably lucid statements about ceremony, which for me constitutes an impressive institutionalized performance of indicative, normatively structured social reality and is also both a model of and a model for social states and statuses, I do not think such formulations can be applied with equal cogency to ritual. For ritual, as I have said, does not portray a dualistic, almost Manichean, struggle between order and void, cosmos and chaos, form and indeterminacy, with the former always triumphing in the end. It is, rather, a transformative self-immolation of order as presently constituted, even sometimes a voluntary sparagmos or self-dismemberment of order, in the subjunctive depths of liminality. One thinks of Eliade's studies of the "shaman's journey" where the initiand is broken into pieces and then put together again as a being bridging visible and invisible worlds. Only in this way, through destruction and reconstruction, that is, transformation, may an authentic reordering come about. Actuality takes the sacrificial plunge into possibility and emerges as a different kind of actuality. We are not here in the presence of two like but opposed forces as in Manichean myth; rather there is a qualitative incongruence between the contraries engaged, though Jung's daring metaphor of the incestuous marriage of the conscious ego with the unconscious seen as an archetypal mother poses that relationship in terms of paradoxical kinship and affinity. Subjunctivity is fittingly the mother of indicativity, since any actualization is only one among a myriad of possibilities of being, some of which may be actualized in space-time somewhere or somehow else. The hard saying "except ye become as a little child" assumes new meaning. Unless the fixing and ordering processes of the adult, the sociostructural domain, are liminally abandoned and the initiand submits to being broken down to a generalized prima materia, a lump of human clay, he cannot be transformed or reshaped to encounter new experiences.

Ritual's liminal phase, then, approximates to the "subjunctive mood" of sociocultural action. It is, quintessentially, a time and place lodged between all times and spaces defined and governed in any specific biocultural ecosystem (Andrew Vayda, John Bennett, and the like) by the rules of law, politics, and religion and by economic necessity. Here the cognitive schemata that give sense and order to everyday life no longer apply but are, as it were, suspended in ritual symbolism perhaps even shown as destroyed or dissolved. Gods and goddesses of destruction are adored primarily because they personify an essential phase in an irreversible transformative process. All further growth requires the immolation of that which was fundamental to an earlier stage - "lest one good custom should corrupt the world." Clearly, the liminal space-time "pod" created by ritual action, or today by certain kinds of reflexively ritualized theater, is potentially perilous. For it may be opened up to energies of the biopsychical human constitution normally channeled by socialization into status-role activities, to employ the unwieldy jargon of the social sciences. Nevertheless, the danger of the liminal phase concealed and respected by hedging it around by ritual interdictions and tabus, it is also held in most cultures to be regenerative, as I mentioned earlier. For in liminality what is mundanely bound in sociostructural form may be unbound and rebound. Of course, if a society is in hairline-precarious subsistence balance with its environment, we are unlikely to find in its liminal zones very much in the way of experimentation - here one does not fool around with the tried and tested.
But when a "biocultural ecosystem," to use Vayda's term, produces significant surpluses, even if these are merely the seasonal booms of a naturally well-endowed environment, the liminality of its major rituals may well generate cultural surpluses too. One thinks of the Kwait and other northwest Amerindian peoples with their complex iconographies and formerly rich hunting and gathering resources. New meanings and symbols may be introduced or new ways of portraying or embellishing old models for living, and so of renewing interest in them. Ritual liminality, therefore, contains the potentiality for cultural innovation as well as the means for effecting structural transformations within a relatively stable sociocultural system. For many transformations are, of course, within the limits of social structure and have to do with its internal adjustments and external adaptations to environmental changes. Cognitive structuralism can cope best with such relatively cyclical and repetitive societies.

In tribal and agrarian cultures, even relatively complex ones, the innovative potential of ritual liminality seems to have been circumscribed, even dormant, or pressed into the service of maintaining the existing social order. Even so, room for "play," Huizinga's ludic, abounds in many kinds of tribal rituals, even in funerary rituals. There is a play symbol: vehicles, leading to the construction of bizarre masks and costumes from elements of mundane life now conjoined in fantastic ways. There is a play of meanings, involving the reversal of hierarchical orderings of values and social statuses. There is a play with words, resulting in the generation of secret initiatory languages as well as joyful or serious punning. Even the dramatic scenarios which give many rituals their processional armature may be presented as comic rather than serious or tragic. Riddling and joking may take place, even in the liminal seclusion of initiatory lodges. Recent studies of Pueblo ritual clowns recall to us how widespread the clown role is in tribal and archeic religious culture. Liminality is peculiarly conducive to play, where it is not restricted to games and jokes, and extends to the introduction of new forms of symbolic action, such as word games or original masks.

But whatever happened to liminality as societies increased in scale and complexity, particularly Western industrial societies? With deliminalization seems to have gone the powerful play component. Other religions of the Book, too, have tended to stress the solemn at the expense of the festive. Religiously connected fairs, festivals, and carnivals do continue to exist, of course, but not as intrinsic parts of liturgical systems. The great Oriental religions, Hinduism, Taoism, Tantric Buddhism, Shintoism, however, still recognize in many public performances that human ritual can be both earnest and playful. Eros may sport with Thanatos not as a grisly danse macabre but to symbolize a complete human reality and a nature full of oddities.

It would seem that with industrialization, urbanization, spreading literacy, labor migration, specialization, professionalization, bureaucracy, the division of the leisure sphere from the work sphere, the former integrity of the

orchestrated religious gestures that once constituted ritual has burst open and many specialized performative genres have been born from death of that mighty opus deorum hominumque. These genres of industrial leisure would include theater, ballet, opera, film, the novel, printed poetry, the art exhibitions, classical music, rock music, carnivals, processions, folk drama, major sports events, and dozens more. Disintegration has been accompanied by secularization. Traditional religions, their rituals denuded of much of their former symbolic wealth and meaning, hence their transformative capacity, persist in the leisure sphere but have not adapted well to modernity. Modernity means the exhaustion of the indicative mood; but in what thab Hassan has called the "postmodern turn" we may be seeing a re-turn to subjunctivity and a rediscovery of cultural transformative modes, particularly in some forms of theater. Dismembering may be a prelude to remembering, which is not merely restoring some past intact but setting it in living relationship to the present.

There are signs, however, that those nations and cultures which came late to the industrial table, such as Japan, India, the Middle Eastern nations, and much of South and Central America, have succeeded, at least in part, in avoiding the dismemberment of important ritual types; they have incorporated into their ritual performances many of the issues and problems of modern urban living and succeeded in giving them religious meaning. When industrial development came much to the Third World it had to confront powerfully consolidated structures of ritual performative genres. In the West similar institutions had been gradually eroded from within, from the revival of learning to the Industrial Revolution. Here the indicative mood triumphed, and subjunctivity was relegated to a reduced domain where admittedly it shone more brightly in the arts than in religion.

Religion, like art, lives insofar as it is performed, that is, insofar as its rituals are "going concerns." If you wish to say or gild religion, first remove its rituals, its generative and regenerative processes. For religion is not a cognitive system, a set of dogmas; alone: it is meaningful experience and experienced meaning. In ritual one lives through events or through the alchemy of its framings and symbolizations; one relives semi-autogenic events, the deeds and words of prophets and saints or, if these are absent, myths and sacred epics.

If, then, we regard narrative as an emic Western genre or metagenre of expressive culture, it has to be seen as one of the cultural grandchildren or great-grandchildren of "tribal" ritual or juridical process. But if we regard narrative etically, as the supreme instrument for binding the "values" and "goals," in Dilthey's sense of these terms, which motivate human conduct into situational structures of "meaning," then we must concede it to be a universal cultural activity, embedded in the very center of the social drama, itself another cross-cultural and trans-temporal unit of social process.

"Narrate" is from the Latin narrare ("to tell") which is akin to the Latin gnārēs ("knowing," "acquainted with," "expert in") both derivative from the
Indo-European root gnó (“to know”) whence the vast family of words deriving from the Latin cognoscere, including “cognition” itself, and “noun” and “pronoun,” the Greek γνώση, whence gnósis, and the Old English past participle gecnawon, whence the Modern English “know.” Narrative is, it would seem, rather an appropriate term for a reflexive activity which seeks to “know” (even in its ritual aspect, to have gnósis about) antecedent events and the meaning of those events. Drama itself, of course, derived from the Greek δράμα (“to do or act”); hence narrative is knowledge (and for gnósis) emerging from action, that is, experiential knowledge. The redressive phase of social drama frames an endeavor to rearticulate a social group broken by sectional or self-serving interests; in like manner, the narrative component in ritual and legal action attempts to rearticulate opposing values and goals in a meaningful structure, the plot of which makes cultural sense. Where historical life itself fails to make cultural sense in terms that formerly held good, narrative and cultural drama may have the task of püesis, that is, of remaking cultural sense, even when they seem to be dismantling ancient edifices of meaning that can no longer redress our modern “dramas of living”—now evermore on a global and species-threatening scale.

Notes

2 See Hayden White’s Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe (Baltimore, 1973, p. 16; all further references to this work will be cited in the text).
4 Edward Sapir, “The Emergence of the Concept of Personality in a Study of Cultures,” Journal of Social Psychology 5 (1934): 412; all further references to this work will be cited in the text.
7 See Luc de Heusch’s Le Roi ivre; ou L’Origine de l’état (Paris, 1972).
8 See Jan Vansina’s Kingdoms of the Savannas (Madison, Wis., 1966).
9 See my Schism and Continuity in an African Society: The Forest of Symbols; The Drums of Affliction; and Drama, Fields, and Mphatsho: Symbolic Action in Human Society (Ithaca, N.Y., 1974).
10 Richard Schechner, personal communication.
11 See Saevan Bercovitch’s The American Jeremiad (Madison, Wis., 1978).
PERFORMING AS A MORAL ACT
Ethical dimensions of the ethnography of performance

Dwight Conquergood

For the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. . . . The self has to find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities such as the family, the neighborhood, the city, and the tribe. . . . Without those moral particularities to begin from there would never be anywhere to begin; but it is in moving forward from such particularity that the search for the good, for the universal, consists.

—Alasdair Maclntyre

During the crucial days of 1954, when the Senate was pushing for termination of all Indian rights, not one single scholar, anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or economist came forward to support the tribes against the detrimental policy.

—Vine Deloria, Jr.

Ethnographers study the diversity and unity of cultural performance as a universal human resource for deepening and clarifying the meaningfulness of life. They help us see performance with all its moral entailments, not as a flight from lived responsibilities. Henry Glassie represents the contemporary ethnographer’s interest in the interanimation between expressive art and daily life, texts, and contexts:

I begin study with sturdy, fecund totalities created by the people themselves, whole statements, whole songs or houses or events, away from which life expands, toward which life orients in seeking

maturity. I begin with texts, then weave contexts around them to make them meaningful, to make life comprehensible.

Joining other humanists who celebrate the necessary and indissoluble link between art and life, ethnographers present performance as vulnerable and open to dialogue with the world.

The repercussions for “thinking,” which Clifford Geertz attributes to Dewey, can be transposed to a socially committed and humanistic understanding of “performing”:

Since Dewey, it has been much more difficult to regard thinking as an abstention from action, theorizing as an alternative to commitment, and the intellectual life as a kind of secular monasticism, excused from accountability by its sensitivity to the Good.

This view cuts off the safe retreat into aestheticism, art for art’s sake, and brings performance “out into the public world where ethical judgment can get at it.”

Moral and ethical questions get stirred to the surface because ethnographers of performance explode the notion of aesthetic distance. In their fieldwork efforts to grasp the native’s point of view, to understand the human complexities displayed in even the most humble folk performance, ethnographers try to surrender themselves to the centripetal pulls of culture, to get close to the face of humanity where life is not always pretty. Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard wrote that fieldwork “requires a certain kind of character and temperament. . . . To succeed in it a man must be able to abandon himself to native life without reserve.” Instead of worrying about maintaining aesthetic distance, ethnographers try to bring “the enormously distant enormously close without becoming any less far away.”

Moreover, ethnographers work with expressivity, which is inextricable from its human creators. They must work with real people, humankind alive, instead of printed texts. Opening and interpreting lives is very different from opening and closing books. Perhaps that is why ethnographers worry more about acquiring experiential insight than maintaining aesthetic distance. Indeed, they are calling for empathetic performance as a way of intensifying the participative nature of fieldwork, and as a corrective to foreshorten the textual distance that results from writing monographs about the people with whom one lives and studies. When one keeps intellectual, aesthetic, or any other kind of distance from the other, ethnographers worry that other people will be held at an ethical and moral remove as well.

Whatever else one may say about ethnographic fieldwork, Geertz reminds us, “one can hardly claim that it is focused on trivial issues or abstracted from human concerns.” This kind of research “involves direct, intimate and more or less disturbing encounters with the immediate details of contemporary
life.”¹⁵ When ethnographers of performance complement their participant observation fieldwork by actually performing for different audiences the verbal art that they have studied in situ, they expose themselves to double jeopardy. They become keenly aware that performance does not proceed in ideological innocence and axiological purity.

Most researchers who have extended ethnographic fieldwork into public performance will experience resistance and hostility from audiences from time to time.¹⁶ This disquieting antagonism, however, more than the audience approval, signals most clearly that ethnographic performance is a form of conduct deeply enfused in moral matters. I believe that all performance has ethical dimensions, but have found that moral issues of performance are more transparent when the performer attempts to engage ethnic and intercultural texts, particularly those texts outside the canon and derived from fieldwork research.

For three and a half years I have conducted ethnographic fieldwork among Lao and Hmong refugees in Chicago. The performance of their oral narratives is an integral part of my research project and a natural extension of the role of the ethnographer as participant to that of advocate. When working with minority peoples and disenfranchised subcultures, such as refugees, one is frequently propelled into the role of advocate. The ethnographer, an uninvited stranger who depends upon the patient courtesies and openhearted hospitality of the community, is compelled by the laws of reciprocity and human decency to intervene, if he can, in a crisis. Further, the stories my Lao and Hmong friends tell make claims on me. For example, what do you do when the coroner orders an autopsy on a Hmong friend and the family comes to you numb with horror because according to Hmong belief if you cut the skin of a dead person the soul is lost forever, there can be no hope of reincarnation? Moreover, that disembodied soul consigned to perpetual limbo will no doubt come back to haunt and terrorize the family.

I have performed the stories of the refugees for dozens of audiences. In addition to academic audiences, where the performance usually complements a theoretical argument, I want to make about the epistemological potential of performance as a way of deeply sensing the other, I have performed them before many and varied non-academic audiences. I have tried to bring the stories of the Lao and Hmong before social service agencies, high schools where there have been outbreaks of violence against refugee students, businessmen, lawyers, welfare case workers, public school teachers and administrators, religious groups, wealthy women’s clubs, and so forth. Often I have been gratified to see the way the performance of a story can pull an audience into a sense of the other in a rhetorically compelling way. Many times, however, the nonacademic audiences are deeply disturbed by these performances. I have been attacked, not just in the sessions of discussion and response immediately following these performances. One time the anger and hostility was so heated that I was invited back to face the same group two weeks later for a three-hour session that began with attack and abuse but moved gradually, and painfully, to heightened self-reflexivity (for me, as well as them). The last hour we spent talking about ourselves instead of the refugees.

Here is a partial list of the offenses for which I am most frequently condemned. Members of certain religious groups in the culture. My refugee friends are not Christian, and their stories enunciate a cosmology radically different from Judeo-Christian traditions. Fundamentalist Christians perceptively point out that by the very act of collecting, preserving, and performing these stories, I am legitimizing them, offering them as worthy of contemplation for Christians, and encouraging the Lao and Hmong to hold fast to their “heathenism.” Welfare workers despise me for retarding the refugees’ assimilation into mainstream America and thereby making the caseworker’s job more difficult. From their point of view, these people must be Americanized as quickly as possible. They simply must drop their old ways of thinking, “superstitions,” and become American. Developing resettlement programs that involve careful adjustments and blends between the old and the new would require too much time or energy or money. Some social workers and administrators clearly emphasize that videotaping ancient rituals, recording, and performing oral history are not morally neutral activities. Some public school educators interrogate me for performing a respectable tone a Lao legend that explains the lunar eclipse as a frog in the sky who swallows the moon. After one performance I was asked, “How do the Lao react when you tell them they are wrong?” When I replied that I do not “correct” my Lao friends about their understanding of the lunar eclipse, the audience was aghast. Some stunned but some stayed to chastise me. I’ve been haunted for not correcting the grammar and pronunciation of the narrative texts I’ve collected and thus making the people “sound stupid and backward.” Weeks after a performance I received letters from people telling me how angry they were, that they “couldn’t sleep” when thinking about the performance, and that it had given them “bad dreams.”

In another vein, from audiences who are moved by the performance, I am sometimes challenged in an accusing tone, “How can you go back to being a professor at a rich university? Why don’t you spend full time trying to help these people learn English, get jobs, find lost relatives?” In comparison to nonacademic audiences, the criticism from academic audiences pales. Nevertheless, remarks get back to me about how I’m “moving the field off-center.” The ostensibly neutral question, “What does this have to do with oral interpretation of literature?” thinly veils deep misgivings. One specialist in eighteenth-century literature was more direct, and I respect him for that. At a Danforth conference, this senior gentleman rose to his feet after my presentation and in authoritative and measured tones declared: “You have confused art and nature, and that is an abomination!”

The one question I almost never get, however, is the “white guilt” accusation, “What right do you, a middle-class white man, have to perform these
narratives?" Usually whoever introduces me gives some background information about my participant observation research. One time some audience members came in late, after the introduction, and sure enough, one of them was the first to raise his hand after the performance and accuse me of white man's presumptuousness. However, other audience members came to my defense before I had a chance to respond. They explained to him that I had lived with the people for more than three years, that I was not a weekend commuter from a comfortable suburban house. This information seemed to subdue him.

Even though my ego is probably as vulnerable as the next person's, I take courage in knowing that negative response, more than approving applause, testifies to the moral implications of this kind of work. I can be grateful to my detractors for forcing into my awareness the complex ethical tensions, tacit political commitments, and moral ambiguities inextricably caught up in the act of performing ethnographic materials. Indeed, I began doing this kind of work focused on performance as a way of knowing and deeply sensing the other. Hostile audiences have helped me see performance as the enactment of a moral stance. Now I have become deeply interested in the ethical dimensions of performing the expressive art that springs from other lives, other sensibilities, other cultures.

I agree with Wallace Bacon that the validity of an intercultural performance is "an ethical concern no less than a performance problem." Good will and an open heart are not enough when one "seeks to express cultural experiences which are clearly separate from his or her lived world." I would like to sketch four ethical pitfalls, performative stances towards the other that are morally problematic. I name these performative stances "The Custodian's Rip-Off," "The Enthusiast's Infatuation," "The Curator's Exhibitionism," and "The Skeptic's Cop-Out." These four problem areas can be graphically represented as the extreme corners of a moral matrix articulated by intersecting axes of ethnographic tensions. The vertical axis is the tense field between Identity and Difference, the horizontal axis between Detachment and Commitment (see Figure 1). The extreme points of both sets of continua represent "dangerous shores" to be navigated, binary oppositions to be transcended. The center of the map represents the moral center that transcends and reconciles the spin-off extremes. I call this dynamic center, which holds in tensive equipoise the four contrarieties, "Dialectical Performance." After mapping the five performative stances in order to see their alignments, I will discuss each one in more detail.

**The Custodian's Rip-Off**

The sin of this performative stance is Selfishness. A strong attraction toward the other coupled with extreme detachment results in acquisitiveness instead of genuine inquiry, plunder more than performance. Bacon provided a striking example of this performative stance when he cited the case of the Prescott Smoki cultural preservation group who continued to perform the Hopi Snake Dance over the vigorous objections of Hopi elders. This group appropriated cherished traditions, reified them in a way that was sacrilegious to the Hopi, and added insult to injury by selling trinkets for $7.50, all in the name of preserving "dying cultures." The immorality of such performances is unambiguous and can be compared to theft and rape.

Potential performers of ethnographic materials should not enter the field with the overriding motive of "finding some good performance material." An analogy from my fieldwork situation would be my performance of some of the stunningly theatrical shaman chants of Hmong healers replete with black veil over face and sacred costume. Not even a Hmong man or woman may perform these sacred traditions at will. You must be called to shamanic performance, which typically is signalled by a life-threatening illness, during which you have tremors, "shake" (miu nang, the Hmong word for "shaman," is the same word for "shake"). When the shaman shakes and chants, he or she is talking and pleading with the spirits that control the world. These ecstatic performances are extraordinarily delicate and dangerous affairs. A Hmong Shaman risks his or her life each time the soul leaves the body and ascends the
The Enthusiast's Infatuation

Too facile identification with the other coupled with enthusiastic commitment produces naive and glib performances marked by superficiality. This is the quadrant of the quick-fix, pick-up artist, where performance runs aground in the shallows. Eager performers get sucked into the quicksand belief, “Aren’t all people really just alike?” Although not as transparently immoral as “The Custodian’s Rip-Off,” this performative stance is unethical because it trivializes the other. The distinctiveness of the other is glossed over by a glaze of generalities.

Tzvetan Todorov unmasks the moral consequences of too easy and eager an identification with the other:

Can we really love someone if we know little or nothing of his identity, if we see, in place of that identity, a projection of ourselves or ideals? We know that such a thing is quite possible, even frequent, in personal relations; but what happens in cultural confrontations? Doesn’t one culture risk trying to transform the other in its own name, and therefore risk subjugating it as well? How much is such love worth?

“The Enthusiast’s Infatuation,” which is also the quadrant where “fools rush in where angels fear to tread,” is neither innocent nor benign.

Fredric Jameson, to whom we are indebted for naming the Identity-Difference interpretive dilemma, complements Todorov by showing how too easy affirming of identity not only banalizes the other, but seals off the self from any moral engagement:

... if we choose to affirm the identity of the alien object with ourselves—if, in other words, we decide that Chaucer, say... or the narratives of nineteenth-century Russian gentrty, are more or less directly or intuitively accessible to us... then we have presupposed in advance what was to have been demonstrated, and our apparent comprehension of these alien texts must be haunted by the nagging suspicion that we have all the while remained locked in our own present with its television sets and superhighways... and that we have never really left home at all, that our feeling of Verstehen is little better than mere psychological projection, that we have somehow failed to touch the strangeness and the resistance of a reality genuinely different from our own.

Secure in our protective solipsism, those of us in this performative stance will never permit the other “to come before us as a radically different life form that rises up to call our own form of life into question and to pass judgment on us, and through us, on the social formation in which we live.”29 Superficiality suffocates self as well as other.

The Curator’s Exhibitionism

Whereas the enthusiast assumed too easy an Identity with the other, the curator is committed to the Difference of the other. This is the “Wild Kingdom” approach to performance that grows out of fascination with the exotic, primitive, culturally remote. The performer wants to astonish rather than understand. This quadrant is suffused with sentimentality and romantic notions about the “Noble Savage.” Performances from this corner of the map resemble curio postcards, souvenirs, trophies brought back from the tour for display cases. Instead of bringing us into genuine contact (and risk) with the lives of strangers, performances in this mode bring back museum exhibits, mutes and staring.

Jameson explains that when one affirms “from the outset, the radical Difference of the alien object from ourselves, then at once the doors of comprehension begin to swing closed....”22 The manifest sin of this quadrant is Sensationalism, and it is an immoral stance because it dehumanizes the other. Todorov makes strikingly clear the moral consequences of exotizing the other in his brilliant case study of the most dramatic encounter with the other in our history, the discovery and conquest of America.23 He clarifies how the snap-shot perspectives of “Noble Savage” and “dirty dog” can come from the same view-finder:

How can Columbus be associated with these two apparently contradictory myths, one whereby the other is a “noble savage” (when perceived at a distance) and one whereby he is a “dirty dog,” a potential slave? It is because both rest on a common basis, which is the failure to recognize the Indians, and the refusal to admit them as a subject having the same rights as oneself, but different. Columbus has discovered America but not the Americans.

Too great a distance—aesthetic, romantic, political—denies to the other membership in the same moral community as ourselves.
The Skeptic’s Cop-Out

The fourth corner of the map is the prison-house of Detachment and Difference in which, according to Jameson, “we find ourselves separated by the whole density of our own culture from objects or cultures thus initially defined as other from ourselves and thus as irremediably inaccessible.” Instead of a performative stance, it is an easy bail-out into the no man’s land of paralyzing skepticism. This corner of the map is the refuge of cowards and cynics. Instead of facing up to and struggling with the ethical tensions and moral ambiguities of performing culturally sensitive materials, the skeptic, with chilling aloofness, flatly declares, “I am neither black nor female; I will not perform from The Color Purple.”

When this strange coupling of naive empiricism and sociobiology—only blacks can understand and perform black literature, only white males John Cheever’s short-stories—is deconstructed to expose the absurdity of the major premise, then the “No Trespassing” disclaimer is unmasked as cowardice or imperialism of the most arrogant kind. It is only the members of the dominant culture who can hold to this high purity argument regarding cultural intercourse. It is a fact of life of being a member of a minority or disenfranchised subculture that one must and can learn how to perform cultural scripts and play roles that do not arise out of one’s own culture. As a matter of sheer survival refugees must learn how to play American ways of thinking and social conduct. “Code-switching” is a commonplace ethno-graphic term used to describe the complex shifts minority peoples deftly and continuously negotiate between the communication styles of dominant culture and subculture. Todorov, who refers to his own “simultaneous participation in two cultures,” offers a strong rebuttal to the skeptic’s position:

Ultimately, understanding between representatives of different cultures (or between parts of my own being which derive from one culture or the other) is possible, if the will-to-understand is present: there is something beyond ‘points of view,’ and it is characteristic of human beings that they can transcend their partiality and their local determinations.

There is no null hypothesis in the moral universe. Refusal to take a moral stand is itself a powerful statement of one’s moral position. That is why I have placed squarely on the moral map the skeptic’s refusal to risk encounter to show that nihilism is as much a moral position as its diagonal counterpart, naive enthusiasm. In my view, “The Skeptic’s Cop-Out” is the most morally reprehensible corner of the map because it forecloses dialogue. The enthusiast, one can always hope, may move beyond infatuation to love. Relationships that begin superficially can sometimes deepen and grow. Many of my students begin in the enthusiast’s corner of the map. It is the work of teaching to try to pull them toward the center. The skeptic, however, shuts down the very idea of entering into conversation with the other before the attempt, however problematic, begins. Bacon, who is keenly aware of the “deep and difficult and enduring problems,” rejects the skeptic’s cop-out when facing up to the alternatives for action in the world:

What, then, do we do? Do we give up performing ethnic materials? Do we say, with Anaya, that to the Hispanics belong Hispanic treasures?

Surely not, because our world has never before cried out so needfully for understanding among us all. Never has a sense of the other seemed more crucial for our own humanity. The embodiment of texts of all kinds is . . . one real path to the understanding of others.

The skeptic, detached and estranged, with no sense of the other, sits alone in an echo-chamber of his own making, with only the sound of his own scoffing laughter ringing in his ears.

Dialogical performance

One path to genuine understanding of others, and out of this moral morass and ethical minefield of performative plunder, superficial silliness, curiosity-seeking, and nihilism, is dialogical performance. This performative stance struggles to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another. The aim of dialogical performance is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another. It is a kind of performance that resists conclusions, it is intensely committed to keeping the dialogue between performer and text open and ongoing. Dialogical understanding does not end with empathy. There is always enough appreciation for difference so that the text can interrogate, rather than dissolve into, the performer. That is why I have charted this performative stance at the center of the moral map. More than a definite position, the dialogical stance is situated in the space between competing ideologies. It brings self and other together even while it holds them apart. It is more like a hyphen than a period.

The strength of the center is that it pulls together mutually opposed energies that become destructive only when they are vented without the counterbalancing pull of their opposite. For example, good performative ethnographers must continuously play the oppositions between Identity and Difference. Their stance toward this heuristically rich paradox of fieldwork (and performance) is both/and, yes/but, instead of either/or. They affirm crosscultural accessibility without glossing any real differences. Moreover, they respect the Difference of the other enough to question and make vulnerable her own a priori assumptions. When we have true respect for the Difference of other
cultures, then we grant them the potential for challenging our own culture. Genuine dialogical engagement is at least a two-way thoroughfare. Glassie insists that the ethnographer’s home culture should be an open to interpretation, questioning, weighing of alternatives, as the host culture.

Old societies alienated from us by chronology become but academic curios, no challenge at all to the status quo. The outward search for alternatives can likewise die into thrills and souvenirs, but when the traveler is serious, the quest through space leads through confrontation into culture, into fear, and it can prove trying, convincing, profoundly fruitful. The reason to study people, to order experience into ethnography, is not to produce more entries for the central file or more trinkets for milord’s cabinet of curiosities. It is to stimulate thought, to assure us there are things we do not know, things we must know, things capable of unsettling the world we inhabit.31

In order to keep fieldwork dialogically alive, Glassie construes it as “intimate conversation,” a description that resonates both literally and metaphorically with the praxis of ethnography:

Ethnography is interaction, collaboration. What it demands is not hypotheses, which may unnaturally close study down, obscuring the integrity of the other, but the ability to converse intimately.32

Todorov makes the same point about the dialogical stance towards textual criticism:

Dialogic criticism speaks not of works but to works, rather with works. It refuses to eliminate either of the two voices present. The author is a “thou,” not a “he,” an interlocutor with whom one discusses and even debates human values.33

He argues that the honesty of dialogic criticism lies in two voices that can speak simultaneously and interactively. Like good conversation, the event is a cooperative enterprise between two voices, neither of which succumbs to monologue: “... as in personal relations, the illusion of fusion is sweet, but it is an illusion, and its end is bitter, to recognize others as others permits loving them better.”34

Dialogical performance is a way of having intimate conversation with other people and cultures. Instead of speaking about them, one speaks to and with them. The sensitive immediacy and empathic leap demanded by performance is an occasion for orchestrating two voices, for bringing together two sensibilities. At the same time, the conspicuous artifice of performance is a vivid reminder that each voice has its own integrity. The performer of a Laotian cosmological legend stands before an audience in all his Scots-German facticity. Dialogical performance celebrates the paradox of “how the deeply different can be deeply known without becoming any less different.”35 Bacon quoted Auden, who evocatively etched the moral lineaments of dialogical performance: “When truly brothers/men don’t sing in unison/but in harmony.”36

Dialogical performance is a way of finding the moral center as much as it is an indicator that one is ethically grounded. One does not have to delay entering the conversation until self and other have become old friends. Indeed, as the metaphor makes clear, one cannot build a friendship without beginning a conversation. Dialogical performance is the means as much as the end of honest intercultural understanding. But what are the qualities one absolutely needs before joining the conversation? Three indispensible, according to Glassie: energy, imagination, and courage.

Scholars need energy to gather enough information to create full portraits. They need imagination to enter between facts, to feel what it is like to be, to think and act as another person. They need courage to face alternatives, comparing different experiences to help their fellows locate themselves.37

If we bring to our work energy, imagination, and courage—qualities that can be exercised and strengthened through dialogical performance—then we can hope not to trample on “the sweet, terrible wholeness of life.”38

Finally, you don’t have to do years of fieldwork with a people before you can perform their verbal art. Fieldwork is enormously time-consuming and labor-intensive; it appeals to a certain kind of person and temperament, but certainly it is not for everyone. Ethnographers would be selfish and arrogant to set themselves up as cultural game wardens, insisting that you have to “been there” before you understand. Geertz is quite insistent that good ethnography is not dependent on the fieldworker’s being possessed of some mystical powers that enable her to “commune with natives”; good ethnography can be done “without recourse to pretensions to more-than-normal capacities for ego-effacement and fellow-feeling.”39 He argues that ethnographic understanding “is more like grasping a proverb, catching an allusion, seeing a joke—or, as I have suggested, reading a poem—that it is like achieving communion.”40

It is the responsibility of the ethnographer of performance to make performance texts derived from fieldwork that are accessible—and that means performable—for responsible interpreters of texts who have callings other than fieldwork.41 The ethnographic movement in performance studies will die if it does not reach out to share the human dignity of the other, the otherwise, with audiences larger than a coterie of specialists. If it turns in upon itself, then, quite appropriately, it will become an “inside joke” that only
fieldworkers can get. The ethnographic movement is dependent on the existence of traditional interpreters and teachers of literature, who continue to deepen in new generations of students sensitivity to the other of a Renaissance text, or a contemporary poem, so that when performance texts from nonliterate cultures are produced and made available, it will be possible for more voices to join the human dialogue.

Notes

1 This essay is the result of an ongoing dialogue with three voices other than my own. My transposition of Clifford Geertz's title, "Thinking as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of Anthropological Fieldwork in the New States," *Ars Technica*, 28 (Summer, 1968), 139-158, explicitly signals the deep impact that essay has had on my own fieldwork project. Wallace Bacon first introduced me to "the sense of the other," an idea that changed my life and is a luminous demonstration of "thinking as a moral act." For more than a decade, Mary Strine has given me lists of difficult books that ask hard questions, and insisted that I read them. Particularly the diachronic Marxism of Mikhail Bakhtin, which she introduced to the field, has challenged me, and even though not explicitly cited, I hope its presence is felt by the very nature of the questions that shaped this paper.


5 "Thinking as a Moral Act," p. 140.

6 "Thinking as a Moral Act," p. 139.


11 "Thinking as a Moral Act," p. 139.

12 "Thinking as a Moral Act," p. 141.


15 Bacon, p. 95.


17 Bacon, p. 94-95.


20 Jameson, p. 54.

21 Jameson, p. 70.

22 Jameson, p. 43.

23 Todorov writes, "My main interest is less a historian's than a moralist's, the present is more important to me than the past," p. 4.

24 Jameson, p. 49.

25 Jameson, p. 43-44.

26 "A Dialogic Criticism?" *Raritan*, 4 (Summer 1984), 69.

27 "A Dialogic Criticism?" p. 50.

28 Bacon, p. 96.

29 Bacon, p. 97.

30 The recent explosion of interest in the works of Mikhail Bakhtin now being translated from the original Russian and made available to Western readers has given widespread currency to the idea of "dialogue" as a way of being in the world. Two of Bakhtin's works now available in translation are useful starting points for engaging the complexities of his thinking: *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryn Emerson and Michael Holquist; ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryn Emerson (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984). I recommend also two invaluable scholarly tools for anyone working with Bakhtin: the intellectual biography by Katherine Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), and the critical assessment of his ideas in their programmatic context by Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984). Clark and Holquist point out in their biography that Bakhtin had a lifelong involvement with performance and theatre ranging from the German government who organized the young Bakhtin brothers in dramatic renderings of the *Iliad* to his dramatic performances in the Nevel theatre groups long after his university days (p. 21). Todorov concludes his assessment of Bakhtin's lifelong career by arguing that the term that most richly encompasses the scope and depth of his intellectual project is "philosophical anthropology." I have reserved for this last chapter those ideas of Bakhtin that I value most and that, I believe, hold the key to his whole work: they constitute, in his own terms, his "philosophical anthropology," (p. 94).


33 "A Dialogic Criticism?" p. 72.

34 "A Dialogic Criticism?" p. 73.


36 Bacon, p. 94.

37 Glassie, p. 12.

38 Glassie, p. xiv.
52

PERFORMANCE SCIENCE

Michal M. McCall and Howard S. Becker


Performance science is a new way of presenting the results of fieldwork research. The performance mode creates problems of syntax and interpretation, but has corresponding advantages, including narrativity and multivocality. We illustrate these problems and advantages with examples from our study of the social organization of professional theatre in the United States, and we urge fieldworkers studying other subject matters to experiment with the performance mode.

Prologue

MICHAL:
We should probably explain that this script was written for and first performed at a conference, called "Editing Reality: A Symposium on the Construction of Social Truth," that Bruce Jackson and Diane Christian organized and hosted at the State University of New York at Buffalo on the weekend of September 24 and 25, 1988.

HOWIE:
We also need to say this script is a methodological piece. It refers to other scripts and papers that contain some of the findings of our theatre research, but it’s about performance science, not theatre.

MICHAL:
Saying that underscores one of the points we want to make: we don’t think performance science scripts have to be about theatre. We hope other fieldworkers, who study other collective activities, will explore this new form.

HOWIE:
And putting it in the context of Bruce and Diane’s conference underscores another point: a performance science script is edited every bit as
much as a conventional ethnography, a documentary film, a life history, or any of the other constructions people at that conference were talking about. We edited reality by writing a story about how we do performance science.

MICHAL:
And telling stories is very much an act of editing. What was it Hayden White said? Narrative “is productive of meaning by its imposition of a certain formal coherence on a virtual chaos of events, which in themselves (or as given to perception) cannot be said to possess any particular form at all, much less the kind that we associate with ‘stories’."

HOWIE:
But our script isn’t just a story, any more than a real play is like a novel. It depends more on dialogue than on the narrator’s voice. Several other people at the conference told stories. Our piece was different because it was written and performed as a dialogue. That’s what performance science does best: it shows us, talking about what we’re doing, constructing interpretations as well as data.

MICHAL:
It’s been more than a year since we wrote this script. Since then, you’ve taught a course called “Performance and Social Science,” with Dwight Conquergood, and I’ve read more feminist theory and criticism. What would you say about performance science, now, that you didn’t or couldn’t say when we wrote it?

HOWIE:
One thing I’ve certainly learned is how appropriate performance science is to a wide variety of subject matters. Students in that class performed materials as various as the situation of homeless people and the activities of the Charles Manson gang, as well as portions of Kai Erikson’s *Everything In Its Path* and Diane Vaughan’s *Uncoupling.* They devised very inventive solutions to the problems of performing those differing texts.

MICHAL:
I might say something more, or different, about textual politics. On the one hand, Dorothy Smith’s argument is very convincing, that the issue isn’t how much voice informants have in our texts, it’s how much we add to their understanding of the extralocal determinants of their experience through our sociological investigations. On the other hand, I like it that performance science, like other experimental forms, “gives” indigenous discourse a semi-independent status in the textual whole [and] interrupt[s] the privileged monotone of ‘scientific’ representation.”

HOWIE:
No sense talking about what we might have done differently, if we knew then what we know now. This script, like all intellectual work, has some rough edges. Let’s just let them show.

(At a typical academic conference, in the front of a typical meeting room, is a dais, raised about two feet above the floor. At the back of the dais sits a table, with two chairs behind it, a skirt on the front of it, and a chair at either end. There are podiums at both front corners of the dais. HOWIE and MICHAL sit in the chairs behind the table, preparing to present their paper. HOWIE sits stage right, MICHAL stage left. Each holds a copy of the script. HOWIE removes a paper clip from his paper, takes a watch from his pocket and puts it on the table in front of him, and begins. MICHAL appears to take notes as HOWIE speaks. In this first section, they address the audience directly. When not speaking, they look down at the papers they hold.)

HOWIE: For the last two years, we have, with Lori Morris, been studying the careers of theatre people and the social organization of theatrical communities in the United States. We’ve interviewed, observed and participated, one way and another, in those communities in the San Francisco Bay Area.

MICHAL: The Twin Cities.

HOWIE: And Chicago.

MICHAL: For the last year, we’ve been experimenting with a new way of presenting the results of that research.

HOWIE: New to us, although the ideas certainly aren’t new to theatre people.

MICHAL: We call what we’ve been doing “performance science.” That’s partly a joke.

HOWIE: (Parenthetically) People who know about performance art get the joke, but not many sociologists do.

MICHAL: And partly serious, because we do think that our research is some kind of science.

HOWIE: (To MICHAL) Although it’s not clear that many other sociologists will think so. (To audience) The first text we performed wasn’t much different from a conventional scholarly paper, though the way we presented it was unusual.
(Both stand, pick up the chairs facing into the side of the table nearest them, and place them side by side, about four feet apart, in front of the table. After placing the chairs, they walk to the podium at either side of the stage, MICHAIL stage left and HOWIE stage right. During the first two speeches, they address the audience directly. When not speaking, they look down at their scripts.)

MICHAL: (To audience) Think of the theatre as an industry whose product is plays. The industry is located, like all industries, in particular places—in communities, both local and national. The major shift in American theatre in the last forty years or so, has been from a highly centralized national system centered in New York to a system in which theatre is created in a network of regional theatre communities. We have been studying those communities.

HOWIE: (To audience) We've used some simple ideas to organize our interviews, observations, and archival materials. Communities, roughly defined as the area in which you can work and still get home every night, contain pools of resources needed to make theatre: actors, directors, technical workers, and administrative personnel; spaces in which plays can be performed, and audiences. Productions bring those resources together in various combinations, creating cooperative arrangements in which plays get put on and presented to the public. Our problem is: how do producing organizations draw those resources from the community's pool to produce the performances we see? (HOWIE walks to chair, stage right, and sits down.)

MICHAL: (At the podium, stage left, addressing the audience) You can create the whole organization anew for each production, as was done in Broadway's heyday. (She turns to look at HOWIE) According to a theatre historian:

HOWIE: (Shifts to theatre historian voice, stroking an imaginary beard once or twice) "Producing a Broadway play was an ad hoc operation. A producer got a likely script from an author or agent and contracted to put it on. He then raised the necessary money; hired a director, actors, and staff (designers, press agent, etc.); rented a theatre; and oversaw the preparations. The director and actors rehearsed in rented halls while the set was being built by a carpentry firm and the costumes were created or supplied by a costume company.

When the show was ready it went on an out-of-town tour, on a circuit that usually included Philadelphia, Boston, and New Haven, to be tested in front of audiences and revised if necessary. Then it opened in New York, was reviewed, and either closed in disgrace or ran for a while. The weekly operating surplus—the amount by which ticket sales exceeded running costs (rent, salaries, etc.)—was returned to the investors until they were paid and then was split between investors and producer. When a show stopped making a weekly profit (he takes off his glasses and gestures with them) it closed and the entire organization was disbanded."

MICHAL: (Walks to chair stage left during this speech, and sits) We went on to discuss other ways of organizing theatrical activity—regional theatre companies and freelance theatre—and the vicissitudes of actors' careers in these organizations.

(Both address the audience in this section; when not speaking, they follow in their scripts.)

HOWIE: Like most scholarly reports of ethnographic research, this piece contained both our voices and words as researchers, and the voices and words of the people we'd interviewed. And in that piece it was easy to tell which was which: (he points to the podium) sociologists stood, informants and others we quoted sat.

MICHAL: But in most scholarly reports, the researcher's voice dominates.

HOWIE: We only hear the informants' words through the filter of the academic interpretation.

MICHAL: We wanted to give the people who talked to us more "voice," let them be heard more fully, with less intervention by us.

HOWIE: We also wanted to use more theatrical techniques, so our second script started without any sociology talk, each of us giving voice to someone we had interviewed: Lori in Chicago, Michal in the Twin Cities, and Howie in San Francisco.

(They stand. HOWIE moves to a spot right of center and downstage. MICHAIL moves to a spot upstage and center. She stands with her back to the audience. He looks directly at the audience as he speaks.)

HOWIE: Everyone says Chicago is so hot now. Well, it's because of the non-Equity theatres. Steppenwolf and Remains were non-Equity. When they got big they were forced to go Equity. Organic was non-Equity. Chicago is a success because of the non-Equity theatres where they have a chance to do interesting stuff. . . . Lots of times people say there are so many theatres that audiences are going to start dropping off but I don't think it's true. I think it helps, not hurts. Once a person comes to a theatre the audience will be expanded and they'll come again.
MICHAL: Minneapolis-St. Paul was a very fat theatre town in 1978. There was a good crowd for everything. People went to see everything, good or bad. This loyalty to experimentation was destroyed by the cost of tickets and by the audience perception that they have less disposable income than they used to have. Really, a twenty-dollar ticket today is no more expensive, as a percentage of income, than a five dollar ticket was then. But to most people, it’s still twenty bucks and they think twice about spending it.

(When she finishes speaking, MICHAL turns her back to audience again. Simultaneously, HOWIE turns, shaking his head, and addresses the audience directly.)

HOWIE: Casting really is a problem. San Francisco has a problem that we share with a lot of other smaller centers, smaller cities, which is that we have a lot of talented, really fine younger actors. Twenty to twenty-five, no problem, a lot of really good people. Twenty-five to early thirties, thirties and forties, beyond that—the farther you go the harder it gets to find competent people. There are just fewer and fewer people of real skill the older they are. The reasons for that are obvious. It’s a hard life, being an actor. People don’t stick with it. They quit. As they get older and begin to develop adult attitudes and responsibilities, they find something else to do. They’ll only stay with it for company work, where they’re part of a company that gives them steady work. That’s one of the things that ACT’s real strength, that group of really highly skilled older men they have. That’s priceless.

(MICHAL crosses to stand in front of the stage right chair while she speaks.)

MICHAL: That opening got people’s attention. It makes it clear there’s a story here.

(They sit. During the next several speeches, they face each other, as if HOWIE were interviewing MICHAL.)

HOWIE: Having your own space is really crucial, isn’t it, in establishing who you are?

MICHAL: It is, yes. Three other groups use the same two theatres we use. I’ve had people say to me that they’re not sure, but they think they’ve seen our work because they always go to plays in those two theatres. Audiences don’t pay any attention to who is producing. They just know the space. So it really is hard.

HOWIE: Is it hard to schedule the spaces you use? Because so many theatres use them?

MICHAL: It is. They book way in advance. One books in March for the next calendar year, and the other books in December for the following theatre season. And, of course, they’re very different spaces. What works in the big one won’t work in the small one. Our last show would never have worked in the small theatre. So you have to know what you’re doing and when you can get the space and which things will work in each space, and work all that out, too.

Ideally, you’d have your own space or space you rented year round. But that’s hard, too. It’s hard to afford that when you only produce three or four times a year. And you’d still have the problem of drawing an audience to a new space. And if it’s a warehouse or store-front you still have the size problem. And then, if you rent it out to other groups in between, you still have problems with scheduling. And besides, then you have to “manage” the space and that’s not really why you—why we—got into this in the first place.

(They turn to face the audience. Again, when they speak they address the audience. When not speaking, they look down at the script.)

HOWIE: You can see that a lot of data gets communicated.

MICHAL: The selection and arrangement of the stories embodies a rudimentary analysis.

HOWIE: Maybe as much as anyone really needs.

MICHAL: And, perhaps more important, information about mood and emotion, as well as events and attitudes, gets transmitted.

HOWIE: We did get a little nervous at the thought that we were “acting.”
MICHAL: Because, after all, we aren’t actors and didn’t want to have to live up to conventional standards of stage performance.

HOWIE: Besides, we remembered that Erving Goffman, in his classic paper “The Lecture,” specifically forbade professors and similar types to perform. (He sits up straight and speaks in an academic style) “A speaker who attempts to perform and succeeds, should have come to the occasion dressed in tights, carrying a lute. He who attempts such evasion and fails—as is likely—is just a plain schmuck, and it would be better if he had not come to the occasion at all.”

MICHAL: (Looking at the audience, she gestures to HOWIE.) Never mind Goffman. We knew, from the first time we did it, that performing our work was a real improvement over reading scholarly papers aloud.

HOWIE: Of course, performing does create some new problems.

MICHAL: We needed a performance syntax our audiences could understand as easily as they understand the syntax of scholarly papers, whether written or read aloud.

HOWIE: For instance, written papers have headings, which say “This text has parts and now we’re in the next one.” Headings tell you where you are in the argument that’s being constructed.

MICHAL: In written form, this paper would have a heading saying “Part II starts right here.”

HOWIE: (To MICHAL) But how do you indicate a heading in a performance?

MICHAL: (To HOWIE) One of us could get up and say (stands and says): “Act II: Problems of Performing Social Science Texts.” (Sits)

(WHEN she says “Act II: Problems of Performing Social Science Texts,” she holds up her script so that the audience can see, written on the back of it in large letters, the words “Act II.”)

HOWIE: (To audience) We’ve found a lot of similar problems. We already mentioned one: how do we indicate that the people we interviewed, as opposed to the authors, are talking? Typographically, you indent the quoted material.

MICHAL: Or simply announce it: “As one director told us.” We solved that problem the first time in the way we showed you, by creating a visual analogy to indentation in the staging: sociologists stood, informants sat.

HOWIE: Maybe staging is the performance science analogue of typography.

(They both stand. MICHAL walks to chair stage left during her next speech. While she speaks, HOWIE goes upstage, takes a chair from behind the table and puts it in between and slightly upstage of the two chairs in front of the table; he sits in it.)

MICHAL: We solved the problem another way in our second piece, by letting each of us be the sociologist for a third of the piece, and seating that person in the weakest position on stage. (Sits in stage left chair) Sitting here, stage left, puts me in a relatively weak position, because audiences more or less automatically look to their left—stage right—maybe because we read from left to right.

HOWIE: (To audience, sitting in the chair upstage, center) Sitting upstage of others makes you the focus of audience attention, because others on stage have to turn their backs to the audience when they talk to you. (MICHAL turns to look at HOWIE. He points to her.) When they do that, they “upstage” themselves, meaning they lose the focus of audience attention.

MICHAL: (Looking out to the audience) If we do a bit of an interview seated this way, it automatically makes the informant more important than the social science interviewer. (Turns back to HOWIE)

HOWIE: (To audience) Other variations in placement, where we look, how we use our scripts, our tone of voice, and so forth, also let you know when we’re playing the part of an interviewer and when we’re commenting on the interview’s content.

MICHAL: (Turns to face audience) You can’t do theatre without a place to perform. And a space is more than a home, it’s a large part of a theatre’s identity. Each community’s limited supply of spaces reflects the economic and political situation of its city. Competing with other theatres for a home takes a lot of time and effort. And not all spaces suit a theatre’s way of working. The space you find limits the work you can do in it. (Turns to HOWIE, as if interviewing him) What are you looking for?

HOWIE: (To MICHAL) We’d like to find someplace, you know, about two hundred and fifty seats. The main thing is that it has to be a flexible space, we have to be able to rearrange it for different shows, we don’t want a place where we’re locked into a proscenium stage.

MICHAL: (To HOWIE) I noticed that someone has taken over that old movie theatre that closed.
HOWIE: (To MICHAL) That’s the kind of place we don’t want, where you have that kind of stage.

MICHAL: (To HOWIE) You need a warehouse, right?

HOWIE: (To MICHAL) Yes, that’s the kind of place we’re looking for. We have a committee of the Board looking, and we’re all nosing around. In fact, we have a couple of places that we’re really interested in, one in particular that I think is going to work out. We need to have our own place anyway, because no one knows where we are and audiences get attached to places as much as they do to theatres.

MICHAL: (To HOWIE) What’s the place you think is going to happen?

HOWIE: (To MICHAL) There’s a real estate developer who’s got a building that’s just right for us. See, the problem is that you can find these buildings but you have to put a lot of money into them to make them suitable for a theatre. Because essentially these buildings are just empty shells, you have to put heat and electricity and plumbing in, there’s nothing there, so it gets to be a very expensive business. This developer is willing to spend some money on it himself, put all that stuff in and we’d just be responsible for the seating and the theatre lights and stuff like that. So it would be a good deal for us.

MICHAL: (They both stand. As she speaks, MICHAL walks to the podium, stage left, and HOWIE moves to stage right chair.) There’s another very interesting problem that performing our text makes inescapable. That’s what happens when you read something aloud.

(Throughout the next exchange, HOWIE says his lines without paying attention to MICHAL. She, in turn, comments on what he says as though he can’t hear her. She speaks to the audience, but stands sideways watching HOWIE when he speaks.)

HOWIE: As I was preparing for one of our performances, I decided to read one of my speeches aloud to myself. I hadn’t done that before. I was probably worrying about how my voice sounded. I suddenly remembered something everyone learns as a kid—that you can alter the meaning of a sentence by changing which word you emphasize. So I said, talking out loud to myself, “CASTING really is a problem.”

MICHAL: Meaning that casting is a problem rather than some other things that might be problems, like finding a good script to do.

HOWIE: Then I said, “Casting REALLY IS a problem.”

MICHAL: Meaning that if you think it isn’t, you’re wrong.

HOWIE: Then I said, “Casting really is a PROBLEM.”

MICHAL: Meaning that he had thought it might be fun, or at least no worse than a minor irritation, but now realizes it’s a real pain.

HOWIE: And having done that, I lost my innocence forever. From then on, I knew—could never forget—that whether I emphasized “casting,” “really is,” or “problem,” whether I thought about it or not, the choice was not “natural” and obvious. It was a real choice that I could have made some other way. And I realized what theatre people meant when they spoke to us of “making choices.”

MICHAL: (Walks, during this speech, to the stage left chair. HOWIE gets into robot pose.) When you write something—for a silent reader in some other place and time—you don’t have to decide which of those several things you or your informant meant by saying that casting really was a problem. The reader decides that from clues in the context, or however they decide it. Reading the sentence aloud forces you to choose an interpretation. You have to decide what this speech means, NOW.

HOWIE: (Looking at the audience, HOWIE speaks in a robot-like voice, with no emphasis at all.) Because not emphasizing any word would, of course, be a very serious interpretation too. (To the audience, again speaking naturally) Maybe that’s why people read their papers in that dry, uninfluenced way. So they won’t have to decide what they really mean.

(Again, they address the audience directly. When not speaking, they look at their scripts.)

MICHAL: Thinking through the choices of emphasis, intonation, and pace leads you to a deeper understanding of the text. Deciding what each sentence means inevitably shapes the larger meaning of the content.

HOWIE: Deciding to say “Casting really is a PROBLEM” means deciding that what’s important is that this guy thought he didn’t have to worry about casting and now finds that he does. That implies that some theatres can’t get the actors they want to work with them. That leads to the analysis of the stratification of the theatre community, how some theatres have more money, longer seasons and better reputations, and so are more attractive to desirable actors.

MICHAL: Performing the text became a way of understanding the substance of what we were saying.
HOWIE: (Parenthetically) Hermeneutics, we’re told, originally referred to the practice of reading Biblical passages aloud to get a deeper understanding of their meaning.

MICHAL: Since we had been studying theatre, there was a special payoff: because WE were performing, putting some kind of show on stage, we began to understand what the people we had been interviewing really were doing when THEY put a show on stage.

HOWIE: We can see now that the performances needn’t be about theatre. It actually feels like we have two research projects going—one about theatre communities and one about this way of presenting results: performance science.

MICHAL: We started doing performance science for fun. I had written a paper, using Howie’s data on San Francisco and Lori’s on Chicago as well as my own on the Twin Cities. I listed them as co-authors and called it “Looking for Work: Routine and Heroic Efforts to Find Work in the American Theatre.”

HOWIE: (To audience, confidentially.) I think we’re getting into the next part. (Stands and holds his script so that the audience can see, written on the back of it in large letters, the words “Act III.”) “Act III: Some Advantages of Performing Social Science Texts.” (Sits)

MICHAL: (To audience) One day, I was talking about it to Howie on the telephone.

(They turn and cross their legs away from each other, in unison, and hold imaginary telephone receivers to their ears. MICHAL holds her imaginary phone in her left hand; HOWIE holds his in his right hand. As they talk they look into the middle distance, as if listening to each other.)

MICHAL: You know what would be fun?

HOWIE: What?

MICHAL: If all three of us read this paper. You could read all the men’s voices, Lori could read all the women’s voices and I could read the sociology.

HOWIE: (A statement, not a question) You mean like a staged reading.

MICHAL: Well, that’s not what I meant. But, yes, I guess it would be like a staged reading.

(They put down the telephones and turn to the audience, uncrossing their legs.)

HOWIE: (To audience) In the end, she read that paper alone. But later I put it together with a paper Lori had written and made a script, which all three of us read—I should say “performed”—at a conference on art and social theory a month later. (Turning to MICHAL) It is fun.

(During the next section, they turn and talk to each other, as if in conversation.)

MICHAL: Fun and... energizing. I feel energized after a performance. It’s a high!

HOWIE: It is. Maybe because it takes so much concentration. You have to focus. Not think about anything else while you’re doing the performance. Just trying to do it right—not miss a line or trip over your tongue. Trying to read it so the meaning is clear.

MICHAL: And you don’t think about the audience. Don’t look at them to see if they’re convinced. Don’t look around to see who’s there.

HOWIE: There are no distractions. You don’t have to sit there on the platform with nothing to do while others read their papers.

MICHAL: Since we’ve started performing, I’ve been watching regular convention sessions more closely. The other speakers, and the session organizer, and the discussants... they all act like they’re backstage while other people are speaking, like the audience can’t see them.

HOWIE: In a performance, you know you’re on stage, that every word and gesture will be taken to mean something.

MICHAL: Performing really FEELS different from reading a paper. You feel like you are the informant, like you’re having the experiences they’ve described.

HOWIE: Yeah, like you really are the actress who found herself out of work.

(MICHAL turns to address the audience. HOWIE looks down at his script.)

MICHAL: Our theatre has gotten too heavy, there is too much administration. As a result, artistic decisions are predicated on financial considerations, on the necessity of keeping the institution going. It’s something that I am really upset about because now it has affected me personally. They had a really wonderful play that was going to be done... a brilliant, wonderful play. It was scheduled for later this season and I was cast in it. Now they’ve cancelled...
it, well, they didn’t cancel it, they postponed it until next year. Instead they are doing a two character show and it looks like the other actress in the company is going to get the woman’s part and not me.

I thought they had a commitment to me for a third show this year and now there’s nothing. So there really is no meaning to the idea of a company. I can’t count on it. I had it out with the Artistic Director yesterday and I told him that that was it, they could make me an offer for next year and I would consider it, but that I didn’t consider myself obligated to the theatre any more. . . . So now I’m unemployed. Which is a strange feeling. I’m panicked because I don’t have any work ahead.

(In the next section, they address the audience directly. When not speaking, they look down at their scripts.)

HOWIE: After our performance at the national sociology meetings, a friend said that our performance was “dense with information.”

MICHAL: He said, “I felt like I learned a lot. Usually when you come out of a session, you haven’t learned anything.”

HOWIE: Maybe that’s because we start with fieldwork data. After all, the goal of fieldwork is to learn everything about what you’re studying. So the information is always denser. It’s not just associations between variables, significant or not.

MICHAL: (To HOWIE) I suppose. How would you perform that other kind of paper? How do you play a statistical table?

HOWIE: (To MICHAL) Maybe in music. Like Tom Lehrer. You could sing multiple regressions. (Starts to sing softly, to the tune of the Mozart “Eine Kleine Nachtmusik”) The beta weight is three point four six eight. (Getting louder and eventually carried away) The beta weight is three point four six eight!

MICHAL: (To HOWIE) Howie! (To audience) A performance also feels dense because there are so many voices.

(Again they address the audience and look down at their scripts when they aren’t speaking.)

HOWIE: It’s what Bakhtin called “multivocal.”

MICHAL: The analyst’s voice is only one among many. Our last performance had twenty-five voices speaking—not just the three of us.

HOWIE: And most of the time we played interviewers, not analysts. In fact, we didn’t have much analysis in that script.

MICHAL: And the voices of our informants were heard in long speeches.

HOWIE: Not short quotes used as evidence for the generalizations the sociologists were making.

MICHAL: The longer the speech, the more “noise,” the more material that isn’t exactly about the point being made. You can’t disguise the speaker’s own meaning when you use longer quotes. You can’t make them say just what you want the audience to hear and no more.

HOWIE: In postmodern terms: we’ve “deprivileged” the analyst.

MICHAL: In other terms, too. By turning the analysts into characters in a script, we made them less authoritative, easier to argue with, especially since we gave them several voices and let them disagree with each other.

HOWIE: A script is more story-like, less like an argument. You can’t pin down the meaning as much. When you build an argument, you try to cover all the bases, answer all the questions that might come up. If you do it right, there aren’t any questions.

MICHAL: We get lots of questions after a performance. And not the obligatory questions that mean: “I know we’re supposed to have a discussion, now, and somebody has to say something.”

HOWIE: Or: “I’m going to show off how much I know about this subject or how well I know the speakers.” (To MICHAL) People in the audience want to talk about the meaning of what they’ve just experienced.

(In the next section, they speak to each other, as if in conversation.)

MICHAL: The question and answer period is my favorite part. I think I do the performances just to get to the questions.

HOWIE: You know what surprises me? All the questions we get about fieldwork and interviewing.

MICHAL: I know. All those people who wanted to use copies of the script to teach methods courses!
HOWIE: Maybe that’s because we give the audience so much data that they can do their own analysis. Remember, after our first performance? Someone said she felt like she could do her own analysis, get her own meaning, maybe a different meaning from ours, out of our data.

(Again, they address the audience and follow their scripts when not speaking.)

MICHAL: Performing social science also makes the research process more visible, more alive to the audience. Bruno Latour might say that we “opened the black box of interviewing.” We let the interviewing show.

HOWIE: We admit…

MICHAL: Even insist…

HOWIE: That social science grows out of people talking to people, being with other people, hearing, listening, interpreting, making something out of it all.

MICHAL: That the meaning of what we hear isn’t obvious, or given.

HOWIE: That the data are constructed. When you read someone’s words, other people hear that person’s voice, in the words. The voices start to be real people, to exist independent of what you say about them.

MICHAL: The audience knows they aren’t listening to the real person who actually said what’s being read. They know they’re listening to us read what someone else said, as we wrote it down. They see our bodies and know they’re not the bodies of the real speakers. So the constructed character of the data is obvious.

HOWIE: They also see that the interviewing fieldworkers don’t do this:

(He stands and holds his script up like a clipboard and pretends to read the questions from it and write the answers down. During this exchange, he keeps advancing toward MICHAL, a step with each question, becoming more and more domineering; MICHAL resists his domination, more and more, as he answers.)

HOWIE: “Name?”

MICHAL: “Michal McCall.”

HOWIE: “Occupation?”

MICHAL: “College Professor.”

HOWIE: “Are you planning to vote in the coming election?”

MICHAL: “Don’t know!”

(HOWIE, rebuffed, looks down, turns to face upstage, then sits in chair upstage center. MICHAL is still seated in chair downstage left.)

MICHAL: (To audience) Anyone who has done interviewing in the field knows that a good interview is much more of a conversation than that.

HOWIE: (To audience) Instead of following the printed questions on schedule, we ask for justifications.

MICHAL: Use our personal knowledge of what’s being discussed.

HOWIE: Offer our own thoughts, opinions and memories.

(They turn toward each other and reenact an interview. HOWIE is the informant.)

MICHAL: Where did you have the theatre then?

HOWIE: It was in a basement on 16th Street, the building where Theatre Rhinoceros is now, you know that building?

MICHAL: Yeah. How many people that did that seat?

HOWIE: Forty-nine people. At least that’s all that the fire marshal would let us have in there.

MICHAL: Did you stay in that space after the first season?

HOWIE: No, we moved. The city had a building that they wanted to tear down. But it had become a sort of artists’ hangout; artists lived and worked there, and the Mayor did not want to provoke anything there because there was an election coming up. You know, she is pretty sharp about public relations. So there was a nice vacant space in there, that was just right for a theatre, so we got that and built ourselves another theatre inside there… We were only supposed to have fifty seats according to the fire marshals, but we could squeeze in another couple of rows and get it up to seventy or so. But the time finally came—I guess the election was over—when they were going to tear down the building. We had friends at City Hall, we knew when they were
going to do it and, in fact, we got them to delay doing it until we had finished our season. The day after our last show, right after we closed, they came in and started to demolish the building.

MICHAL: Where did you go from there?

HOWIE: We found a really great space, in the basement of a church.

MICHAL: How big was it?

HOWIE: That was fifty seats too. Actually, we could get a lot more than that in. The fire marshal said we could only have fifty. But we could put in a couple of extra rows, it was pretty easy.

MICHAL: How did you get away with that? You know what happened to the Eureka. (Speaking, over her shoulder, to audience) The Eureka Theatre’s space had been closed down by the Fire Marshal for fire code violations. (She stands and, pacing the stage right and left, reads as if quoting from the code.) “To hold more than fifty persons in San Francisco, including performers and crew as well as audience for a play, a room must have two exits of a certain width, equipped with approved panic hardware and opening outward, more than a certain percentage of the circumference from each other.”

HOWIE: (To MICHAL, who turns and sits, in stage left chair, as if resuming the interview) Don’t forget that we were in a church. The very first time the fire marshal came to give us a hard time, I just called the minister and told him what had happened, and he called up the fire marshal and said, “Are you daring to come into the House of the Lord and bother His Servants?” And that was it, we never saw or heard from the fire marshal again.

MICHAL: (As she turns slowly to the audience, HOWIE moves to the stage right chair.) That gives you some idea of what we actually did in our research, and the basis for our generalizations.

HOWIE: (To audience) Audiences experience a performance differently than having a paper read at them. Performances are more fun for them. And they bring some vitality back into telling about your work.

MICHAL: (To audience) A friend says that we may have found a solution to the problem of “alienation from work” among academics. He compared the fun we obviously have when we’re performing—and the fun the audience has watching us—to the boredom and lack of involvement with their work so common among academics.

HOWIE: I know what he meant. (He walks to the podium, stage right, as he talks.) On my way to a performance, I walked past a room where they were having a regular session. There were maybe six people in a room set up for a hundred. Some poor guy was standing at the podium, saying: “None of these associations were significant at the .05 level, but they were all in the same direction, so we are entitled to conclude that . . .” I didn’t wait for the conclusion. He didn’t sound like he cared and I certainly didn’t.

MICHAL: (She walks to the podium, stage left, as she talks.) Not all our reviews rave. At the national meetings, someone asked, “As long as you’ve gone this far, why aren’t you in costume? Why don’t you memorize your lines?”

HOWIE: (To audience) Our answer was: Why not?

MICHAL: (To audience) Or, rather, “That sounds like a good idea. Why don’t you do that?”

(They continue to address the audience, looking down at their scripts when they are not speaking.)

HOWIE: We used this “performance” form to report our results because it suited the content and the collaborative nature of our theatre study, and because it was what we felt comfortable doing on stage, all of which would differ from project to project.

MICHAL: We certainly aren’t the only people to perform social science texts. Victor Turner did it, and entered into a fruitful collaboration with Richard Schechner, in performance studies. And other people in performance studies, like Dwight Conquergood, do fieldwork in order to produce texts they can perform.

HOWIE: The literature on chamber theatre or readers’ theatre had a lot of clues for us on what we were trying to accomplish and how we might go about it. Writing on the rhetoric of scientific communication taught us how arbitrary scholarly conventions of presentation are. These examples showed us how many choices of performance style and method there are.

MICHAL: So? Why not? Why not have costumes? Why not do musicals? Or standup sociology?

HOWIE: Why not? As long as we’re editing reality into a communicable form anyway, it’s only a question of what that form is. Performance formats ought to make everyone realize— it made us see it—how much we take for granted when we write or read or hear conventional scholarly papers.
THE EFFICACY OF PERFORMANCE SCIENCE

Comment on McCall and Becker

Richard A. Hilbert

Who but a spoiler would write critical commentary about McCall and Becker's engaging script? Whatever the content, a response paper in conventional prose seems to draw an audience right back into the same academic underworld that the authors are attempting to liberate us from. Therein lies my initial reluctance to accept this assignment: a comment on "Performance Science" has to miss the point of the play going in.

I could not of course have known such reluctance had I not, in some sense, or at some level, received and appreciated the point of the play. Part of that point—that academic sociologists might loosen up a bit, take themselves less seriously, understand their own participation in what they produce as knowledge, take a less pretentious attitude toward those they study, and through all of this improve the accuracy of their discipline—comes so close to my sentiments as to exacerbate my initial reluctance: why pick on fun? This script is fun, no doubt, and it should elevate the mood of the journal readership. I especially like its playful commentary about itself as an example of the medium it recommends, including its use of this medium to discuss other cases of using it for the same reasons the authors use it here. I am delighted and grateful that there are sociologists of this caliber willing to engage in these kinds of projects.

Nevertheless, there are some serious issues embedded in this script that should be addressed. An initial irony is that these issues may not be as apparent in a performance of the play as they are in the script as a written document, now a published document. I have not seen a performance, but friends who have suggest that I really need to see it to gather its full impact. This is probably so, and were I to gather its full impact, the issues that emerge
as central in its written form might not seem central at all. I say this is ironic because the authors argue on behalf of performance and may even confound their very recommendation by submitting the script to a journal. They do not argue, in the script, that a published script has advantages over a published article; in fact it follows from what the authors say that the impact of their work will be lost in the commitment to paper. This script is not, in other words, the medium the authors recommend. Hence despite what the authors say concerning why performance is preferred over papers (including oral presentation), I am obliged by format to recast this script as a "paper anyway," albeit a highly innovative one. It is this "paper anyway" to which I direct my comments.

And so at risk of returning to academic pretensions (but no citations, I promise), I see the script encompassing two domains: some theoretical assertions and some methodological recommendations. There is also the substantive domain of the theater research, but this is covered more in other plays which this script refers to and borrows from here and there. I want then to focus mainly on the theory and methodology of this piece.

First, the theory. Since ethnographers invariably interpret and transform their data, we are told that an improved science would simply present the richness and detail of social life from the points-of-view of real life actors, making their life-worlds supreme, minimizing the role of the analyst. This is a view that surfaces in sociological work now and then, but it is an incorrect (and I believe even anti-intellectual) view that goes nowhere and cannot provide a science. The view is frequently based on a crude understanding of phenomenology's interest in subjectivity, though phenomenologists themselves do not share the view. Nor is ethnomethodology interested in "the point-of-view of the actor" in the manner indicated in this script, although ethnomethodologists have been particularly forceful in criticizing sociologists who remake social settings in their own theoretical images. Modern theory that addresses actors' perspectives is generally more sophisticated than merely present, or "re-present," those perspectives, especially the variety of theory going under the label "postmodern" or hermeneutics.

Contemporary concern with subjectivity moves into questions having to do with how actors can have points-of-view at all, how there could be anything for them to have points-of-view about, how these two converge in ongoing social practices, and so on. At least this is a tendency, though I am necessarily overlooking myriad distinctions and controversies within these traditions. But simply reproducing actors' orientations either denies sociology's unique offering or appropriates actors as professional colleagues, either of which is objectionable.

Therefore: (1) No inherent advantage can be taken from "large chunks of verbatim quotations from... field notes with only minimal interpretation" (p. 122), especially without a theoretical angle for understanding such quotes. (2) Likewise for communicating "a lot of data" (p. 122). (3) No one would dispute the critical importance of "understanding the substance" of one's study (p. 125), but this should not be confused with sociological investigation itself. (4) It is certainly no scientific advantage to provide data that members of an audience can analyze according to their own lights to get whatever they want (p. 129). This reduces criteria for sociological excellence to pure nominalism. (It seems moreover to contradict the effort to capture actors' subjective orientations.) And (5) making one's analysis "more story-like, less like an argument" (p. 128) tends toward making sociologists just one more example of what they are purportedly studying, forcing them to miss their phenomena entirely.

Still, these authors will surely get a lot of sympathy and agreement from audiences when they propose a maximal use of the setting in "actors' own words," one that makes actors seem like "real people" as opposed to theoretical constructs. If accessing actors' subjectivity really is the desired goal of sociology, and if such objectives are arguably achievable (I would argue that they are not), then we need to address methodological questions concerning how best to achieve them. The authors' preference for staged production is clear enough, but why is this method superior to even more "direct access" to actors through documentary films or video-tapes? Is not the analyst's role minimized even more in Wiseman-type documentaries than it is in plays in which sociologists do dramatic readings of actors' quotes or even "play actors?" Some documentaries do not even contain narration, for example, but just move through actors' settings recording actors' versions of those settings in their course. Certainly editing still remains inextricably a producer's activity, but it seems to me that this activity is more minimal than the active reproduction of actors' settings through actors' eyes in a sociologist's managed script.

Moreover, while narrated documentary seems to move us closer to the ideal of minimal participation by the sociologist, I would like to know more about what that ideal consists of. If bringing actors' meanings and feelings to scientific gatherings is the preference for developing a social science, then I want to know what analysts are thereupon supposed to do. (If we were presenting these comments as a dramatic production, the question would go: "What are analysts supposed to do?"") What would sociology consist of then? Some inevitable editing, perhaps, but since editing transforms the setting from what it is for actors, we should continue to minimize our editing to... to what? None of this would have to be that, in principle, as some kind of ideal. And even though this is an acknowledged "impossibility," would we not be seeking an ideal sociology in which there would be no more "analysts' works," only the natural data, and therefore no sociology? Or maybe under this vision sociologists become hunters and gatherers of other people's talk where the only professional mandate is: never touch anything, never interpret it, never use it, just say it again.

There is some residual ambiguity concerning the preference for staged production. I am struck by the connections between the authors’ choice and...
the substance of their studies. On the one hand, they seem to have arrived at their position through attempting to capture the mood and temperament of theater work as representing those theater settings the authors were examining. On the other hand, they seem to be recommending performance science as a way of presenting results of research on any setting whatsoever (p. 126). Is this fortuitous? Or would any substantive research have been equally informative regarding how best to present research results in general? Would the authors, I wonder, have built skyscrapers and brought them to professional meetings had they been studying urban development? Would they be discovering bacteria had they been initially studying laboratory science? Would they be recommending these approaches as means for capturing "real subjective reality in general," that is as a science for sociology? The logic of their approach, as well as the natural history of their methodological position, demands clarification.

Once again, I am quite sympathetic to those who feel this script should not be addressed in such a traditional format. The script is not strictly the theory and method piece that I am commenting on, and the authors do not exactly make the arguments I am responding to, at least not in a systematic way. They cannot be doing that, since part of their recommendation is that we do not do that. This script falls outside the normal discourse of academic journals, so some would say that one cannot or should not argue with it from within the normal discourse. There is some inevitable truth here; for example, the fact that this script begs to be not only performed but performed by these very authors meant that it could hardly be subject to blind review. I faced another form of that inevitability as a reviewer of the work for the journal, where I could only conclude: publish as is or reject, i.e., no revision. I think that the editor made a wise choice.

Yet the very appearance of this script raises a family of questions about innovation and the introduction of new media into the sociological mainstream. If for example this piece cannot be addressed outside of its own medium (in which case I would have to write another play), then we have to think more generally about how to regard work that moves outside academic discourse to argue for making those very moves. Would anything unusual have to be acceptable on that basis? I can only imagine where this discussion might lead, and I thank McCall and Becker for the opportunity to think about it.

Notes

*Editor's note: Hildreth's comment was written in response to a version of the McCall and Becker paper that did not include the present "Prologue."


SNAP!

Culture: a different kind of "reading"

E. Patrick Johnson


The nonverbal art form known as "snapping," has become a recognizable signifier within popular discourse. African-American gay men and African-American women in particular are two groups who lay claim to this performative gesture and who, in many ways, have set forth aesthetic criteria by which to measure its effectiveness. Situated within the context of pop culture, however, snapping as a discursive practice becomes a contested signifier as various groups struggle over ownership, use, and meaning. Snapping, through its association with camp, also problematizes the notion of camp performance as transgressive. This study describes how certain groups define, use, appropriate, and reappropriate snapping as a communicative act and how shifts in cultural, social, and popular contexts significantly alter not only its function but also how it is performed and interpreted.

Snapping comes from another galaxy, as do all snap queens. That's right, I ain't just your regular oppressed American Negro. No-no-no! I am an extraterrestrial, and I ain't talkin' none of that shit you seen in the movies. I have real power.—"Ms. Roj."

George C. Wolfe, The Colored Museum (3)

African-American expressive forms and performance traditions continue to tell us much about the ways indigenous performances reflect the values, beliefs, and attitudes of a people. As Victor Turner reminds us, "An experience is itself a process which presses out to an 'expression' which completes it. . . . A performance, then, is the proper finale of an experience" (19). Therefore,
given the historical legacy of slavery, the Diaspora, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement, and the continued struggle for political, social, and economic power and agency today, we cannot ignore how such life experiences inform African-American cultural performance.

Although cultural performances are reflective and reflexive as they maintain, critique, subvert, or even transgress indigenous cultural traditions, they are also appropriated by other cultures. It is no wonder, then, that African-American art forms are so intimately intertwined with those of the dominant culture, it is difficult at times to distinguish them; yet, distinctions persist. African Americans' use of language, for example, still exists as a distinguishable component of American culture. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. suggests, "the black vernacular has assumed the singular role as the black person's ultimate sign of difference, a blackness of tongue. It is in the vernacular that, since slavery, the black person has encoded private yet communal cultural rituals" (68). To extend Gates' assertion, I would include nonverbal communication, for even when used alone it may communicate what speech can and more. Behaviors such as rolling the eyes and neck, "giving skin," and poking the lips are all nonverbal behaviors in popular culture as "black" expressions, and are used quite often to parody or stereotype African Americans. The same is true for the nonverbal behavior known as "snapping."  

The "SNAP!" is onomatopoeic in form, in that the word sounds like the behavior. It consists of placing the thumb and the middle finger together to make a snapping sound. The behavior is like that of people dancing to music who "pop" their fingers to the beat. However, the SNAP! embeds the pop within a larger nonverbal structure. Along with the actual snapping of the fingers, the arm makes a sweeping motion, usually from left to right, the snap coming at the end of the movement. When used in combination with words, the snapping may occur at the end of each word, the arm portion varying in position according to the number of words spoken. In addition, the snap is usually louder than that heard while popping one's fingers to music. The snap may be used by itself, in combination with words or with other nonverbals such as rolling the eyes. In this essay, I use "SNAP!" to indicate the nonverbal behavior.

At one time snapping was witnessed most often among African-American women of any sexual practice and African-American gay men. Currently, the behavior is so popular that one might encounter the snap in places and among persons less expected, particularly among heterosexual African-American and European American males. Thus, the popularity of this behavior, noted well by its depiction on television shows and in plays, led to the present study.

This study examines snapping as an expressive form within the communicative repertoire of African-American culture, but focuses primarily on its use within African-American gay male culture. Drawing on interviews, observations, pop culture/media texts, and critical essays, I will describe, interpret, evaluate, and theorize about snapping. While my general aim is to bring this expressive form to the attention of communication/performance scholars, my ultimate goal is to illuminate the multifarious ways in which snapping, as a discursive, cultural performance is appropriated outside one of its indigenous cultures, namely that of African-American gay men. Moreover, I wish to explore the socio-political consequences that follow when an expressive form is appropriated intraculturally (in this case by heterosexual African-American males), and interculturally, particularly when the impact of gender and sexual identity subordinate race.

Methods

The primary data were collected over a four-month period through participant observation, media analysis, and interviews. Most observations were made on the courtyards of two large southern universities, one in central North Carolina and one in southern Louisiana. Other observations were made at a small, gay night club near the university in southern Louisiana, and in shopping malls in central North Carolina.

Media analysis consisted of viewing popular television shows and documentary films in which the behavior is featured. Examples include Tongues Untied, Martin, In Living Color, and The Colored Museum. A total of ten texts were examined. Observations and media analyses were expanded; then in-depth interviews with nine adults were conducted individually and audio taped. The interviewees were four African-American gay males from central North Carolina—all in their mid-twenties; one 40-year-old, African-American lesbian female from southern Louisiana; one 24-year-old, African-American heterosexual female from central North Carolina; one 27-year-old, white gay male from central North Carolina; one 27-year-old, white heterosexual female from southern Louisiana; and one 27-year-old, white heterosexual male from southern Louisiana. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and consisted of a core set of questions with regard to the interviewee's use of snapping. When appropriate I probed further to obtain specificity about the context in which interviewees performed snapping, their particular style, and their attitudes about who snapped and why. Finally, most of the interviewees preferred to use their initials or their first name only. Only one chose to create a full pseudonym.

Snapping in context

What little scholarship exists on the phenomenon of snapping comes from the African-American gay community itself. Marlon Riggs's article, "Black Macho Revisited: Reflections of a SNAP! Queen," for example, offers a critique of the commodification of snapping in popular culture. Specifically, Riggs ridicules African-American heterosexual men (particularly those in the media and in Hollywood) for engaging in what he calls "black machoism."
According to Riggs, African-American heterosexual males with access to the media, television, and film, malign, essentialize, and negate African-American gay male identity by only presenting snap in a stereotypical and/or parodic form. Riggs argues that heterosexist and homophilic representations of African-American gay men position African-American gay men as "other." In addition to Riggs's work, Marcos Becque, author of "Snapping and Other Discursive Practices in Tongues United," contends that snapping is a kind of discursive practice that radicalizes traditional conceptions of black gay male identity and self-expression. For the purpose of this study, however, I place snapping under the larger category of verbal and nonverbal art known as Signifying.

Signifying incorporates either direct or indirect tactics in verbal dueling. An example of indirect Signifying is when a third party stirs up trouble between friends. The third party accomplishes this by falsely reporting to one friend that the other has been bad mouthing him or her. If the friend given the false information fails to see through the ruse, he or she might confront the other friend, and an argument may ensue. In this case, the third party's Signifying is successful. This type of indirectness is seen most often in the "Signifying Monkey" tales in African-American folklore. Other examples of indirect Signifying are talking around a subject, addressing a third party to inquire about a second party, or exposing something about someone by alluding to it metaphorically in the presence of others.

Signifying also may be direct. Such is the case in the verbal art game known as "playing the dozens." The dozens is a test of verbal dexterity—who can best them through ritual insult. The game is highly aggressive and requires audience participation. Connections to the dozens and snapping are made later in the paper.5

Certain nonverbal behavior is also considered Signifying. The infamous rolling of the eyes is a form of direct Signifying, in that it communicates beligerence, condescension, or anger. Smirking and poking the lips are nonverbal examples of indirect Signifying. For example, three friends are conversing and one of the speakers is apparently lying about something. If the second party smirks or pokes her lips out behind the back of the person speaking, but in view of the third party, she is Signifying.

In general, snapping, as it is used among the interviewees of this study, occurs in similar situations as Signifying. However, there are a number of slang derivatives of Signifying that broaden the function of snapping. Below is a descriptive synthesis of many of the contexts and terms that extend the meaning of the snap.6

Reading, disssing, and throwing shade

Based on the interviews conducted, I discovered two different functions of snapping: "reading" and "throwing shade." For the purpose of this study, I place both of these under the larger domain of Signifying, along with the derivatives that follow. "Reading" has a number of meanings, depending on the context. To read someone is to set them "straight," to put them in their place, or to reveal a secret about someone in front of others in an indirect way—usually in a way that embarrasses a third party. Reading has two modes: one is serious and one is playful. There are implicit rules, similar to the dozens, governing which mode the participants are in. Serious reading accompanies a hostile and aggressive attitudinal change. This type of reading is used quite often and is simply known as reading. In the playful mode, however, reading has other names such as "cracking someone's face" and "calling someone out."

To crack someone's face is also to embarrass them by revealing a flaw in character, a lie they just told, or saying something derogatory about them—either to be mean or to respond to something they just said. "Calling someone out" is used in the same way, but rarely to comment on an external flaw, say clothing or a particular hairdo; rather, it reveals the comment's inherent falseness or a flaw in character of a speaker. Both face cracking and calling someone out are examples of reading in the playful mode. They can, however, be used in the serious mode of reading. For instance, if someone calls someone out by revealing something too personal, then it is taken as an insult by the addressee. While there are no explicit rules governing what can and cannot be said during a "reading session," most participants are aware of what topics are "off limits." In the playful mode, one of the interviewees gives an example of reading someone by calling them out about their sexuality.

Alan: ... gay people, sometimes they call others out or "He's gay" or something you know that could be either positive or negative, however we may feel about the person. You know, if it is a person who we may think is gay and they're not coming out totally, we'll snap about that: "Oh, he's gay."

In this instance, calling someone out can be playful if the parties are among friends in the know; however, in mixed company, this type of reading is serious and oversteps the bounds of social etiquette and may incite a confrontation.

Cracking someone's face can also be used in a nonplayful mode. The best example of this mode is when a person undermines the comment of another person (usually a negative comment about a nonpresent party) by revealing that same flaw or something worse about the addressee. The following scenario is a classic example of how both calling someone out and cracking someone's face are used as two different dimensions of reading—one playful, the other serious:

SNAP!
A group of gay men are standing on the sidewalk conversing when another gay male passes by. The passerby has on a pair of shoes that one of the men recognizes as coming from "Payless Shoes." He comments:

M1: Chile. She [he] tryin' to work them shoes like she got them from a real store, knowing that she got 'em from Payless. SNAP!

(laughter)

M2: See. Why you tryin' to read people? The ones [shoes] you got on now came from K-Mart 'cause I was with you when you bought 'em! SNAP! SNAP!

The other men in the group "ooh" and hiss, putting their hands over their mouths while shaking their heads. M1 is left speechless, because his face has been cracked.

In the preceding scenario, M1 was Signifying on the passerby indirectly to the group of men by calling him out about where he got his shoes. In the context of the group, this calling out is playful. However, when M2 reveals the same flaw about M1, he cracks M1's face, something that is not done after someone has just made a good score. M2 crosses the lines of playfulness because he embarrasses M1 in front of his friends and blunts the humor of his comment on someone outside the group.

The outcome of the reading above is "dissing." Dissing, like snapping, has different effects and meanings depending on the context in which it is used. It can mean to "dismiss" someone, as in telling a person off, or to dismiss someone in the sense that one person ignores another altogether—all of which are forms of disrespect. In the case of M1 and M2, M2 "disses" M1 because he reads him in a way that M1 finds insulting and disrespectful. Therefore, dissing is one of the effects of reading—these effects are interpreted negatively or positively by the receiver depending on the social context and the people involved. If, for example, someone is dissed in the presence of people outside a specific circle of friends or outside the African-American gay community in general, he or she may view the dissing as betrayal. In another context, however, dissing may have a communal effect if it is done within an intimate and familiar social sphere. For instance, if it is clear to the person to whom a comment is directed that the intent of the comment is playful, the dissing is taken in good spirit.

The nonverbal counterpart to reading is called "throwing shade." To throw shade is to ignore a person altogether, even if the person is in immediate proximity. If a shade thrower wishes to acknowledge the presence of the third party, he or she might roll his or her eyes and neck while poking out his or her lips. People throw shade if they do not like a particular person or if that person has dissed them in the past. The effect of throwing shade in this manner is also a type of dissembling, because it is considered disrespectful not to acknowledge someone's presence. In the playful mode, however, a person may throw shade at a person with whom he or she is a best friend.

Snapping can be conjoined with any or all of these communicative acts. Most of the interviewees suggest that snapping is used to punctuate a personal reading or dissembling. The following are two excerpts from an interview with one of the African-American gay men that give an example of snapping first in the playful mode, and then in the serious mode, using it as a cap or punctuation.

CB: When I was... this was during the first part of my being out and I was hanging around a group of white people. I had explained it one time to this one particular person, who, every time he would try to verbally combat me or every time he would try to fight with me verbally he would snap and he wasn't doing it right. So, one time I read him and we were standing downstairs at the front desk in the dorm and I read him and there was this little bell on the desk, so I said, "somethin', somethin', somethin' (SNAP! SNAP! SNAP!), DING!!" and rang the bell and he just did the ultimate, he knocked you out. It was when I was with this group of people that I was snapping the most.

I was told this by a dude who was actually in Tongues United' and he says something similar to this in Tongues United, but he would tell me how he went to—he and a group of friends went to a nightclub in San Francisco and this was in the late 80's. He and a group of black friends went to a nightclub and the doorman wanted them to show three pieces of ID. And this was obviously a discriminatory practice. So, instead of showing him three pieces of ID he said, "Oh, I have your three pieces of ID: SNAP! SNAP! SNAP!" And then they turned and left.

In the first example, the interviewee used snapping to read his white friend in a playful way, in a way that did not attack him on a personal level. CB used snapping in this instance to call his friend out about snapping too often, and from CB's perspective, his friend could not do it "right." Thus, CB's snapping (the "right" way) demonstrated to the friend how it is done.

In the second example, however, snapping is used in an antagonistic fashion in order to read the doorman. The SNAP! symbolically replaces the three forms of ID and the doorman is left with his face "cracked", and on the floor." CB commented further that in this instance, snapping was his friend's "offense, defense, and warning: 'I'm gonna get you.'" Still, in both instances, snapping is used to cap or to punctuate a point. A final example of snapping as punctuation is witnessed in the familiar warning: "Don't (SNAP! make (SNAP!) me (SNAP!) read (SNAP!) you! (SNAP!)"
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The nonverbal counterpart to reading is called “throwing shade.” To throw shade is to ignore a person altogether, even if the person is in immediate proximity. If a shade thrower wishes to acknowledge the presence of the third party, he or she might roll his or her eyes and shrug while poking out his or her lips. People throw shade if they do not like a particular person or if that person has dissed them in the past. The effect of throwing shade in this manner is also a type of dissing, because it is considered disrespectful not to acknowledge someone’s presence. In the playful mode, however, a person may throw shade at a person with whom he or she is a best friend.

Snapping can be conjoined with any or all of these communicative acts. Most of the interviewees suggest that snapping is used to punctuate a verbal reading or dissing. The following are two excerpts from an interview with one of the African-American gay men that give an example of snapping first in the playful mode, and then in the serious mode, using it as a cap or punctuation.

CB: When I was... this was during the first part of my being out and I was hanging around a group of white people. I had explained it one time to this one particular person, who, every time he would try to verbally combat me or every time he would try to fight with me verbally he would snap and he wasn’t doing it right. So, one time I read him and we were standing downstairs at the front desk in the dorm and I read him and there was this little bell on the desk, so I said, “somethin’, somethin’, somethin’ (SNAP! SNAP! SNAP!), DING!!” and rang the bell and so that was it. You know, that was like, just did the ultimate, he knocked you out. It was when I was with this group of people that I was snapping the most.

I was told this by a dude who was actually in Tongues United and he says something similar to this in Tongues United, but he would tell me how he went to—he and a group of friends went to a night club in San Francisco and this was in the late 80s. He and a group of black friends went to a night club and the doorman wanted them to show three pieces of ID. And this was obviously a discriminatory practice. So, instead of showing him three pieces of ID he said, “Oh, I have your three pieces of ID: SNAP! SNAP! SNAP!” And then they turned and left.

In the first example, the interviewee used snapping to read his white friend in a playful way, in a way that did not attack him on a personal level. CB used snapping in this instance to call his friend out about snapping too often, and from CB’s perspective, his friend could not do it “right.” Thus, CB’s snapping (the “right” way) demonstrated to the friend how it is done.

In the second example, however, snapping is used in an antagonistic fashion in order to read the doorman. The SNAP! symbolically replaces the three forms of ID and the doorman is left with his face “cracked, and on the floor.” CB commented further that in this instance, snapping was his friend’s “offense, defense, and warning: ‘I’m gonna get you!’” Still, in both instances, snapping is used to cap or to punctuate a point. A final example of snapping as punctuation is witnessed in the familiar warning: “Don’t (SNAP!) talk (SNAP!) to (SNAP!) you!” (SNAP!)
Snapping is also used to punctuate shade throwing in a way that communicates, “I’m over you.” In this sense, the SNAP! means that while I acknowledge your presence (just by the mere act of snapping), your existence is irrelevant to my life. The familiar phrase that accompanies this use of snapping is, “I’ll snap you out of existence!” But one interviewee reported that snapping and throwing shade are rarely used together.

Although this interviewee does not use the two, I witnessed several gay men in the bar scene using the two together. For example, I saw a young man poke out his lips, roll his eyes, and snap when another young man joined the group of friends of which he was a part. After that initial contact, he paid the young man no attention.

The forms of Signifying covered here do not begin to cover the hundreds of others that accompany snapping. These few, however, do provide a core pool of verbal and nonverbal communicative acts that may help one understand the use of snapping in different contexts.

**Interpretation**

After I reviewed the data collected for this study, I became aware of three dimensions of snapping: its association with “effeminate” males; its communal function; and its primary function as a playful ritual. Of course these are not the only dimensions of snapping, but they are a place to begin interpreting the meanings of this behavior within African-American gay male cultures.

**Snapping in “queen” culture**

Many of the interviewees believe that snapping is a “gay” thing. But more importantly, some of them believe that it is associated with a particular type of gay male, namely those gays known as “queens.” A queen in the gay community is a male homosexual who is particularly flamboyant (“grand”), extremely effeminate (“nelly”), and temperamental (“bitchy”).

Because snapping is associated with effeminacy and usually accompanied by the stereotypical “attitude” projected onto African-American women, African-American gay men who want to present a more “masculine” image do not snap. To do so would be emasculating. CB sums it up well when he explains why he stopped snapping.

CB: I was not snapping when I came out initially. It wasn’t until . . . I had been out for a little while I’d say before I started snapping. ’Cause even though I think I was aware that that’s a part of gay culture or a part of the “girlfriend culture,” shall we say, because black women do it too, I was uncomfortable with being associated with that. You know, I didn’t want to come off as being a “queen.” Queens have a special place in gay culture, I’d say, because a lot of humor, a lot of the camp in gay culture comes from queens; yet, queens aren’t really held up to this lofty position in the culture—I would say.

Well, I think the more masculine one is, the “better off” or the more attention grabbing that person is as far as sexually. But for someone who is effeminate that isn’t necessarily the case, except for men who are into effeminate men. So, for people who are kind of queeny and who do the whole girlfriend thing and snap and call themselves “she” and what not that can be a turn off for a lot of men who aren’t . . . number one, who aren’t secure with that . . . with, displays of effeminacy by men and number two, for men who are into very “bitchy” men.

CB’s testimony reflects the sentiment of many gay men, who are looking for the “ideal” man. The other gay men interviewed in this study as well as other gay friends to whom I have spoken, expressed the sentiment that they were not attracted to “queeny” gay men. According to one close gay friend, “If I wanted a ‘woman,’ I would date one.” Effeminacy, therefore, is not valued outside of camp and humor in most of these communities. Most of the effeminate gay men to whom I have spoken—again, those in this study and a number of close friends—look for men whom they call “trade.” Trade is a man who is usually handsome and extremely masculine. These men are called trade not only because they are masculine, but because most often they consider themselves “straight”; thus, they present themselves as straight men who will trade sexual favors with a gay male. One of the interviewees told me that trade sometimes call themselves bisexual, when they are really just gays undercover. Whether these men are straight, bisexual, or gay, however, is not an issue; the point is that for the gay men who seek them out, trade is the epitome of masculinity. Gay theorist Alan Young sees this search for an “ideal” man as problematic, or at least as a reflection of the male gaze, usually associated with the objectification of the female body, which reinforces the hegemony of patriarchy and paternalism.

Sexual objectification has to do with seeing other human beings in terms of the superficial alone—face, body, clothes. Phrases like these, often heard among gay men, are sexist and sexually objectifying: “Those blue jeans really turn me on.” “He has a big cock.” “I’m only attracted to blondes.” “He’s too wussy; if I wanted to sleep with a woman, I’d do it with a real woman.” I have thought or said all of these things at one time or another. Gay liberation is teaching me how this oppresses me and my brothers.
Snapping on the playground

There are those who would argue that it is more fun to watch people in a snap session than to participate. What these people don’t know is that they are participating. As with many African-American communicative devices, it is part of their participation as audience members that makes snapping effective. Snapping, in this sense, is akin to “playing the dozens” (see above). Because the dozens has historically been associated with urban, heterosexual African-American males (see Abrahams, “Deep”), one could say that snapping is its African-American gay male counterpart. Both are examples of playful dueling and require great skill and audience participation. I would argue that snapping requires even more skill than the dozens, however, for participants must demonstrate verbal dexterity as well as skill of the hands. Different forms of snaps are created in “snap sessions” in order to demonstrate originality and skill. When coordinated with verbal astuteness, snap sessions make for an enjoyable performance, as the audience is usually the judge of who is the best skilled “reader.” The important thing to note about these snap sessions, also known as “read” sessions, is that they are fun. As Chuck, one of the African-American gay interviewees put it: “I use it as fun. When I was really mad at somebody I just blessed them out and went about my business. I use snapping, more or less, for fun. You know how you play the dozens?”

Chuck brings up another interesting point about snap sessions that further connects them to the dozens. Like the dozens, there are implicit rules of snap sessions that keep them in the realm of play. In snap sessions, the highest insult is to diss someone in a way that is “below the belt” by revealing a character flaw or information that is “off limits” to the general public.

As stated earlier, snapping also has connections to The “Signifying Monkey” tales in African-American folklore. The monkey in these tales is wily, belligerent, and irreverent. He has no respect for authority; in fact, his primary goal is to dupe the lion—the “king” of the jungle. Moreover, the monkey uses a great deal of profanity when speaking to the lion; thus, the telling of these tales might offend many people. It is this “irreverent” side of the monkey that is associated with snapping.

For some, snapping should be used only in certain places and in the presence of certain people. Even when it is playful. Because snapping is viewed as an “irreverent,” “common,” or “base” behavior, many choose not to do it in church, or in the presence of people they respect. Another interviewee, Pearl Mae, implied that snapping is constructed as “common” behavior by those who have a middle class mentality.

PJ: So, you think that stuff like rolling the neck, putting the hands on the hip, and snapping and stuff like that is a class issue? There’s a class issue there?
PM: Sometimes, I don’t know if it’s so much a class issue because you can be a poor black person and still be bourgie [bourgeois].
PJ: This is true. I’m an example.
PM: ‘Cause I know people who don’t have a pot to piss in and will still tell their children that they’re supposed to be ashamed of certain kinds of behavior. And then I know some black folk with tons of money, who, as one friend of mine would say, “Don’t know how to act.” They can just act just as crazy as anybody else. Rather than just economic circumstances, it’s just a bourgeoise mentality—some kind of “we need to get away from this base behavior and move toward something that is more acceptable or white.” And I think that anybody can possess that. But it’s usually found more in the black middle class—urban people. I went to a black, middle class urban church where people had mostly migrated from the South, but then tried to forget it and you know it [the South] was something that they just did in the Summer. They just went back home to see Mama but didn’t really bring Mama with ’em.

Pearlie Mae’s reflections indicate that snapping, like the popular “Signifying Monkey” tales, is deemed unacceptable for “respectable” people. Snapping and performing these tales, then, violate some element of decorum within certain contexts within African-American communities. The interviewees in this study appear to acknowledge and respect these unspoken rules unless, as one interviewee put it, “you want to show your ass”; or, in other words, if one wanted to embarrass the people around her or him by behaving in a manner that is not consistent with the cultural milieu or the social decorum within different African-American social settings.

**Snapping across the line**

I stated earlier that snapping is used by a variety of people outside of African-American gay cultures. Consequently, some gays are upset by what they consider an appropriation of an art form that belongs to them, while others in these communities are ambivalent about the matter. Still other gays, including ones in this study, feel that anyone can snap, but only if they can do it “right.”

**Girlfriend culture**

Many of the black gay interviewees of this study believe that snapping originated with black women. In fact, Chuck went so far as to say that they do it better than anyone.

His belief is not the norm, however. While many gay men are willing to share the origin of snapping with African-American women, or even to acknowledge that they do it well, they are reluctant to say that African-American women are the originators. Nonetheless, many African-American gay males do not have a problem with African-American women snapping, because they share an ethnic heritage—in essence, because they are black. This position is also shared by the heterosexual African-American woman I interviewed. In her particular case, however, she did not realize that snapping was a behavior found in the African-American gay community until after she came to college.

Pearlie Mae: Well, as I’ve always known snapping, it was always done by black women. And truthfully, I knew that certain men in my church did it, but I didn’t know they were gay until somebody told me later and I just thought that, you know, “Oh, well that’s just Keith.” Keith just snaps for emphasis. Martin just snaps for emphasis. These were all choir directors. I just didn’t think—I didn’t attribute it to them being gay because I didn’t know that they were gay. But it was usually black women. And I didn’t know of it as a black gay men’s tradition until I saw *Paris is Burning* and then I started wondering whether or not if the horse came before the cart or the cart before the horse. I didn’t know whether or not black men appropriated it from black women or black women appropriated it from black gay men.... ‘Cause they both kind of hang out in the same circles in the church so... who’s to tell?

Like most African-American women, Pearlie Mae uses snapping in many of the same ways that black gay men use it. to accentuate a read. Other uses, however, are peculiar to the African-American gay community like throwing shade and outing. Pearlie Mae says that she mostly uses it as punctuation to underscore a particular cunning line. “Like if I wanna say that somebody is a tired, old, heifer wrench, I might snap on each word in some kind of motion, so they’ll get the point.”

Personally, I’ve seen black women snap more in the realm of compliment. For instance, some of my female college friends would snap if one of their girlfriends entered the dorm room in a particularly nice outfit. One of them might comment, “Girl, you are wearing that dress!” (SNAP!) or simply, “Work, girl! Work!” (SNAPSNAIPSNAP!). In both instances, the addressee is acknowledging not so much the value or aesthetic qualities of the clothes of the addressee, as much as she is acknowledging the addressee’s ability to make the clothes look good, regardless of their worth. In other words, she is upstaging the clothes and not the reverse—she is “working” them.
I also believe that African-American women are responsible for the term, "SNAP! Diva," at least indirectly. Stereotypically, divas are women who are perceived to be larger than life, grand, and, to a degree, privileged. With this perception also comes a type of attitude—a performance, if you will—exemplified by the diva and recognized by others that gives credibility to her position. Some of these signifiers are a stately walk or carriage, a head held high, and an arrogant attitude. These performative signifiers are often associated with African-American women.

The SNAP! Diva, however, is an instance where gay men have transformed the role into someone who is an astute snapper, who carries much attitude, and who is particularly "grand." The character "Miss Roj," from George C. Wolfe's The Colored Museum, is an example of a SNAP! Diva:

Oh yes-yes-yes! Miss Roj is quintessential style. I corrow the hairs on my legs so they spell out M-I-S-S R-O-J. And I dare anyone to fuck with me because I will snap your ass into oblivion.

I have the power you know. Every time I snap, I steal one beat of your heart. So if you find yourself gasping for air in the middle of the night, chances are you fucked with Miss Roj and she didn't like it.

Miss Roj's success as a SNAP! Diva primarily depends on him taking himself seriously, even if others do not. The attitude, adopted from black women, is a means toward this end. It communicates, "Don't fuck with me or I'll snap you out of existence."

Snapping brother to brother

Heterosexual African-American men who snap add a whole new dimension to the behavior. Because snapping is associated with African-American women, African-American gay males, and effeminacy, heterosexual African-American males monitor their uses of snapping so as not to call into question their masculinity and/or sexual orientation. Pearlie Mae provides an example of how a heterosexual African-American man snaps:

Pearlie Mae: ... I think I might have seen it once or twice and it was usually in a context where they were getting ready to tell somebody off about something. You know, trying to save face, usually in a group of people. They've been dinged somehow and they need to save face. But they always did it—they would change..., the way they did it. They wouldn't... just kind of snap and do it in their own personality. They would either adopt that

In addition, on the Fox Network comedy, In Living Color, heterosexual African-American comedians David Alan Grier and Damon Wayans, portray Blaine Edwards and Antoine Meriwether, two effeminate men who fashion flashy chiffon blouses, tight pants, hair poufs, and feathered slippers—pseudo drag garb that signifies the "gyness" of the characters. Blaine and Antoine review films, books, and other texts similar to film critics Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert. Instead of giving the films a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down," however, the two invent particular snaps. In fact, much of this skit's popularity was due to the anticipation by the audience of what the snap for the week would be. The two act out "gyness" in a stereotypical fashion and demonstrate random misogyny when they review works by or for women. When such works appear, they reply in unison, "hated it." On the other hand, when they review works by men or that feature a male star, they deliver a favorable review infused with sexual innuendo. It is not surprising that the skit's theme song is "It's Raining Men," a popular song in gay night clubs. The following is an excerpt from one of the skits:

Blaine: Hi, I'm Blaine Edwards.
Antoine: And I'm Antoine Meriwether.
Together: Welcome to "Men on Film."
Antoine: The show that looks at movies from a male point of view. Tonight we'll be wrapping up the Summer films. First up is the box office smash, Total Recall.
Blaine: Yes. This is the movie where muscle-bound Arnold Schwarzenegger goes in search of his past. (looks at camera) Just a hint: Arnold: Try the closet! (laughter) Next we have Betsy's Wedding.
Together: (looking at each other) Hated it!
Antoine: Then there's Ghost. You know, Patrick Swayze was the real stand out in this film. You know, I'd breathe life into his spirit any day—even if I did have to go through Whoopi Goldberg! (rolling his eyes) Perish the thought.
Blaine: Yes, indeed. Now we come to Dick Tracy.
Antoine: You know, I like the title, but the movie just left me limp.
Blaine: I know what you're saying. This is what I don't get: all the characters fit their names—you know, Flat Head had a
of view of the audience, the act of expression on the part of the performer is thus marked as subject to evaluation for the way it is done, for the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer's display of competence. Additionally, it is marked as available for enhancement of experience, through the present enjoyment of the intrinsic qualities of the act of expression itself.

Conceived in this way, the black male's adaptation of the black woman's or gay male's attitude or stance is an attempt to display his "competence" as a performer; therefore, he aspires to a particular aesthetic criterion. The effectiveness of his performance, then, is contingent on his ability to achieve his criterion. Alternately, a display of performer incompetence may have damaging consequences to him as a performer, but more importantly to him as a "man," especially if an audience sees his snatching as an extension of his personhood and not as a performance.

Even though the concept of performer competence suggests that black women and black gay men are the most skilled snappers from the perspective of straight black males, their insistence that their use be construed as a performance speaks to something else altogether. This strategy seems a kind of "this is not really me" message to the audience, so that no one will question the performer's masculinity or belief him to be gay. In other words, black men are comfortable using the behavior, but they are wary of the stigma that goes along with it. As bell hooks suggests: "Much black male homophobia is rooted in the desire to eschew connection with all things deemed 'feminine' and that would, of course, include black gay men" (147). Likewise, in the "Men On Film" skit, the characters stop short of kissing, because such an act would subvert the parody, for "real" men in drag don't kiss. Moving toward each other "as if" they were to kiss and stopping short, provides a homoerotic image, titillating the audience but then reminding it that this is "play" by refusing to kiss and saying, "Not! Can't touch this," for to touch "this" would call into question their "real" masculinity and sexual orientation.

Through the parodic, the heterosexual male assumes a symbolic distance from femininity, positioning it as other. Although this distance is interpreted by some as a critique of biological essentialism, it may, as Carole-Anne Tyler suggests, reflect castration anxiety, and further fetishize the female body: "For when roles are already alienated and unreal, the problem may not be how one holds them at a distance but how one responds to that distance" (57).

Alice Walker, in response to accusations about her negative depiction of black men in her works, says, "It's amazing to me to see when black men stop acting macho, how they become invisible to other black men". Walker goes on to explain that no one ever mentions the transformation that her character "Mr..." undergoes in her novel The Color Purple, so that by the end of the
novel he is sitting on the porch sewing with Cele. The same can be said for straight black men who try to distance themselves from effeminate men. Thus, gay men, especially those who are effeminate, are rendered “invisible”—objects that can be used and discarded at the expense of their subjectivity.

White gay men (whipper?) snappers

Like African-American gay men, white gay men, especially those called “queers,” use snapping. The white gay male I interviewed associates snapping with attitude. He learned it from other gay white males who, he says, were very flamboyant and “queeny.”

Terry: Snapping was always, at least in my experience, was always associated with drag queens, and then more with, if not specifically drag queens, people who were more nelly, flamboyant queens. And then later it had a whole other kind of reading in black culture that wasn’t necessarily gay and it seems to me that while all gay counter-culture could be family, initially, snapping was not something that all gays did.

In this respect, in white gay communities snapping is mostly associated with effeminate gay males and attitude. I have witnessed many white gay men snap—snap well—in a number of different contexts. And as Terry suggests, it is mostly used to read somebody or to demonstrate attitude. Consequently, some of the other uses found in African-American heterosexual and gay communities are foreign to them. For instance, Terry had never heard of snapping being used to compliment or diss someone. These functions of snapping tend to be used primarily among African Americans.

During the interview, Terry also mentioned the origin issue. He originally thought that snapping was a white, effeminate male behavior, because it was among this type of people that he first encountered it. Later, however, he reconsidered his position.

Terry: Things like A Different World, the black college life—to see it there, it suddenly registered as something different and I wondered who had it first. You know, because obviously In Living Color is a series that came on much after my experience [with snapping] earlier on at Lost Colony and the diva queens there—the completely “no colored” diva queens there. And so, I thought, well has black culture taken this? Or are all those diva queens just doing something from black culture? And this has been my experience before where subcultures, counter-cultures, pick up what’s trendy, what’s fashionable from other cultures a whole lot sooner before it’ll get to popular culture and television and movies or what not. So that it seemed to me possible that all my little queeny friends had picked this up as a neat affectation—a neat way of reading, a neat way of showing attitude—from black friends back home, back in college, or back wherever they came from because I certainly knew a lot. Then, you know, Lost Colony might be very white, but the experience of the people there was not necessarily completely white.

Terry’s point is well taken. No matter who “originated” snapping, it is used by white gay males in some of the same ways. This is not to say, however, that there are not distinct differences in use and style—differences that reflect the dimensions of African-American cultures.

White hets who snap

White heterosexuals’ snapping is perhaps the most interesting and controversial aspect of SNAP! culture. For those white heterosexuals who do it, it is more of a parodic gesture, similar to African-American heterosexual males. It does not necessarily accompany the attitude and aggressiveness found in gay uses of the behavior. Moreover, the white heterosexuals interviewed were first exposed to snapping from popular culture through television shows like In Living Color. While I find their use of snapping amusing, other members of both the African-American and gay communities find it offensive—particularly those interviewed in this study. The following excerpt from an interview with a white, heterosexual male, JB, may offer reasons why some find whites’ use of snapping offensive:

PB: When did you first see snapping? Or when did you first encounter it?
JB: Can you define it for me?
PB: The snapping that you’ve seen me do or that you’ve seen on In Living Color.
JB: That’s probably where I first seen it—on In Living Color.
PB: And when you saw it, did you start doing it soon after?
JB: No. Unless, of course, I was mimicking what I saw.
PB: So you didn’t know about snapping before you saw it on In Living Color?
JB: Uh. No. I can’t say that I did.
PB: So do you use it now?
JB: No.
PB: Ever?
JB: Well, I do when I am mimicking In Living Color, or if I am portraying someone who is gay; I use it then.
P1: Why is that?
JB: Because that's what I associate it with. When I first learned about it, it was on In Living Color and it was in a skit between gay guys.

P1: Do you know in what contexts gay men use it outside of the In Living Color depictions?
JB: I would assume it would be like a nonverbal reinforcer or compliment to... uh... an attack that they've made on someone, whether they're joking or not to like... it's kind of like—is substituting for "Now take that!" or "What do you think of that!" something like that.

More than anything else, African Americans and gays take offense to the use of snapping by those outside their communities when it is used to parody or to stereotype, as implicitly read in JB's comment that he only uses snapping when "portraying someone who is gay." Too, some feel that because whites like JB are only exposed to the In Living Color context of the snap, the parodic form becomes the norm. It is for these reasons that the two African-American women in this study, one heterosexual and one gay, say they do not snap in front of white people. The heterosexual woman responded:

Pearl Mae: I don't like using snapping around white people. Because it's uh... I don't know. They use it so much on TV now and it's become more of a stereotype for white people than just a fun kind of gesture, which is the way I've always seen it. And I don't like to reify that stereotype for them so I'm not comfortable snapping around them because they just don't get it. And they don't accept it the way black folk do.

The lesbian interviewee had a similar comment:

Tommye: I feel about a white, gay male or white people period snapping the same way I feel about them rapping or the same way I feel about them playing the blues. Or the same way I feel about them voguing or anything else that is ethnically ours. There is an attempt on their part to imitate. And once they have imitated our culture successfully then there is a tendency on their part to commercialize it.

While Tommye's position is one of an essentialist, she does make some important and troubling points about how, historically, white Americans have co-opted—and in many cases successfully—many of the artistic forms of African-American culture without acknowledging the people behind the art form. Accordingly, because of the views of people like Tommye, the white heterosexual female interviewee of this study said that she would not feel comfortable snapping around black women:

LA: I would be less likely to snap around a black female than I would around a black male whether he was gay or not. I've been made aware of the negative connotations and stereotyping that some people associate with minority groups. I would be comfortable snapping around the black gay men I know, because they know me and they know that it is out of character for me to be culturally insensitive. But around other people, particularly black women, I would be intimidated and self-conscious about snapping.

Not all whites are as "culturally sensitive" as LA, and use snapping and other African-American identified expressions to stereotype African-American people negatively.

From the point of view of the African-American gays interviewed, stereotyping is not as big an issue as performer competence. Most of the interviewees object to whites snapping, because they feel they do not do it well, and because they see it as a "black" thing. Their comments suggest that African-American gay men claim ownership of snapping, an impossibility given the dynamics of culture. Once signs and symbols permeate the fabric of popular culture, the foundations on which the meanings of the symbols and signs are based become sites of contestation—places where they alternately coalesce and contradict one another.

On the other hand, African Americans have established performance criteria for evaluating snapping. The effectiveness of snapping, then, is contingent on meeting these criteria. According to some of the interviewees, such criteria include knowing the proper context in which to snap, making sure that the snap is audible, being creative with regard to inventing new kinds of snaps, demonstrating verbal dexterity to match the snap, and halting the arm at the end of the snap. With regard to the halting of the arm, one interviewee said, "White people don't know how to put the force behind it. They usually just swish their wrist just any old way. You got do it like BAM! (SNAP!) so people know you meaning business." Thus, in the eyes of many African Americans, when it comes to snapping and other African-American identified expressions, white folk simply do not measure up.

Conclusion

Snapping is everywhere. Once a behavior found only among a small number of disenfranchised groups, snapping has disseminated into popular culture—ushered to the forefront of what is hip and for those who had no previous
knowledge of its existence. Thus acknowledged, snapping plays a large role in television culture. Shows like *In Living Color*, *Martin*, and *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* exemplify how snapping is used as camp and parody, as a reflection of attitude, and as a bonding mechanism. I even saw talk-show host Arsenio Hall snap at one of his guests in an attempt to read her about a particular point she made.

In African-American gay communities across the country snapping is used in a ritualistic fashion, accompanied by a complex series of rules and contexts. These rules and contexts determine whether snapping is to be interpreted as reading, dissing, throwing shade, cracking face, calling someone out, or a host of other terms indigenous to these communities. Moreover, snapping seems to have a communal dimension. The mere recognition of its meaning in context seems to provide a space where community building occurs. A demonstration of the importance of snapping in some African-American gay communities is revealed in a story CB told me. He said snapping is such a common part of their lives, that an organization comprised of African-American gay and bisexual men incorporated it into the rules that govern their meetings.

CB: OK. I was at this meeting of a group of black gay and bisexual men called “Black Men’s Exchange.” And one of the officers was at the top of the stairs—this was in a house—one of the officers was sitting at the top of the stairs and someone had evidently asked him a question which he was answering. So the leader of the group who was speaking at the time stopped and was like, “Uh, excuse me I need to have everyone’s attention” and blah, blah, blah. You know, he did his little spiel. And the guy who was answering the question said, “As an officer of this group I am entitled to answer any questions which are asked of me,” so on and so forth: SNAP! SNAP! SNAP! SNAP! And then everybody fell out because everybody was like, “Oh, no. That’s against the rules: No reading. No snapping.” and I started laughing.

That was my first meeting and I started laughing because that’s some serious stuff when you have to make up a rule about no reading, no snapping, we’re gonna try to get along, blah, blah, blah. And so they solved it. They settled it. But it was funny.

CB’s narrative reflects both the fun and the seriousness of snapping within African-American gay cultures. Whether in a “SNAP! session” or reading somebody for “real” in the streets, snapping serves a vital and functional role in the lives of its users.

These are scenes of the celebratory aspects of snapping. It is also a problematic behavior because of some the associations that accompany its use. Snapping in heterosexual as well as gay cultures is associated with effeminacy; thus, some refuse to engage in the behavior. Snapping, then, as a signifier of femininity is problematic, for it raises questions as to whether it radically challenges essentialist views of gender or indirectly reaffirms phallocentric hierarchies.

The other controversy around snapping is the essentialist perspective embraced by members of African-American communities, both gay and heterosexual. As an African-American I understand this sentiment. Nonetheless, I realize that no text is sacred because culture itself is not. We live in a world in which once an utterance, expression, or gesture leaves us, its meaning becomes contested, fair game for many interpretations.

Likewise, Marlon Riggs’ essay on the appropriation of snapping by popular, macho African-American men is a riveting and provocative exercise of scholarship. Yet, its essentialist view of snapping is problematic. Riggs writes:

Within the black gay community, for example, the SNAP! contains a multiplicity of meanings: as in—SNAP!—“Got your point!” Or—SNAP!—“Don’t even try it.” Or—SNAP!—“You fierce!” or—SNAP!—“Get out of my face.” or—SNAP!—“Girlfriend, pleasee.”

The snap can be as emotionally and politically charged as a clenched fist, can punctuate debate and dialogue like an exclamation point, a comma, an ellipse, or altogether negate the need for words among those who are adept at decoding its nuanced meanings.

This study examines all of the uses of snapping Riggs describes. However, the uses, meanings, and contexts of snapping Riggs outlines are those found among African-American gay males and, to a lesser extent, African-American women; therefore, the signifiers of snapping that are recognizable to one group are foreign to another. Snapping’s value, then, is contingent on the set of socially and culturally constructed value systems of a particular group of people. Heterosexuals, black or white, do not necessarily harbor the same value systems as gays or experience the world from the same subject position; hence, their use of snapping might bear striking differences, uses that may or may not reflect homophobia, racism, and misogyny.

Snapping, however, may still retain some of its political and social power, despite its appropriation by popular culture. In these instances, snapping resists “[becoming] part of a simplistically reductive Negro faggot identity…. ” (Riggs, 255). Marcos Becquer argues, for example, that snapping and voguing are two art forms that transcend simple appropriation by dominant culture and are transformed into an empowering discourse which reflects the complexity of African-American gay culture. He writes:

The historical hybridity which informs snapping and voguing becomes… a strategy that reaches beyond mere appropriation into
more complex forms of cultural miscegenation. By complicating the
dichotomy of self/other this strategy reflects more directly the lived
experience of “the creative contradictions of the clash of cultures.”

8

Becquer’s argument problematizes the notion of appropriation as it is
generally conceived with regard to cultural art forms. For him, snapping and
voguing are too complex to be fully robbed of their indigenous usage within
African-American gay communities. Unlike Riggs, Becquer does not argue
from an essentialist perspective; rather, he suggests that the complexity of the
behavior, together with its history, transforms it into a discourse that does
not lend itself easily to appropriation; therefore, the elements of the behavior
that make it empowering for its originators remain intact. Moreover, as John
Fiske reminds us:

There is always an element of popular culture that lies outside social
control, that escapes or opposes hegemonic forces. Popular culture is
always a culture of conflict, it always involves the struggle to make
social meanings that are in the interests of the subordinate and that
are not those preferred by the dominant ideology. The victories,
however fleeting or limited, in this struggle produce popular plea-
sure, for popular pleasure is always social and political.

Perhaps it is at those places “outside” social control where the indigenous
meanings of snapping are recouped. And I venture to say that given the
existence of African-American gay men to devise new technologies for self-
assertion, particularly that of the SNAP!, there are also many victories,
both literal and metaphorical.

Notes
1 Like the term “Signifying,” there may be other terms used to describe this behavior.
   However, in central North Carolina and in southern Louisiana, the term “snapping” is
   the most commonly used term to describe this behavior.
2 I found that issues of class do not have a direct effect on snapping. One interviewee
describes a context in which snapping around a certain social circle would be seen
as distasteful; in general, however, one’s social class does not preclude one from
engaging in the behavior.
3 One of the four African-American gay males interviewed out himself to me
at the conclusion of the interview. Although I interviewed him under the impres-
Sion that he was heterosexual, I include him in the African-American gay male
sample.
4 The “Signifying Monkey Tales” are widely anthologized; however, for a critical
analysis and discussion on the origin of the tales, see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 1988.

5 For more on Signifying, see Claudia Mitchell-Kerman, 1972.
6 Due to the great number of terms used by the interviewees, I did not use all of
   them in the following description. Rather, I chose to present the main categories in
   which many other derivatives or alternate sayings are found.
7 Tongues United is Marlon Riggs’ controversial docudrama which aired on PBS’s
   “Point of View” (POV) series in the summer of 1990. The film explores the lives of
African-American gay males, often challenging the assumptions that African-
American gay culture is monothetic and/or simplistic. The film features a segment
on snapping and voguing in which performers demonstrate and mockingly give
viewers “lessons” on how to perform the behavior.
8 The term “queen” is almost always viewed as derogatory. Therefore, none of the
African-American gay males interviewed would consider themselves to be
queens, though others in their communities might. Because there is rarely self-
identification with the term (with, of course, the exceptions that African-
American gay culture is monothetic and/or simplistic), the film features as a form of self-empowerment, similar to those males who
have reappropriated the term “queer.” I do not refer to the interviewees in this
study as queens, even though they provided most of the commentary on queen
culture.
9 The politics of representation with regard to gender performance is the focus of
much feminist and gay scholarship. For some scholars, camp performance by gay
men is less a critique of compulsory heterosexuality and phallocentrism and more
a rejection of male dominance and woman-hating. For example, Marilyn Frye
writes: “One of the things which persuades the straight world that gay men are
not really men is effeminacy of style of some gay men and the gay institution of
the impersonation of women, both of which are associated in the popular mind
with male homosexuality. But as I read it, gay men’s effeminacy and domi
nating of feminine apparel displays no love or identification with women or the wom
” 137)
10 Paris Is Burning is director Jennie Livingston’s 1991 documentary on African-
American and Latino gay drug balls in New York City.
11 Voguing is a kind of dance which resembles the movements of a model during a
photography shoot—a series of freeze frames. Other movements in the dance are
more fluid resembling that of a mime. The same is believed to have been taken
from Vogue magazine, which features some of the world’s top fashion models.
   The dance originated among urban, African-American gay males and was
   appropriated and made popular by Madonna, who also recorded a song by the same
   name. The dance is also featured in the Jennie Livingston documentary, Paris Is Burning.
Works cited


DISAPPEARANCE AS HISTORY
The stages of terror

Anthony Kubiak


“The terror returns like sickness to lurk in the house,” laments the chorus in
the opening of the Oresteia, “the secret anger remembers the child that shall
be avenged.” Terror always returns to the Oresteia like a sickness, like the
terrible pathology of the Return itself: memory, repetition, the return of the
Same; the murdered Iphigenia, the Other, or the Enemy who “is repetition”;
prefractiates the “anamnesic horror of the repetitive play of disappearance,”
disappearance itself.

Terror’s primary force and aspect in the theatre is disappearance. When
disappearance threatens in the theatre, that threat engenders terror. When
terror erupts in the theatre, it is typically figured in a kind of disappearance.
As disappearance, as aphanisit, terror comes in many forms. Sometimes it is
suggested in the compressed cruelty of wit, sometimes in an excess of violence
approaching atrocity. Likewise, our definitions of terror and our concepts
of disappearance take different forms, and emerge with varying degrees of
ferocity, depending upon the performance under consideration. The trope
Quem Queritis, for instance, which some critics cite as the moment of
theatre’s re-emergence in the West after the decline of the classical world,
represses the terror of the crucifixion and disappearance, and repositions it
in the sanctioned terrorism of the Church’s censorship of the drama during
the Middle Ages. But this order of terror is different from the absence of
the single comma in Marlowe’s Edward II that engenders the appearance
of Lightborn, the author and executor of the horrifying disappearance of
the King. Similarly, the intense cruelty of wit circulating in and around the
appearance and dis-appearance of the body in Restoration comedy – the
panoptic, disciplining wit of Congreve’s Way of the World and Etherege’s
Man of Mode – produces its own peculiar and particular kind of terror, quite
distinct from, but in its way no less harrowing than, the organized, regulated,
and mechanized terror befalling the Disappeared in Buechner's *Danton's Death*.

More recently, Beckett has brought to paralyzing extremities the effects of the suppressed terror that Strindberg and Ibsen explored, while writers like Genet and Pinter allow terror a more self-conscious and overly violent free-play. We might contrast the claustrophobic, exhausted fury of Strindberg's *Dance of Death*, for example, with the menacing violence of the two strangers in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. Even the eruptive, though still paraplegic, frenzy of Ham in Beckett's *Endgame* appears to indicate that terror as violence has resurfaced in Modernist drama.

Much earlier, Antonin Artaud sought a comprehensively terrifying disappearance by eliminating altogether the representational structure of theatre grounded in "classical" texts. Artaud revolted against the theatre's overdependence on these texts, a dependence that he felt prevented performance from attaining its radical, exorcising end: to evoke a hyper-Aristotelian catharsis, he had recourse to the cruelty of a terror beyond pity and beyond representation - the Plague.

Terror in the theatre is different from terrorism. According to André Breton (apparently inspired by his friend Vauche), the simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd. This "simple" Surrealist act is meant to awaken spectators to their own "debasement" and to the exhilarating danger - and beauty - of *performance menacing art*. As I will show much later in this essay, a similar desire finds its most graphic expression today in the work of those body-artists who use real, and often excessive, violence as a means of representation in their performances. Unlike the theatre that evokes terror, these terrorizing works desire for disappearance to show itself - and by the same token, to *reappear* - in a repetition or return of the Same, threatening to destroy the performer's body, and producing a visible sign of terror in the body. A similar aspiration fuels the complicity of media with the intoxicating plague of transnational terrorism in post-industrial culture.

"What is the theatre," writes Blau, "but the body's long initiation in the mystery of its vanishing?" There is perhaps nothing so terrifying as the knowledge that my body will forsake me, that this *I am* is vulnerable to pain, to death. Or that another, with a single word or calculated glance or hidden observation, can call my appearance, or my actual being, into question. "I hate myself, I look so ill today," says Loveit in Etherge's *Man of Mode*, and her servant Pert responds revealingly, "Hate the wicked cause on't, that base man / Mr. Dorimant, who makes you torment and vex / yourself continually."

In the international theatres of State terrorism the extreme limit of Dorimant's inquisitorial gaze - the interrogation - may even initiate real disappearance in death (how many deaths in El Salvador in 1986?). Performance on the stage, mirroring performance in everyday life, conducts its business in the face of this threat, in the ambience of this "initiation," trying in moments, to face the facts but far more urgently, trying to forget fact entirely - that fact in particular, glimpsed in "the backward half-look over the shoulder." Terror operates in this theatre of the seemingly unspeakable, and the apparently unrepresentable.

The theatre's entire structure - the voiced breaches between and within characters, the abyss separating actor and audience - attests to its involvement in the deep psychic schism that results from what Jacques Lacan calls "the mirror-stage," that point in psychic development in which the fragmented self appears momentarily whole in the vision of the Other, either as a literal mirror-image, or as the body of another person. In this relation, the Other wields a power that one finds both reassuring and terrifying, for it constitutes one's sense of one's integrity and of what is most gratifyingly familiar, but at the same time it keeps that integrity permanently out of one's control and therefore permanently illusory. Disappearance in the theatre relies on this latter aspect of the Other.

For Lacan, the Other consists partly in that place outside of the self that is the "locus of the inscription of the Law," the concealed space of the unconscious formed by repression. As such, "The Other," like meaning itself, has no distinct site. It will retain the allusiveness of interpretation, and always escape - like language - from closure. Since this unlocality produces terror, one seeks protection in becoming inaccessible oneself, Herbert Blau puts it succinctly: "The silence of another - intolerable. The only defense is the silence within." But this is just another kind of terror, one which the self imposes on itself. Hieronimo, in *The Spanish Tragedy*, demonstrates how gruesome such terror can be. After his son's incomprehensibly wanting murder, his despair drives him to bite out his tongue, terrorizing his own body. It is just such a displacement by the speaking subject into the law, into the locus of the Other, (in this case, the law of silence) that produces apathy. When I speak from the locus of the Other, I disappear to myself.

As the Other demands through force that we show ourselves, we experience our "fading," the threat of our disappearance, a threat that Lacan calls "lethal." And it is this particularly lethal aspect of the Other, the perception of the Other as the Enemy, that gave rise to Blau's exhaustive work with his group Krakken:

The enemy we wanted to know is the sinister aspect of the Other, the Familiar, the Double, the Secret Sharer, perhaps all that survives of the Beloved - what makes your hair stand on end.
In the Enemy, the familiarity of the Other—the sense of the Other as mirrored self, different, but also the same—is red-shifted by that fractional difference, that splintered second of arc that represents light-years. The Other, still somehow the Same, is now radically altered, changed, life-threatening, like one of the ghosts of Dunsinane, or like the image of Desdemona in Othello’s eye after her imagined adultery, a “well-painted passion”—the form still recognizable, but the difference making ‘your hair stand on end.’ There is no knowing if this alterity inheres in my perception or in the Other; certainty can only exist in the knowledge of the Other.

This shift in perception, the assumption of this aspect of the Other, is critical because it both clarifies one aspect of the Other—its seeming enmity, or its enmity as seeming—and obfuscates the larger field of the Other by introducing yet another variable, another variant in the precession of its masks. But even within the restrictions of its definition as the Enemy, the Other is still impossible to grasp, impossible to know. The more familiar the Enemy looks, the more threatening, more dangerous, it becomes. Familiarity is the most dangerous liability in the confrontation with the Enemy. In a commentary on the theatrical project built around the concept of the Enemy, Blau writes, “Our greatest temptation would be to embrace some spectre of the Enemy prematurely, while the mortal Enemy, scornful in the realm of archetypes, was laughing at the presumption.”

Since the Enemy threatens to exterminate the self, it becomes a matter of survival to distinguish it from the Other in which one recognizes oneself.

The Enemy might be fiction, chimera, product of paranoia—yet something more than our own psychic field distorted, made monstrous or feeble by the perversions of dread, an inverse reverence. . . . The Enemy’s mask is inscribed by history with lines drawn by our earliest childhood fears. The idea of the enemy is what was dreamed for us before we dreamed. Our dreams return to our denials: we are being dreamed. The Enemy is doing the dreaming.11

Finally, Blau’s work recognizes in its search for the Enemy that the Enemy may simply be the paranoia of the search itself. “The very conception of the Enemy might be the Enemy,” he says; but all the same “there is the conception.”12

When I place myself in language—the Other’s location—announcing my presence there, and vanishing to myself here, disappearance effects pain. According to Lafitau in Danton’s Death, pain “measures time . . . finely, it splits a sixtieth of a second.”13 The moment of terror, like the instant of pain, is a moment of zero time and infinite duration. Although terror can only occur in history, it is felt as a naked singularity, existing outside all possible representation. In the actual time that terror and pain occur, History cancels itself, places itself “under erasure,” dis-appears. “The smallest twinge of pain

—and may it stir only in a single atom—makes a rent in Creation from top to bottom.”14 In pain we experience history as pure subject, isolated and detached; we experience history, in other words, as a-historical. But pain is an instance of what Lacan calls the Real, a term designating the actual conditions of life as they penetrate the mind and body unmediated by the Symbolic. Frederic Jameson puts it succinctly: “the Real in Lacan . . . is simply History itself,” where the term “History” refers to the experience of the subject.15 In terror the Real seems, paradoxically, to split from history, sheared away in an instant that appears—in the blink of an eye—as history’s end. The recuperation of that end, and the refication of terror into history as historicized “fact” or image is the Terror, or the practice of the terror, terrorism.

Terror threatens the Symbolic, discriminating order of language by forcing either the disintegration of language, or its reduction to silence. To again paraphrase Blau: Samuel Beckett has shown us again and again that the theatre really may have nothing to say. But the terror that infects performance is not the same as terrorism. Terrorism is an invasive technique; it is effective as a technique only when it appears as a symbolic rupture in the Symbolic, “rational,” “normal” order of things—a gun held to the head of a hostage-pilot, for instance, communicating in this threatening display before the television cameras the symbolic structure of the hostage situation. The effects of terror, by contrast, appear as an actual (thus unrepresentable) rupture of the Symbolic or Imaginary by the Real. As such, it can never be a “technique.” The manipulation of terror by the forces that create real states of Terror or terrorism must ultimately leave terror unchanged, unspoken. Only the image of terror, the mask of the Enemy, is subject to revision. The space of that revision is performative, whether the performance is theatricalized, or privatized—in torture and disappearances, for example.

But revising the image of terror in performance should not be confused with changing the reality. Although the image of the Terror has been changed, or displaced, or “revised,” the real terror, the terror that has silenced performance itself, remains hidden (as it must). It is thus always up for question whether our modes of theatre and performance are laboring against terror, or against the image of the Terror as terrorism.

Terrorism seeks to separate the seemingly inseparable—the Real from the historical—and to obliterate the transcendental signifier “history” in the ecstasy of a moment in which the Real seems to exist without its Historical “aura.” In that instant of transformation, a moment of sustained Real-ity, demand would fully satisfy desire. The terrorist impulse is at once an impulse to the sublime and an impulse for death enacted in the present performative; but it becomes, finally, the Other Theatre of Cruelty, the Other Theatre generated by Plague, since as the terrorist act necessarily becomes an electronically mediated spectacle, its theatrical impulses cease to be theatre, but more on this later.
In the midst of these abstractions and apparent contradictions, terror, the essence of the Enemy, may appear unlocated, unrepresentable, nameless, but it remains real, like the Enemy, it "has a name." However unspoken the moment of terror might be, the Enemy has its methods and techniques, its reasons — no matter how unutterable these may seem. Although the moment of terror exists in the Real, and so is outside language, we act as though it can be understood — a Utopian twist, perhaps. We study, if not terror, then terror's existence in its effects, its strategies, its illusions, its masks, in the cruel and terrifying traces of its History upon our minds and bodies — in short, what Marx might simply have called History itself.

Robespierre, in *Danton's Death*, articulates this distinction:

The weapon of the republic is terror. The strength of the republic is virtue. Virtue: for without it, terror is corruptible; terror: for without it, virtue is powerless. Terror is an outgrowth of virtue; it is nothing more than swift, rigorous, and inflexible justice.

In the theatre we see the distinctions between master/slave, self and Other, Enemy and Beloved, virtue and terror blur and begin to disintegrate. And it is precisely in terror — the terror of disappearance in the binaries — that distinctions threaten, on the one hand, to collapse into the totality of the Same, and on the other, to collapse the totality of the Same itself. The difference between State terror and terrorism against the State — a discourse between others.

This distinction is posited quite clearly in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin when he differentiates the monologic language of the State, which tries to impose the violence of perfectly mediated uniformity (Law) on the language of a society — Robespierre's monolithic appropriation of the terms "virtue" and "terror" — from that same society's use of a performative, heteroglossic language, which tries to disable the monologues of power through the endless slippages and differentiation of common speech. The intrusion of a more self-consciously "common" speech into theatre and performance has been one of the hallmarks of modernism. But as Blau notes, we have seen the slow decay of this "realistic" speech into more and more primitivist versions of colloquialism, "proto" language, and finally aphasic and silence. Words themselves have been disappearing. The decomposition of language through the history of the theatre is best seen, perhaps, by comparing the ebullience of speech in earlier periods with the arid, aphasic, repetitive "dialogue" in Robert Wilson's work, or the "ontologic hysteria" of Richard Foreman's librettos. It is almost as if modern and postmodern performance, sensing the terrorizing inadequacy of language, has, like Hieronymo, bitten out its tongue.

Both the Terror and terrorism, as words, as symbols of the real terror — the unspoken, a-historical, nameless invasion of the mind and body — are always other than themselves because terror cannot be signified. It exhibits the full force of the Real. Terror, when signified, is repositioned in the Symbolic order, where it ceases to be what it is. It becomes refixed, historicized, and in its historicization, it forecloses itself. In its true nature terror is random. Like terrorism as it is theorized by Jean Baudrillard, terror "no longer has any objectives, ... nor any determinate enemy.... Terrorism is this: it is novel, and insoluble, only because it strikes wherever, whenever, whoever."

As terror moves into signification and becomes understood as the Terror or terrorism, it becomes an annihilating violence in the service of knowledge (virtue) and power. It contains as its inscription the law of terrorism — the absolute necessity to communicate the incomunicable as incomunicable, or, as Lycotard might put it, to represent the unrepresentable. Terrorism uses the incomunicable to ground a discourse of power in an absolute coercion of the body. This difference of terror from itself, this alterity, this non-representable, the word itself, concealing violation within its mark like a tattoo on the body, forms the basis of terrorism's ideology and political technique.

The spectacle of terrorism to which terror gives way is essentially a product of the political order, a world as Guy Debord writes, "at once present and absent which the spectacle makes visible.... the world of the commodity dominating all that is lived." The terrorist, the newsman, and "anti-terrorist" law-enforcers are all implicated in this process of commodification: all help to maintain the continued efficacy of terrorism as a political tool, as an implement of the Symbolic, informational order — the Law of terrorism, or terrorism as cultural object.

Terror's movement from the Real to the Symbolic — terror into terrorism — gives it political force. As it exists in the Real, terror can have no literal meaning, and as it comes to rest in the Symbolic order, it can no longer be what it was when it was felt as real. This is the reason, I think, that terrorism needs, and has always insisted upon, the performative mode. According to Blau, "The illusions of performance are still horrifically intertwined with the performance of illusions. The terrorist act has always been designed theatrically." But it is crucial to remember that although the two impulses — terror in the theatre and the theatre of terrorism — may meet somewhere in the present performative, the two impulses are not the same. It is also important to keep in mind that today State terrorism (by far the more virulent of the two forms of terrorism) typically relies on the non-theatrical in-visible techniques of torture, clandestine operations, disappearances, and night-time bombing runs.

II

Lacan defines the Other (Enemy) as a manifestation in/of the Symbolic order. Jean Baudrillard places the simulacrum in an order of simulations that seems to be something like a collapse of the Lacanian Real and Symbolic — what he
calls the hyperreal, but what appears more as the hyper-symbolic: “the real is not only what can be reproduced, but that [like language] which is always already reproduced. The hyperreal.”  Baudrillard reverses the usual order of the signifier and the signified. He says that the difference between Ss is an illusionary product of the capitalist ethos that differentiates between use value and exchange value and favors the “reality” of the latter, as does the signified over the signifier. But in the post-industrial capitalism of our time, reifying more and more heavily on the exchange of signs as commodities, the signifier—a seemingly symbolic entity—takes up reality of the signified (or the referent?) into itself, and erases the difference. What is real, then, is what can be (like the signifier) perfectly programmed, controlled, and reproduced each and every time from a preexisting symbolic model or “simulation.” There is thus no “reality” or Real in the Lacanian sense; what is real refers back each and every time not to something, but to a model, a program, a virtual hyperreal: “It is reality itself today that is hyperreal, ... it is reality that disappears utterly in the game of reality.”

The logic of the simulacrum precludes theatre in as much as the latter is an imaginary/symbolic construct that stands in the place of the (repressed) Real. Since Baudrillard collapses such distinctions, there can no longer be a theatre that refers its illusions back to “reality.” “End of the theatre of representation, the space of signs, their conflicts, their silence... It's a theatre. It's a movie,” 25 old adages, old naturalistic denunciation. These sayings are now obsolete. 26 Even Artaud is displaced, existing only as the cold “referential of cruelty.” 27 Terrorism, according to Baudrillard, has now subsumed theatre into its order of simulation: terrorism is “our Theatre of Cruelty, the only one that remains to us, perhaps equal in every aspect to that of Artaud or to that of the Renaissance.”

The logic of the simulacrum applies quite well to the current “hyperreal” phenomena of terrorism. Terrorism has for some time been absorbed into the semantics—the “simulations”—of media. Terrorism, that “Theatre of Cruelty,” owes its existence, according to Baudrillard, to the various media that produce it. Although terrorism may be, as scholars in international affairs are fond of saying, “a theatre, at least in its embryonic stages,” 28 in Baudrillard’s thought terrorism, when it is not “theoretical,” is not so much an exploitation of the media by terrorists, as at least in its embryonic stages, it is the media’s means by which the realterror act into consumer product (the sellable video image). Terrorism is thus dependent upon a system of information whose coherence is determined by the logic of simulacra—the endless precession of images whose signifying function is aimed only at other images, other simulacra. In this world, polarities of right and left (right and wrong?) are collapsed into a single, unending chain of identical images—the images of “the terrorist,” who has ceased to represent anything but a nameless, endlessly mirrored nonentity with vaguely Semitic features—the Enemy reduced to what Blau might call “the Enemy that appears by default... The Enemy that comes out to meet faithheartedness.”

What does it mean to simulate real terror, and pain? What are the models from which terror emerges? Which discourses have truly absorbed the pain of torture and the wounded body? Baudrillard discusses such questions briefly in Simulations, but only from the standpoint of one who knows the pain, not from the standpoint of the one who actually experiences it. Baudrillard admits only the hyperreal pain of simulation, “for guilt, anguish and death there can be substituted the total joy of the signs of guilt, violence and death.” For Baudrillard pain and terror have also become hyperreal.

But once the logic of the simulacrum—the endless precession of identical images—makes the Real disappear into the hyperreal, theatre into terrorism, pain into the signs of pain, we stand face to face once again with the Enemy. The real Enemy, now the simulation “who appears by default.” When the Real disappears, we disappear to ourselves. We do not return to simulation, though: we return to the simulacrum’s terror, a terror generated by the threat of violence by the Other.

Although there is terror both in the real-time terrorist act and in theatre, it does not follow that there is any easy equation between the two. If there is a link between the terror of terrorism and that in the theatre, it is not in the surface similarities of theatricality, but in the necessity of the immediate body, the body that is, in Blau’s words, “dying right in front of your eyes.” Blau’s work has focused on the obdurately immediate body, the body that “stinks of mortality,” but whose presence and identity continuously elude us in a ghostly play of appearances and disappearances:

Remember me, says the Ghost (who is after all only an actor, with his own history of living speech), withdrawing, the words echoing in the tablet where, even if scratched in the actor’s blood, the speech is only the shadow of an appearance whose identity is suspect.

The oscillation between an insistence on the irremediable physical presence of the actor, coupled with an absolute suspicion of the significance of that presence, places Blau’s work at the lacerating edge of the “problem” of the Real—its indistinctness in Lacan, its repression by the “hyperreal” in Baudrillard: the Real as History that insists itself as the ground of our thought and experience. For Blau, the theatre is the space and time within which that problem is explored in all its dimensions, in all of its impossibilities.

If theatre has been repressed in the orders of simulacra, we may forget the simulation that is theatre; the doubling, mirroring, replicating structure of rehearsal and repetition in performance; that process of simulation that
embody the Enemy as repetition, "the life-denying force of a cadaverous return." While it is true that, according to Baudrillard, the doubling in theatre is different from the "vertiginous hyperreality" of the simulacrum, that initial breach in the perception of the theatre is the beginning and the return of simulation; and in that return, as at the end, there is the Enemy and death.

A Theatre of Cruelty seems unnecessary when reality has outstripped what is most cruel in the theatre, when "the enormity of fact almost corrodes the reality and value of art." Recently though, there have been some attempts to re-establish the reality of terror in performance in the face of its commodification and repression by mediation and simulation. It is perhaps in body-art that the image of terror has most visibly re-entered performance. The scars, marks and mutilations appearing in the works of Stelarc and Burden, the needles and threadmills and binding ropes in the performance work of Linda Montano, the kiss and the bite in the work of Vito Acconci, and the repetition of similar violence in countless lesser known performance works, all indicate a desire in performance to mark the body with the design of its specific historical necessity as proof of its reality.

But marking the body in performance alienates it from itself and forces it to become a sign (or rather, a sign of a sign) of its physical presence. Its theatricalized wounds put it again at a distance from itself, producing in its informational designs a literal ecstasy that attests to a desire for the sublime in the representation and cancellation of the body's history. This is quite similar to the desire in terrorism for a sublime produced through the obliteration of History. But this distancing also reifies and commodifies the body. Like simulation, it sells the violent image and transmutes expenditure into production. We need only turn to Baudrillard's "white lymph" of television to remind ourselves how easily "real" pain and "real" wounds are packaged and sold in post-industrial American capitalism. Although the images of violence sometimes seem to challenge our capacity to absorb them, absorb them we do—at first with trepidation, perhaps, but finally with complacency, even oblivion.

Though terrorism may be, as Blau says, designed as theatre, though it may be a simulation, a hyperreality, it is not theatre; neither is it installation, performance art, or any "art form" that selects the living/dying body—the real body, even if "realized"—as its material. Terrorism may be documentation of some performative act that occurred somewhere, once, and perhaps it is theatre/performance for those bodies pierced with shrapnel, burnt with napalm, violated with electric cattle prods, but we will never know, because it is not our theatre; we, with extremely rare exceptions, were never there.

Still, the creation of terrorism as a commodity has serious implications for all modes of performance that attempt to employ the terrorism of "actual" violence as a central concept. Given that the media endlessly reproduce images of terrorized bodies for the benefit of the political and economic order, we must seriously question the meaning of those same images, or other images of the violated body, as they come to us in contemporary performance. Although the terror of the wounded body may be "real" to the performance artist, that reality is instantaneously cancelled in systems of exchange that constitute American capitalism because the inflicted wounds exist, primarily as spectacle. Contrary to this, the terror of anaphasia in the theatre is what Blau calls a "ghosted" terror—a terror that is real, but that only becomes perceivable, paradoxically, in disappearance, in the fading residue of a presence in the returning memory, in those traces that play over the suspect appearance of the body.

In the dreaming body of the actor, the living image of the displaced person: self time memory consciousness desire. The theatre is always beginning over, that's the trouble. Where do we start?

The return of theatre is the return of a terror that resists spectacle, or that uses spectacle as a place of perfect concealment.

"The spectacle," says Debord, "is the moment when the commodity has attained the total occupation of social life." As the wounds become deeper, our ability to endure the sight of the gore becomes stronger. This is the lesson of violence-as-image. Through repetition, the images of what was once, somewhere, real violence—whether as news event or as body art—lose their repugnance, and become more and more salable as they become an entrenched part of the signifiers of media or art. Theatre and performance become the victims of this process when they lose sight of the difference between the representation of terror and terrorism as representation. But they resist the commodification of violence when they name the Enemy who threatens us. Naming the Enemy is the necessity to which we are condemned; the formulation of the Name is what keeps us alive to life and to death and to history. "While we might prefer to deny the Enemy or call it by other names... somewhere... there is an Enemy and the Enemy has a name."

Notes
2. In Lacanian terms: the disappearance of self in the field of the Other caused, in part, by the internal split of a rising demand/desire. This demand causes the self to situate itself in the location of the Law of authority, which properly belongs to the Other. The self thus "disappears" to itself. For a fuller treatment of the concept of the Other in Lacan, see Anthony Wilden's translation of Lacan's "The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis," as well as his own commentary on the Other, in Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).
HISTORICAL EVENTS AND THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF TOURISM

Michal Kobialka


It is sometimes necessary to turn against our own instincts and to renounce our experience.

—Gilles Deleuze, "Painting and Sensation",

The Deleuze Reader

1995 was the year which commemorated not only the end of World War II by marking the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz in January, the bombing of Dresden in February, the fall of Berlin in May, and the dropping of atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, but it was also the year which witnessed the end of a war that should have never happened, or rather, a war that no one ever expected to take place in Europe: the war in Bosnia.2

The commemoration of these historical events and the material presence of what is quickly becoming an historical event presents us with a unique glimpse into the complex relationship between the physicality of an event and the genealogy of its performance: the way we wish to remember, imagine, or put our imprint on it, the way we construct and organize a place where it can be seen, and the way we adapt it to changing conditions; a relationship that both questioned and tested the Western concept of history and historiography in 1995. In the past, history was written to glorify the winners, to immortalize dead kings, or to assess the achievements of the masses; today, histories are written to announce the split within the "we" or the lines of flight of the "I," to enunciate the diverse positions of the speaking subject, or to develop strategies of resistance for the marginalized. "What we seek now", contends Jean Baudrillard, "is not glory but identity, not an illusion, but, on the contrary, an accumulation of proofs—anything that can serve as evidence of a historical existence".3 As the post-1989 events in Poland, Germany, Rumania,
and Czechoslovakia or debates over conquests, racism, colonialism, gender, and sexual orientation suggest, today's history and historiography are often equated with the mantra for trials and responsibility in order to establish history's objects of study, procedures for studying them, and a proper manner of speaking and writing about them.

This essay focuses on the mode of historicity, which organizes, as Michel de Certeau observes, the manner in which history's objects and subjects are or can be thinkable, identified, or contrived, on the idea of an historical event, which is produced as a specific narrative according to this mode, and, ultimately, on the challenge both of them present to an historian. I will argue that, nowadays, because of how the mode of historicity is structured, historical events, like the events of everyday life, lose their depth and are emptied out by the "marketing" or "fatal strategies" and "staff" trained to sell them as "a past". Such a transaction is legitimized by technology and the media, which are used to establish the general standards for the visible and the worthy of notice. Many of the events, which can only last for a split second before they fade, cannot resist, and become part of the recyclable depositories of imaginations, ideologies, and political rationalizations at once past and present which give them ultimate surface permanence.

If this suggestion can compel considerations of the relationship between the "procedures" and the "events" that they name, misname, make invisible, or ignore in the past and the present, should not we rethink the notion of history and historical practice? What challenges will this investigation bring to our practices as historians?

In order to address these questions, (i) I will discuss representational practices that were and are employed in the process of absorbing two events, which took place in 1995—the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the July genocide in Srebrenica—into the system of historical memory; (ii) I will deal with the conflict between historical memory and the reality principle; (iii) I will show how a performance, Tadeusz Kantor's Silent Night (1990), an optically sonorous event rehearsing an event, can be seen as a tactic exposing the weakness of the dominant representational practices that desire to "freeze the gesture of thinking" and communicate that which escapes us in the commemorative procedures of history. This can only be done by showing that the event cannot be governed by pre-established rules and categories that extinguish or simulate its intensity. Therefore, one must not accept the reconciliation between the event and one's communicable experience of it.

1995. Two events, separated by a linear passage of time and the war against memory, come to mind to haunt us with their and our unspeakable and unrepresentable suffering and to problematize the nostalgia and melancholy for the event's presence and our abjection in history. the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz/Oświęcim and the July, 1995 exodus from Srebrenica, Bosnia.

The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz took place in Kraków and Oświęcim on January 26 and 27, 1995. Since fiftieth anniversaries have a special significance in Western culture, this particular event was assigned a specific meaning. Some fifteen-hundred journalists from many European countries came to Poland to observe and report what did and did not happen during these two days. Prior to the main celebrations on January 27, 1995, there appeared in the mass media a whole series of statements that established reference points in the not-yet-fully-developed landscape of the event. Thus, for example, a Polish daily, Zycie Warszawy, warned that the commemorative anniversary could be plagued by xenophobic madness and mutual accusations and indictments voiced by the Jewish delegations against the Polish organizers and vice versa. Ignatz Bubis, the head of the Central Jewish Advisory Committee in Germany, accused the Polish organizers and the Catholic church of trying to enforce "Polishness" upon the event by not inviting all the survivors but only a select few. "The Poles do not want to see any Jews there", added Bubis. These words appeared in Leipziger Volkszeitung and were aired by many radio stations the next day. An official report asserted that the organizers were conscientiously treating the Jewish victims of Nazism on a par with Polish, Dutch, and Gypsy victims. Another problem surfaced when the organizing committee came forth with the idea of inviting the Nobel Peace Prize recipients. If all Nobel Peace Prize recipients were to be invited, Yasser Arafat would be in the group. Needless to say, after many arguments, the invitation was not sent to Arafat. However, many Nobel Peace Prize recipients, who did not want to be associated with the controversy, politely declined the invitation. Yet another point of contention was the time and the length of the prayers that were supposed to be said during the celebrations. Bubis pointed out that the prayer of the six religions was originally to last twelve minutes. The Polish organizers responded that the representatives of all different religions were to pray together to symbolize the universal aspect of suffering. The Jewish representatives never accepted this explanation and organized independently a three-hour Kaddish, an alternative to the officially scheduled prayer. The fourth controversy prior to the Auschwitz commemoration was the placement of a Catholic cross near the concentration camp. The land on which the concentration camp is located belongs to a Carmelite convent. Avraham Weiss, a radical New York rabbi and a Jewish activist, chose this moment to claim Auschwitz as the Jewish cemetery. If Auschwitz were to be recognized as the biggest Jewish cemetery, there should be nothing there, including any Christian symbols, that could even remotely disturb the dead and the religious feelings of those who mourn the dead.

These four controversies were widely publicized in France, Germany, Israel, and the United States. A perusal of printed journalistic materials shows that
the language that was used by the press reveals much more about how these countries wanted to stage Auschwitz for themselves rather than about the event itself. The French press emphasized that the fiftieth anniversary disclosed a dormant conflict and antagonism between the Poles and the Jews. It accused Walter of nationalism, chauvinism, and anti-Semitism because he did not mention the Jewish victims often enough in his official speech. Liberation's headline speaks for itself: "Auschwitz: Selective memory of the Poles".

Jean Kahn, the president of the European Congress of the Jews, noted in Le Figaro that the Polish government wanted to organize a nationalistic commemoration by emphasizing Polish suffering and forgetting that 90% of the victims were Jews. The German press and radio devoted ample space to the discussion of the ownership of Auschwitz and to the Jewish-Polish conflict. The Jewish-Polish conflict was also the focal point in the Israeli mass media. The press in the United States was full of sensational details as well as incorrect information. The Washington Post accused the Poles of being completely insensitive to the Jews and their tragedy; accused the Polish guards in the death camp of raping Jewish women; and the Polish government of turning Auschwitz into a temple of Polish suffering by changing its name to Oświęcim.

The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz/Oświęcim began on January 26, 1995. Some fifteen-hundred commentators and journalists were closely observing the order of the day and pondering over the pressing questions of who was speaking, when the speech was delivered, how many times was the speech given, who was present, whether there was only a fax transmission from Edgar Bronfman, the president of the World Congress of the Jews.

On January 27, 1995, the official commemoration took place in the concentration camp, Auschwitz/Oświęcim. In order to balance the conflicting claims of past and present, the Polish daily, Gazeta Wyborcza, published a lengthy interview/commentary with Elie Wiesel, the Auschwitz survivor and the Nobel Peace Prize recipient.

On July 13, 1995, a photo exhibit, "Faces of Sorrow: Agony in the Former Yugoslavia", opened at the Weisman Art Museum/University of Minnesota, in Minneapolis. It is a collection of about seventy photographs by more than forty photojournalists representing fourteen countries. As is indicated in the programme, the collection "offers the public the multinational vision of the human ramifications of this crisis". A huge open room is filled with photographs hanging on the white walls. Depending on the subject-matter, they are hung either individually or in clusters. Thus, for example, a colour photograph of a burning town is not disturbed by the frames of other images. It does not have to compete for attention—the theatricality of the image is in a class by itself, the same way a spectacular operatic design is. The shot was taken by Peter Nortwall on February 15, 1991. For those who do not recall what happened then, a huge black sign on the wall, "Ethnic Cleansing", and a small caption, "Flames engulf the ancient port city Dubrovnik after the raid and artillery attack by Serb dominated Yugoslav National Army Forces", broadcast the true meaning of the frozen-in-time event. On another wall, "Images of Sarajevo", there is a cluster of five images. These five photographs, arranged one on top, two in the middle and two at the bottom, show a doctor's hand holding a new-born baby still attached to the mother's womb (Amy Lebowitz, February 1994), a face contorted with pain while the doctors are removing a piece of shrapnel from the person's back (Christopher Morris, July 1993), a doctor drilling manually into a fractured leg in a candle/torch-lit trauma unit of a hospital (Christopher Morris, July 1993), a group of Muslim praying at the courtyard of the Muslim Theological Department of Sarajevo University (Thomas Kern, December 1992), and children playing basketball near a shattered office tower in Sarajevo's business district (Tom Stoddart, April 1992). There is no doubt that these five photographs accurately depict events that are particularly immense and appalling. But they can only show the most visible manifestations of the suffering caused by war. Trying to capture the unthinkable on a film negative, when only isolated moments can be photographed, is a singularly daunting task. It is a task which is always already defined for a photography curator by the selection of materials and the way of exhibiting them. Here, these thoughts fold back upon themselves. One cannot look at these photographs individually, because the existence of other frames within a field of vision prevents this from happening. There is no space to think, to penetrate the object, or to listen to the image. One is almost forced to step back and since there is nothing to stop the line of flight the abyss between the wall/the image and the viewer is established. Within this l'espace absolu, the cluster is manageable because, when one is removed from the immediate and claustrophobic field of the photograph, uncertainty, cry, pain, silence, and everyday activity are transformed into a legible text of lines, abstract images, composition, and contrast. Now, this text does nothing more than accumulate proofs as the evidence of an historical existence. One can hardly escape the desire to talk about the flow of the lines within and without a representational frame. At the same time, one is almost caught in the moment of eliciting pleasure from viewing these images—the records of someone else's fate and destiny. The face on the photograph is not here to see its own shape or to stare at the viewer with empty eyes, because it is either in another land or dead.

A few hours after the opening, information travelled through the electronic networks about Srebrenica, the United Nation's so-called "safe area" for Bosnian Muslims. Twenty-five thousand women and children were impatiently waiting a single word about the whereabouts of twenty thousand men. It was only a week later that some shreds of information became available. What was published in the American press always carried a disclaimer that the tales of survival which would "impress the toughest and best-trained
II

In the 1967 essay, “The Discourse of History”, Roland Barthes ponders over the question of the distinction between “the narration of past events, commonly subject in our culture, since the Greeks, to the sanction of historical ‘science’, placed under the imperious warrant of the ‘real’, justified by principles of ‘rational exposition’” and imaginary narration as can be found in the epic, in the novel, or in the drama. According to Barthes this distinction is grounded in the so-called “reality effect” whose function is to verify, rather than follow, that the event, represented in history and as history, has really taken place:

The prestige of this happened has a truly historical importance and scope. Our entire civilization has a taste for the reality effect, attested to by the development of specific genres such as the realistic novel, the private diary, documentary literature, the news item, the historical museum, the exhibition of ancient objects, and, above all, the vast development of photography, whose sole pertinent feature (in relation to drawing) is precisely to signify that the event represented has really taken place.\(^1\)

This signification of the “reality effect” (l’effet de réel, the effect of the real), as a means of protecting consciousness from doubt, retains the possibility of a verification that can be done by scholars. In The Names of History, Jacques Rancière speaks about a manoeuvre that sheltered historical studies from the fables of opinions.\(^3\) This manoeuvre was the establishment of historical science which placed itself in opposition to fictionalized history and the historical novel. In order to maintain its position, history needed to escape literature, give itself the status of a science, and signify this status. This could only be achieved when the three procedures were articulated in a single discourse. Rancière refers to them as three contracts with the reality effect:

The first is the scientific contract, which necessitates the discovery of the latent order beneath the manifest order, through the substitution of the exact correlations and numbers of a complex process for the scale of the visible weights and sizes of politics. The second is the narrative contract, which commands the inscription of the structures of this hidden space, or of the laws of this complex process, in the readable forms of a story with a beginning and an end, with characters and events. And the third is a political contract, which ties what is invisible in science and what is readable in narration to the contradictory constraints of the age of the masses — of the great regularities of common law and the great tumults of democracy, of revolutions and counterrevolutions, of the hidden secret of the multitudes and the narration of a common history readable and teachable to all.\(^6\)

With scientific, narrative, and political contracts in place, what Barthes perceives as a “reality effect” entered the stage and became a general requirement. It would seem that with postmodern commitment to pluralizing political, cultural, and ideological identities, the requirement for the “reality effect” would disappear. I will argue however that the “reality effect” did not leave the stage. Academics in different fields have now the whole spectrum of theoretical formulations, conceived to decolonize imagination, that are waiting in the new house of History, ready to be interiorized as procedures and exteriorized as achievements, standards, or proper forms.

These theoretical formulations, whose function was to enunciate the postmodern as the condition of existence (Lytard), as an open field of spectable relationships (Foucault), as a dynamic and open space of potentialities (Bourdieu), as a space of close-range vision (Deleuze), as a territory in which objects can be situated but never classified (de Certeau), as a space where words, concepts, and objects need to be wrestled from their "proper" meaning or place (Spivak), are turned into a system whose function is to produce schemata of thought and expression that will describe events as part of a constructed representational model within an assumed reality. History will always find itself in the space of homonymy of science and narrative. De Certeau may be right when he argues in The Writing of History that "[a] fact that has been recorded and is today assumed to be historically valid is shaped from conflicting imaginations, at once past and present".\(^7\)

The two events described in this essay can serve to substantiate this point. In their respective positions, each has a specific time of action that provides the place for a discourse. This discourse is a field where the event becomes visible by welcoming the past that is housed in the physical and narrative bodies of the survivors as well as a present that is lodged in discursive performativity of that which believes itself to be the guardian of the past in the present. Past and present produce their own rationalizations whose function is to record as historically real that which will always escape any form of territorial grounding. As the language of disclaimers showed, even the most gruesome details of Srebrenica can be codified into the genre of descriptive

\(^1\) Barthes, Roland. "The Discourse of History." In The Post-Structuralists: Key Writings, edited by Hal Foster. 1980, p. 158.


\(^3\) Rancière, Jacques. "The Discourse of History." In The Post-Structuralists: Key Writings, edited by Hal Foster. 1980, p. 158.


\(^7\) De Certeau, Michel. The Writing of History. 1986, p. 158.
statements and objective military categories used to reconstruct the massacres. This particular bracketing of an event, or as de Certeau would have it, of forcing the dead bodies to speak the language we understand, is accepted and acceptable. It is acceptable only because violence, as the Bosnia exhibit poignantly indicates, can be transformed into an apocalyptic spectacle prepared for consumption and staged to calm the dead that still haunt us.

This practice has many different narrative forms. Consider Ruth Ellen Gruber’s “Remembering Poland’s Jews,” published in The New York Times on January 29, 1995. The line below the title reads: “Schindler’s List and the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz have reawakened interest in the country’s Holocaust sites.” The article, a guide to the Jewish sites, is a travelogue that describes a tourist’s escapade to the death camps. The tour begins in Krakow. First, a short history of the Jews is given. Second, the remaining part of this section is devoted mostly to how to locate the sites that were seen in Spielberg’s film. On the way around Kraków’s former ghetto where one can see the very buildings that were shown on the screen, one can stop at the several Judica and cafes featuring Jewish-style food and Jewish music. Next, the tour takes one to Auschwitz/Oswiecim, about forty miles west of Kraków, “the principal center for the mass extermination of Europe’s Jewish and Gypsy population. At least 1.6 million people, mostly Jews from all over Europe died there.” The description of what can be seen at the Auschwitz museum follows. “It is impossible not to feel a chill as you walk into the camp under the iron inscription ‘Arbeit Macht Frei’—‘Work Makes you Free’—arched over the gate.” Once the museum with its mounds of clothing, thousands of pairs of shoes, spectacles, suitcases, and toys taken from adults and children before they were herded into gas chambers has been seen, one can go on foot, or take a shuttle bus, to the so-called Auschwitz II located some two miles from the gate. Two other places that are recommended are the Wawrzawa’s former ghetto and Majdanek, a death camp on the outskirts of Lublin in south-east Poland. The guide would not be complete without a selection of places where one can stay, with the emphasis on ambience and the fact that the hotels are “tastefully restored.”

When Baudrillard wrote his now famous essay “Simulacra and Simulations” in which he perceived Disneyland as a “perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulation,” he probably never imagined how, and the degree to which, a simulacrum can be transformed into a flattened effect once “the eclipse of the empire of the sign” was heralded from the top of the Berlin Wall. With the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the event was brought back. In this process, while rationalizations of the past and the present were producing new material and meanings, the whole new system of equivalence was also introduced. One no longer needs to listen to Schönberg’s “Survival of Warsaw” to think about and to face one’s inability to comprehend the events of World War II. Now one can go to experience the event and the past the way a tourist explores an exotic territory. One of the designs for a memorial to Jewish victims of the Holocaust in Berlin envisons no plaques, no statues, and no names, but a garage where the visitors could board special red buses that would take them to places where the Holocaust was planned and executed. “Giving people a way to visit the authentic crime scene would be far more effective than designing a giant monument”, said Frieder Schnick, one of two authors who conceived the project.

Similarly, one reads that “with only one prisoner in custody and money dwindling, the international war crimes tribunal got sympathy but little else today when it put its case before NATO, seeking help to secure mass grave sites in Bosnia and to arrest more than 50 indicted war criminals and deliver them to The Hague for trial.” Why? Because “the arrest of General Mladic, or of lesser figures, could cause great unrest and possible retaliation from the Bosnian Serb forces on the NATO troops who have been trying to befriend them.”

Is it not true that visual or narrative effects and rationalizations are fabricated so that the living can exist elsewhere...

Thus, it is no longer a question of a simulacrum, which has some kind of a physical and corporeal presence, but a question of what remains on the surface when the event is entrapped by the progressive metaphorization. The surface is filled with incorporeal effects that, as Gilles Deleuze suggests, are sonorous (shouts and fist fights between the Jewish and Polish religious groups), optical (the panoramic view of Auschwitz, the Bosnia exhibit), or linguistic (descriptions of controversies or rationalizations). As the events are reduced to effects, they lose their depth, their corporeality, and their uncertainty. Depth, corporeality, and uncertainty acquire a form of a legible experience, an image and a text that can be absorbed and is ready for a physical and a theoretical consumption that breathe new life and new specificity into it. One becomes a tourist who colonizes a landscape, which was created by someone else for someone else, with his/her representations. Now, the landscape is a playground where our guilt can be exalted or our virtue reassured in an almost fetishistic fashion.

Is there a way out of this dilemma? How can the Auschwitz event maintain the condition of its visibility? How can the sorrow of Bosnia be faced? How much compassion or charity can we ask from the dead?

As the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz/Oswiecim and the July, 1995 exodus from Srebrenica demonstrate, there is no distinction between the way an historical record and a current event are presented since both events are produced and verified by representational practices and narratological strategies. Such a distinction is only possible when one believes in the modernist myth of objectivity supported by the "reality effect" or fails to recognize that many historiographic theories operating currently in the field, though they have repositioned the boundaries of history, still function within a very traditional concept of history—history that requires a guarantee of a site from which the speaking subject is looking for proofs and identity.
in his/her knowledge production and dissemination.\textsuperscript{25} Maybe it is finally time to acknowledge that the rational historical, even though it signed a contract with science, narrative, and politics, is not, as de Certeau notes,

distinguishable from that prolix and fundamental narrativity that is our everyday historiography. Scholarship is an integral part of the system that organizes by means of "histories" all social communication and everything that makes the present habitable. The book or the professional article, on the one hand, and the magazine or the television news, on the other, are distinguishable from one another only within the same historiographical field which is constituted by the innumerable narratives that recount and interpret events.\textsuperscript{26}

These innumerable narratives are a part of the practices of interiorization of strategies that are made visible through the process of exteriorization of achievements. Pierre Bourdieu's \textit{habitus} explains the relationship between the conditions of existence in a particular, specifiable, or elected field and the practices of scholarship. \textit{Habitus} is a system of dispositions that structures the practice of individuals belonging to the same group, that is, it is "a system of internalized, embodied schemes which [...] are acquired in the course of individual history and function in their practical state, for practice (and not for the sake of pure knowledge)".\textsuperscript{27} Accordingly, \textit{habitus} participates in the proliferation of an assumed reality through the interpretation of observed and observable practices. These practices are engendered by a place that can be claimed by an historian as his or her own and that serves as a base from which to defend the place or prepare future attacks.\textsuperscript{28}

Following Barthes' argument regarding the "reality effect"\textsuperscript{29} modified by de Certeau's heterological procedures one may ask, however: How is it possible that a narrative form claims to produce not a fiction but a (past) event? How is it possible for a scientific practice and an institutional structure to constitute a type of writing which makes these conditions invisible to the reader? How is it possible to negotiate between a real event that speaks the truth (at least this is what we claim observing it from a referential distance), another real event that lies (at least this is what we are told), and yet another real event that is effaced by those two other real events and, consequently, loses its privilege of being? It is through this stripping naked of the modern myth of writing and the resistance to representational effects that the event can rid itself of the language of intelligibility.

The resistance to representational effects was what defined the generation which witnessed and survived the carnage of World War II. This was the generation which posed the question of what it meant to represent after Auschwitz. While discussing the problem of suffering in literature, Theodor Adorno postis Auschwitz as both an epistemological and ontological dilemma. On the one hand, it is barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz, but literature must resist this verdict because suffering tolerates no forgetting. On the other hand, how can suffering find its voice without being betrayed by the cultural heritage that failed to prevent genocide and that now presents suffering as a matter of consumption? Schönberg's "Survivor of Warsaw" is trapped in these murmurings. Adorno introduces the concept of an autonomous work of art in order to overcome this impasse, arguing that the work's inherent structure, rather than the audience's reception, produces knowledge: "Although the moment of pleasure, even when it is effaced from the effect of a work, constantly returns to it, the principle that governs autonomous works of art is not the totality of their effects, but their inherent structure. They are knowledge as nonconceptual objects."\textsuperscript{30}

For Adorno, there is no question that the Auschwitz event really took place. With the concepts of an autonomous work of art, the event is grasped as the living presence in discourses it generates and in the bodies it acts upon. The event is transformed to "knowledge as nonconceptual objects", that is, the event is not yet stratified by the systems and conventions that stabilize its contours and establish its permanence with the language of intelligibility.\textsuperscript{31}

In 1995, Auschwitz lost for many of us its condition of Adorno's autonomous event. The fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of the death camp somberized the event beyond the order of simulacrum. The simulacrum was still the site of the combat between the Jewish and Polish organizers. Theirs was the battle of the last survivors of Auschwitz who fought for the real event. Their battle was however devoured by the representational practices of the fifteen-hundred journalists and commentators who recorded the order of the events and the nature of the controversies that had taken place. These events and controversies will become historically valid in years to come. Similarly, the works of the seventy photographers of the Bosnia exhibit will remain a visual record of an historical event that was happening at the same time when this other real event was taking place. Adorno cannot compete with fifteen-hundred journalists or with the politics of representation in museums.

Adorno can however help us reimagine the discussion of what it means to represent after Srebrenica. The events in the former Yugoslavia not only destroyed its tenuous multi-ethnic fabric, plunging the Serbs, Muslims, and Croats into the war, but also disclosed the inadequacy of Europe's diplomatic and political forces. They have unequivocally shown that the paternalistic assumption of European and American leaders that the warring parties can be reasonable is marred with weakness. As current reports suggest, a linear progress towards a final and peaceful resolution that would be waiting at the end of a year-long stay of the United Nation troops may be nothing more than the history of desired desires. Clearly, I am not suggesting here that Adorno's comments apply directly to the situation in the former Yugoslavia. They do provide insight into the practice of representing. Adorno defended the Auschwitz event by insisting on seeing Auschwitz or the practice of representing it as a nonconceptual object that does not need to cater to a
scientific, a narrative, or a political heritage that failed to prevent genocide. (Instead, it created representations which would present suffering as a matter of consumption.) As Jean-François Lyotard observed, in another context, a representational practice needs to invoke "the unrepresentable in presentation itself, that which refuses the consolation of correct forms, refuses the consensus of taste permitting a common experience of nostalgia for the impossible, and the inquiries into new presentations—not to take pleasure in them, but to better produce the feeling that there is something unrepresentable." 32

Our nostalgia for the presence of the dead so that the living can exist elsewhere, animates the desire to represent suffering in spite of everything. Adorno cautioned against the aesthetics that had dominated the representation of Auschwitz, that is, the aesthetics of a transparent and communicable experience. Fifty years later, it is no longer Adorno or Lyotard but fifteen-hundred journalists who engage in a somewhat similar practice—the practice of turning the event into a communicable experience which can be thought, seen, understood, and materialized. Be it the commemoration of the liberation of Auschwitz/Oświęcim or Srebrenica, the event loses its depth by attesting to the presentable in a homogenous manner of a linguistic, sonorous, or visual language of intelligibility.

According to de Certeau, the language of intelligibility, which propels an historical investigation, promotes a selection between what can be accepted and what must be forgotten in the process of representing the event. However, "whatever this new understanding of the past holds to be irrelevant—shards created by the selection of materials, remainders left aside by an explanation—comes back, despite everything, on the edges of discourse or in its rifts and crenellations: 'resistances', 'survivals', or delays discreetly perturb the pretense of a line of 'progress' or a system of interpretation." 33 They make unsuspected depths visible.

III

This resistance to representational effects brings to mind Samuel Beckett's _Endgame_, Jean Genet's _The Maids_, Tadeusz Kantor's visual theatre, Joseph Beuys' paintings/reminiscences of World War II, Francis Bacon's "A Study of Velázquez's Portrait of Innocent X", Anselm Kiefer's "Breaking of the Vessels", Robert Wilson's "Songs of Fire" or "Memory/Loss", Meredith Monk's "Volcano Songs", Werner Fassbinder's _Garbage, the City and Death_, Peter Handke's _Die Stunde da wir nichts voneinander wussten_, and Daniel Libeskind's architectural designs for the Jewish Museum in Berlin. All these works are stark examples of representational practices that expose, rather than rework, the fissures in the surface permanence of historical events and in the referential systems anchoring them to the end of the twentieth century. They exploit, rather than subvert, the rationality of history and its normalizing procedures by citing norms in ways that mark weakness and instability in them. There is no linear progression towards some resolution awaiting the end. "Me—to play...[...] Old stanscher. You remain," says Hamm in _Endgame_, a play where the act of contemplation of the post-Auschwitz/Hiroshima world needs to happen in a place where the mind can go without the fear of degrading itself. "I see my light dying," responds Clov. 34 This is also the response of Claire, of Innocent X, of a captive tortured by a desert sun and by man, so his memories would disappear within five days, of a body whose image fades away after the explosion, of hollow people-fragments that are reinventing themselves from hour to hour, of characters silently crossing the stage transversely, and of people staring at the white-washed walls cutting through the Berlin Wall. All these works deterritorialize traditional representation of suffering and pain so the past will not liberate itself with each new face headed one upon the other. They do so by showing "nothing" that screams in the presence of the invisible, by forcing us to turn against our own instincts and renounce our own experience, and by not allowing us to establish a distance from which the objects could be looked upon and co-opted by the operations of institutionalized culture. They do so by creating nomad art of close vision in which all orientations, landmarks, and linkages are in a continuous variation. 35 "No line separates earth from sky, which are of the same substance; there is neither horizon nor background nor perspective nor limit nor outline or form nor center; there is no intermediary distance, all distance is intermediary." 36

The art of close-range vision practiced by Beckett, Genet, Kantor, Beuys, Bacon, Kiefer, Wilson, Monk, Fassbinder, Handke, and Libeskind, may help us hear murmurings of the unrepresentable in history. Kantor's theatre experiments are a case in point.

Kantor practised nomad art ever since he assumed the function of the chronicler of the events of this century: "World War I/World War II/Millions of corpses/in the absurd hæcatomb./After the War/old powers were abolished./World War II/Genocide/Concentration Camps/Crematorie/Human Beasts, Death, Torture./Humankind turned into mud soap, and ashes./Depression/The time of contempt./The 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s have passed./At the time/I have been perceiving warning signals that ordered me and dictated that I choose one action or the other.—PROTEST/REVOLT/AGAINST THE OFFICIALY RECOGNIZED SACRED SITES/AGAINST EVERYTHING THAT HAD A STAMP OF 'APPROVAL'/FOR REALITY/ FOR 'POVERTY'" 37

While watching Kantor's heap of broken images and objects on stage, and while listening to Kantor's words describing the fragments of his life finding their fate and destiny in the theatre of intimate commentaries, we realize that there is something disturbing in this discourse. He forces us to acknowledge that we can listen to Kantor listening to and watch Kantor watching the wars, the events, and the people parade in front of his and our eyes. We listen to Kantor listening to their protests against being accepted by bourgeois
The sounds of the tango returned. The figures began to dance in a rhythm that brought about the distant echoes of their past individualities, now expressed through a slow movement, a quick movement, now a jerky movement, or a circular movement. In the meantime, Helka and Nino continued to clean up the room. The sounds of the tango were muffled by the opening notes of "Silent Night". A man on his knees entered the room. In his arms he carried a baby. He left the baby in the middle of the stage. All, except for Helka and Nino, left the stage. One of the figures returned and offered the baby to Helka. Not fully convinced, Helka accepted the baby. The music increased to provide a background to this Nativity scene—Nino with his cello stood next to Helka holding a baby in her arms. The scene was observed and commented upon by the figures, now called the neighbours, whose heads could be seen through the doors and the window. Suddenly, the music died and with it the illusion of a perfect harmony. Helka left the baby on the floor and returned to her previous activity. The music returned and with it the "story" that circumscribed the everyday reality—Helka was offered the baby once more, and the Nativity scene was repeated. The music died again and so did the harmony, the story, and the topography of this "other" space. The sequence was repeated three times. Finally, to end this unsuccessful "staging" of the event, a soldier with a gun entered the room and forced Helka and Nino off the stage.

It is noteworthy that Kantor's rendering of that sequence, though a relative unfolding of the event synchronized with the tempo and rhythm of "Silent Night", was not a nostalgic reconstruction of the biblical story. The sounds of "Silent Night" made Helka and Nino assume the traditional functions of the Virgin Mary and Joseph; however, the illusion of scriptural harmony was ruptured when the music disappeared. Having repeated unsuccessfully the sequence a few times, Kantor made us realize that "everything is but a recollection; a recollection full of bitterness and tears, because of its futility. This futility and impossibility can be seen in the act of repetition. Nino and Helka act as if they played a difficult scene: from the 'everyday' situation, they move into the past, to that night that happened a few thousand years ago. It seems that a miracle happened, but 'Silent Night' ends abruptly. A soldier with a gun interrupted Helka's and Nino's desire to construct an event through a repetition of actions and gestures in order to orient themselves in Kantor's unstratified space.

The world of miracles was not the only world that was constructed by the figures on stage. The crucifixion and the revolution sequences were the two that received a particular treatment. At one moment, the doors opened and a procession, led by a man carrying a wooden cross on his shoulders, entered. Among those who walked in the procession were the figures from the opening sequence. The stage became Golgotha. The procession stopped. Nino watched how the cross was erected. He looked around for a person who could play the part of the "Crucified One". Carmelo, a factotum, advised him. First, Nino...
pointed a finger at a poor seminary student. The student was placed against the Cross. Carmelo was not however fully satisfied with the choice. He suggested a new person. This time, a Hasidic Jew was chosen to play the part. He lifted the Cross perfectly well. A single shot ruptured the solemn tones of the requiem. All hurried away from the stage. A man in black brought in a wooden coffin/box. The priest, who followed him, ordered the body to be put in it. The Emballdge, rather than the crucified Hasidic Jew, was put inside the box and carried away.

The crucified Hasidic Jew remained alone on stage. After some time, he got down from the cross and sat silently on a chair at the doors. Helka, Nino, and Carmelo entered the "room" and greeted him. They all seemed to be bored, as if waiting for something to happen. Suddenly, from behind the doors, voices singing the revolutionary Çu ira indicated that time must have passed. The crowd, led by a woman seated on a guillotine and a priest, burst onto the stage. The guillotine was placed next to the Cross. While the woman operated the guillotine, the crowd, conducted by the priest, continued the revolutionary song. For the time being, the guillotine cut through the air only. One of the women put her head on the gallows. "She must have always dreamt of being Marie Antoinette. [...] And this is how history fulfilled its destiny according to the possibilities existing in my poor room." The head fell into the basket. The singing continued. The woman, Marie Antoinette, put her head on the gallows again. A sudden confusion. The priest ordered that she be taken away. The woman was seated at the table next to a copy of her severed head. Nino and Carmelo started post-mortem comparisons, that is, Carmelo placed make-up on the face of the woman so there was no discrepancy between her and the copy. Helka became jealous and started an argument with Nino. The revolutionary tune drowned the noise.

It is quite obvious that neither of these events adhered to a biblical or historical representation, deconstruction, or collage of events. Their orientational references were in continuous variation. Nino, who assumed the function of Joseph in a previous sequence, was elected to chose the "Crucified One". A woman, who was one of the dead, became Marie Antoinette. Since the orientations in a performance space were changing according to the functions assumed, the people and the objects established a complex network of relationships between themselves and the events while they were staging these events in a performance space. Although some of the events were recognizable in terms of either historical references or subsequent productions, the images on stage challenged one's desire to reduce them to a particular cognitive or historical object or another collective subject or memory. Remember the election of a poor seminary student to be the "Crucified One", the crucifixion of the Hasidic Jew, the function of the Hasidic Jew after the crucifixion, or the depiction of the revolutionary fervour.

Silent Night made clear that the image was neither an object in the field of one's perception. Instead, the image was the structure that conditioned the entire perceptual field of and the mnemonic practices in Kantor's "Room of Memory". As such, the image's shape could never be fully stabilized, striated, or complete.

Nothing explains this notion better than the closing moments of the cricottage. The "Room of Memory", or what was left of it, was the space of unregulated relationships. There was nothing stable in the field of perception that would delineate its scope and boundaries. There was no foreground or background, no past or future, no perspective or centre. Different pieces of music—the tango, "Silent Night", the requiem, and Çu ira—produced events that connected randomly with other events and objects in the space—the dance, the Nativity scene, the crucifixion, and the revolution. Their traits or narratives were not necessarily linked to traits or narratives of the same nature. Instead, they brought into play very different regimes of signs, codification, and practices:

- Maybe this repetition and its creation, which is different from the "original", will allow us to see our world, this "original", as if we were seeing it for the first time.

As the heap of broken images and objects on stage unequivocally indicate, any event that is transformed into a readable place has its own reality index of what can be understood, made visible, rationalized and can manifest itself as a series of effects. As effects, these events and objects are indefinitely reproducible, or as Jean Baudrillard suggests in The Illusion of the End, are indefinitely recyclable.

To go back to the questions that I have posed in this essay—the events described here, each in its own way, can make us feel angry, inadequate, or helpless. They can be viewed by us from the isolated place from which we will speak of being marginalized, subjugated, or silenced by the fatal strategies of the governments or by various practices that have been created for us and absorbed by us through the accepted representational schemata. But this is precisely what I want to avoid while speaking about historical events. The fiftyfifth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the exodus from Srebenica impress upon us the urgency of remembering the stories not yet written or transmitted through the informatic systems of fifteen-hundred journalists, striated by establishing a distance, invariance and points of inertia, or turned into conceptual objects with a given emotional, intellectual, or real use-value. The written, the striated, and the conceptual represent
the sonorous, the optical, and the linguistic surface of an event. It is only a representational practice, best of a soothing ritornello, doubling, or imitation, that establishes the moment of breaking away from the historiography of tourism and its already consumed image.

To eliminate the "sensational" means to recognize that the event strike in the house of History is a permanent condition that speaks and pursues the language of the tactics of resistance—a radical operation against being enucleated by the ideology of the past and the theory of the present moment. The theoretical formulations, often practised indiscriminately under the banner of postmodern commitment to pluralizing and fragmentation, entrap the events. By so doing, they bring the events as the forms by which, as tourists, we experience history to protect our consciousness from doubt—consuming it, demanding the ownership of representation through symbolic gestures, effacing the anxiety of nonconceptual knowledge—and leaving us at a loss for ethical or committed action except as trophies from a tour through the simulated images, which need not even be accurate, as long as their effects allow us to establish the nostalgic desire for the real.

Consequently, maybe, there is only the event strike left since it forces us to acknowledge its conditions of existence, rather than the politics of gain or loss; its movement and position vis-à-vis the acquired rationalizations of the past and present imaginations, rather than its fixed position in the landscape of order; its challenge to what we would like to make visible through its corporeality and materiality in order to reconcile ourselves with life and death; its function in problematizing our language of intelligibility and field of visibility in which we make Auschwitz and Srebrenica meaningful, worthy of record or notice, and viable; and to enunciate these displacements and realignments which, thus far, have been replaced by the historicity of the past and present imaginations and its contrast with the scientific, narrative, and political order. Maybe, there is only the event strike left, since "we no longer make history. We have become reconciled with it and protect it like an endangered masterpiece. Times have changed. We have today a perfectly pious vision of the Revolution cast in terms of the Rights of Man. Not even a nostalgic vision, but one recycled in the terms of post-modern intellectual comfort". Maybe, there is only the event strike left, since, when the strike is crushed, there will only remain "appearance, and then again, appearance: for the rest take up the bodies, what else is there to say? Except that not to say it then is to start thinking about power".

Maybe, then, there is only the event strike left...

Maybe, then, there is only the event strike left...

...and the enunciation of that which will always escape me.
SPECTACLES OF SUFFERING

Performing presence, absence, and historical memory at U.S. Holocaust museums

Vivian M. Patraka

No term is fixed forever in its meaning (unless it has become invisible through disuse); rather it constitutes a set of practices and cultural negotiations in the present. Thus the narrative of making meaning out of the term “Holocaust” continues. The public performance of the term among Jews is multiple, varying in different cultural sites and being used for differing political agendas and pedagogical purposes. The search for the best term to designate the Jewish genocide outlines an attempt to mark both its historical specificity and its uniqueness. This uniqueness has been linked to the extent of the perpetrator’s intentionality, the degree to which the state apparatus legalized the devastation, the measure of its use of “technological weapons of destruction” (Stammard 151), and the number of people killed. But every genocide, in the particularities of its specific history, is unique. And while each genocide is known by this distinct history, it also is understood in the context of other genocides even though these relationships are not ones of simple analogy or equivalence.

While both the terms “Holocaust” and “genocide” were originally conceived to respond to the events in Europe against the Jews, genocide quickly took on the status of a generic, both describing the persecutions of other groups during this period and providing a means for defining actions against groups that would constitute genocidal destruction. Moreover, however proprietary the claims on the use of the term Holocaust have been in some quarters, the evocative power of the term has begun to extend its use tropologically to contemporary considerations of the destruction of groups other than Jews.

Perhaps this is precisely because the term genocide functions as a delimiting generic, while Holocaust brings with it all the protocols of the unspeakable, the incommensurate, and a sense of unlimited scope to the pain and injustice. Or perhaps Holocaust connotes not just the violent moment of elimination of a whole people, but all that goes into it: the beginning of terror and circulating discourses of oppression and exclusion, the constructing of a state apparatus of oppression and the disinformation it produces, the incarcerations, the destruction, and then the revolting denial and censurables. The entire array of cultural, social, and political forces amassed to effect genocide may be historically embedded in the term Holocaust.

No historical referent is either stable, transparent in its meaning, agreed upon in its usage, or even engaged with in the same way by any large group of people. One way of contextualizing the current movement of the term Holocaust is by invoking Michel de Certeau’s distinction between a place and a space in his application of spatial terms to narrative. For de Certeau, the opposition between “place” and “space” refers to “two sorts of stories” or narratives about how meaning is made. Place refers to those operations that make their object ultimately reducible to a fixed location, “to the being there of something dead, [and to] the law of a place” where the stable and “the law of the ‘proper’” rules. Place “excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location.” “Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent way.” Thus space is created “by the actions of historical subjects.” These actions multiply spaces and what can be positioned within them. Finally, the relationship between place and space is a process whereby “stories thus carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places” (117–18). De Certeau’s distinction between a place and a space is crucial to my argument in the way it clarifies the differing strategies of attempting to move people through a landscape whose meanings are uniquely determined, in contrast to providing an opportunity for contestation and multiplicity of association.

Though the domain of the Holocaust is mass death, the narrative(s) created about it need not make it an immobile, tomblike place nor create an inert body of knowledge intended only to conserve and preserve. Producers of public discourse on the Holocaust can actively engage in redefining this space so that, as I’ll presently show, even the seemingly standard definition of the Holocaust as relating solely to Jews comes under interrogation at sites as formal as Holocaust museums and their fundraising materials. And while I do not mean to be facile about the terrible stakes involved in memorializing these events, a narrative space for producing knowledge of the Holocaust—one that would construct its consumers as actively engaged in producing meanings—might be a powerful means to prolonging remembrance. Even if some contemporary authors do deliberately use the term Holocaust in a way designed to compete with or even erase the original referent, if we assert an
exclusive, proprietary claim over the term in response, we run the risk of magnifying one current perception: that the discourse of Jewish Holocaust functions as a kind of controlling or hegemonic discourse of suffering that operates at the expense of the sufferings of other groups. Instead, the notion of space, rather than mutually exclusive places, could signify a discourse on the Holocaust in which genocide stories of different groups could occupy the same locale without necessarily ejecting or evacuating the original referent of Jewish history and suffering. Even so, I wonder whether so much of the history of the Jewish genocide, the meanings attached to it, even the ethical, cultural and linguistic protocols of where to look for meaning about such events, is so deeply embedded in the word Holocaust as to make the Jewish genocide a paradigmatic frame for other genocides located with the term.

Given all of these risks, it is worth considering how the referent of the Holocaust is configured by contemporary American Jews. Despite the very palpable differences among us, both culturally and politically, it is still the case that many of our responses to the images, objects, and words connected to the Holocaust are “hard wired,” provoking automatic emotional meanings and an attitude of reverence. This makes it hard to get beyond a consensus on the agony, the loss, and the mindful viciousness that produced them so we can discern the actual discourses generated about the Holocaust and how it functions. Some of the strategies of this discourse are manipulative; they solicit our anguish, horror, and fear as the grounds for asserting larger meanings to which we may not wish to assent. But neither avoidance of the places in which these “fixed” narratives reside nor simple dismissal is, I think, useful. For this would risk separating us from our own emotions about the Holocaust, entombing them in these monumental stories so that they are no longer available for either examination or change. Instead, we have to create spaces for critique within and among those seemingly inevitable emotional hardwiring and the places to which they get connected.

I offer the discussion below as a step in that direction. I explore how the referent of the Holocaust is currently being configured at sites in the United States where a cultural performance of Holocaust history is being staged for public consumption—the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C., and the Beit Hashoah Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. My purpose in doing so is to honor this history, but also to renegotiate its effects by rethinking the set of practices set up by these two important museums for the sake of both the present and the future. I also want to view each of the museums against the background of their mass-mailed fundraising letters to explore some of their ideological underpinnings. In doing so, I want to mark both the ideological underpinnings that are fulfilled by each museum and those that are dislodged, whether deliberately by the designers or by museumgoers themselves.

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and its fundraising materials

In order to elicit donations, the fundraising materials for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. indicate what the museum promises to accomplish—a self-presentation that represents the main thrust of this institution (Bal 558), refiguring many of the strategies designed for the museum itself. I believe the target audience for these fundraising letters is, primarily, the American Jewish community, while the letters identify the target spectatorship for the museum as the public at large. A captioned photograph locates the museum by its proximity to the Washington Monument as a means of validating it spatially as a national project. Quotations by Presidents Carter, Reagan, and Bush about the Holocaust further authenticate this undertaking, along with a 1945 statement by Eisenhower—not as President, but as General and liberator—asserting that he could give “firsthand evidence” of the horrors he saw “if ever there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to ‘propaganda’.” Also included on the flyer is an official-looking image of the 1980 Public Law to create an independent federal establishment that will house “a permanent living memorial museum to the victims of the Holocaust” (“a short walk from our great national memorials” and hence, implicitly, connected to them). The effect of this is deliberately to blur the boundaries between the privately sponsored and the governmentally mandated.

Of course, any Holocaust museum must enter into a dialogue with the country in which it is located and the positioning of that country in these events, but the D.C. museum’s emphasis on its geographies of announcement is insistent. A clear anxiety about denials of both the events of the Holocaust and its moral significance for Americans is embedded in these recurrent claims for legitimacy, even if some of the hyperbolic language can be chalked up to the discourse of fundraising, which in itself constitutes a kind of melodrama of persuasion. Inevitably, an American Holocaust museum is caught on the cusp of happened here/happened there, a conundrum, as James Young formulated it (Young 1992), over whether American history means events happening here or the histories Americans carry with them.

Presumably, then, learning about the events of the Holocaust, precisely because they didn’t happen here, creates what one newsletter calls a “meaningful testament” to the values and ideals of democracy, thereby inscribing it within the history of American democracy, if not American history per se. It could be argued, then, that in this museum the Constitution is to be viewed through the prism of Jewish history as much as Jewish history is to be viewed through the prism of the Constitution. Thus one of the central strategies of the museum is to assert the way in which American mechanisms of liberal democratic government would prevent such a genocidal action from occurring
in the United States, as well as partially to overlap, for the U.S. viewer, the perspective of the victims of genocide with that of the victims in World War II. This latter aspect would enhance what Philip Gourevitch describes as the museum’s project to reinforce “the ethical ideals of American political culture by presenting the negation of those ideals” as well as our historical response to them (55). In fact, images of American troops liberating the concentration camps constitute part of the final exhibit of the museum as well as the opening tactic of the Holocaust exhibit proper, where all that is seen and heard is presented through the eyes and ears of the liberating soldiers. Even the survivor testimony played for us in an amphitheater at the end of the exhibit prominently includes one narrative by a Holocaust survivor who eventually married the soldier who liberated her. Indeed, this marriage impediment seems to embody a crucial strategy of the whole museum, with Jews and Jewish history (the feminized victim) married to American democracy (the masculinized liberator). Recalling that the American liberator in this survivor testimony is Jewish as well, I must note another, more implicit enactment in the museum, that of consolidating an American Jewish identity by marrying the positions of liberator and victim.

If what is critical for the museum’s project is to extend our fictions of nationhood by the premise that a democratic state comes to the aid of those peoples outside its borders subjected to genocide, then the conferring of liberation becomes the story of American democracy. To assert this story entails foregrounding the masses of people who died before liberation (as opposed to the pitiful remnant left). It entails foregrounding the assumption that waging war can actually accomplish something and, more precisely, that saving Jews, Gypsies, Leftists, Catholic Dissenters, Homosexuals, and Polish forced labor from the Nazis was one of the goals of World War II, rather than a by-product of winning the war by invading the enemies’ territory. I could dismiss the museum’s overall strategy as a simplistic appeal to hegemonic structures of governance. But to do so would be to deny that the museum must engage United States viewers with an ethical narrative of national identity in direct relation to the Holocaust. The alternative is to risk becoming a site for viewing the travails of the exoticized Other from elsewhere (“once upon a time”), or, even worse, “a museum of natural history for an endangered species” (Bald 560).

Moreover, the museum itself does not produce this idea of liberation from genocide as a completely unproblematic and unquestioned historical reality. Within the physical and conceptual envelope of its democratic discourse, the museum offers viewers a display of documents, including actual telegrams, that communicate how, as late as February of 1943, with the Final Solution fully operational in European death camps, the State Department tried to shut down the channels for receiving information about what was happening to European Jews (Berenbaum 1993 161–2). This policy of suppression of information about and denial of aid to European Jews was challenged only by the intense labor of several men in the Treasury Department whose efforts finally culminated in Randolph Paul’s January 1944 “Report to the Secretary of the Treasury on the Agreement of This Government in the Murder of the Jews.” To make a long, painful story short, in January 1944, Secretary of the Treasury Morgenthau took this information to Franklin D. Roosevelt, persuading him to establish the War Refugee Board by threatening (in a presidential election year) to release documents pertaining to the government’s suppression of information and assistance (Berenbaum 1993 163–4).

Despite the references to its proximity to national memorials in the fundraising materials, the museum is actually closest physically to four mundane-looking government buildings, including the Treasury Building diagonally across the street. Much has been made of the way the museum copes the blocky functionality of these buildings in its initial entranceway, because this entrance is a false one, without a roof, while the actual door to the museum are located several feet behind it. Thus the facade of the building recreates the solemn, neoclassical, and universalizing style of the government buildings around it, but marks its relationship to them as architecturally false. However, the documents issuing from the Treasury Building during the 1940s manifest another relationship, one based in precise historical detail, previously suppressed. This creates a chonotopic connection, i.e., a scene of interaction produced simultaneously out of temporal and spatial relationships, between the two buildings and the histories they contain. In offering this information, the museum constructs a localized historical contradiction to its own ideological claims about how democracies respond to genocides, thereby complicating the narrative of our national identity and, in so doing, turning an ostensibly narrative place into a space for negotiating meanings.

Moreover, while my reading of the actual museum emphasizes sites for constructing multiple meanings and relationships, the fundraising materials recall the larger ways in which the exhibits are to function. One flyer promises the museum will orchestrate our emotions in the mode of a spectacle designed to command attention, transfuse spectators, and narrativize in advance the experience of those who approach it: “You will watch, horrified” and “you will weep” over this “heroic and tragic story.” There is also an overpowering sense of desire in all these descriptions, a need to create an utterly convincing spectacle that will say it all, stop time and space, prevent denial and make the suffering known. Of course, no representation can do that, even if we hear the “actual voices of death camp survivors tell of unspeakable horror and pain.” How could the unspeakable of genocide be spoken? How could the interiority of individual suffering on a massive scale be turned into an exterior, if respectful, spectacle? Perhaps the consuming desire for the real in representation, for the convincing spectacular, is inversely proportionate to the process of genocide itself, which is not spectacularized, but silent, dispersed, concealed, and denied. But the personal artifacts that the letters claim will be collected in one of the museum’s rooms—the suitcases, hair brushes, razors,
photographs, diaries, dolls, toys, shoes, eyeglasses, and wedding rings—despite their vivid materiality—are finally only the small detritus of annihilation that point to the inevitable absence of complete representation.

And yet, in practice, even the sites of artifacts whose meaning is intended to be self-evident can become spaces, instead of places, changed by the paths visitors themselves create as historical subjects. The museum went to great pains, including revising its architectural plans, to exhibit a fifteen-ton freight car used to deport Jews. Walking through it offers us a physical trace of the frightening darkness and claustrophobic agony of the 100 people crushed into this and other such cars. But as I moved toward this traincar on the second day of my visit to the museum, I was approached by a married couple, Mrs. Sonya Zissman and Mr. Harold Zissman, who noticed I was speaking into a tape recorder and came to talk to me. Both had been involved in resistance in rural Poland. They criticized the museum for overemphasizing victimization in its portrayal of the Holocaust, while not including enough material on Jewish acts of resistance in its exhibit. Pointing to the freight car, Mrs. Zissman told me they had been part of a group that had managed to blow up several trainloads of German soldiers. She grinned at me and said, "We gave them hell." They also both wept; this isn’t a happy story. The live performance of survivor testimony by the Zissmans, “unmanaged” as it was by the museum proper, powerfully produced me as an engaged witness to their history, forcing me to negotiate their “unofficial” story with the “official” one surrounding it. What this conversation especially marked for me was how the museum’s larger project of locating itself within a narrative of democracy displaced representations of acts of resistance by Jews in order to embed its narrative in the frame of American liberation. In other words, ideologically speaking, liberation requires a victim; there don’t have to be resisters.

The Beit Hashoah Museum of Tolerance and its fundraising materials

In the process of evaluating aspects of the U.S. Memorial Holocaust Museum, I’ve asked myself “Just what would you have such a museum do? Position spectators as complicitous bystanders? As potential perpetrators of genocide? Who would come to such a museum?” The answers to these questions are not self-evident. Locale and funding sources play a part in shaping what a Holocaust museum shows and who sees it. That the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum identifies itself as a national project, imbibes the Holocaust into our national narratives, and keeps a tight focus on the history of the Holocaust, suits its Washington, D.C. locale and its federal grant of extremely scarce land. Although privately funded, its quasi governmental status helps produce what is and is not displayed within its walls.

The Beit Hashoah Museum of Tolerance is located in Los Angeles, adjacent to the Simon Wiesenthal Center (to which it is organizationally connected). It was built on private land, but received considerable funding from the State of California. As a result, this museum has a more insistent emphasis on pedagogy and is more explicitly targeted for school children and adolescents, although adjacent claims for extremely current technologies of representation are clearly intended to lure the public at large and attract funding from private donors. Under the rubric of teaching tolerance by providing examples of intolerance, it can display injustice in the United States and include a multiracial awareness of past and current American events. It also responds to its more immediate locale. L.A., as a site of racial and ethnic tensions and includes those tensions in its exhibits (witness its speedy creation of an exhibit on the L.A. Uprising). While responding to the local, the museum also locates itself as an international project that globally documents past and present violations of human rights.

In accordance with these projects, the fundraising letters sent to private donors prior to the museum’s opening employed a primary strategy opposite to that of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum: The Beit Hashoah Museum of Tolerance would represent the United States as a site of “bigotry and intolerance,” that is, as a potential place of genocide, with the Holocaust as the most horrific illustration of where intolerance could lead. While the D.C. museum quoted U.S. presidents to authenticate its project, the Beit Hashoah’s Charter Member fundraising flyer quotes Martin Luther King, Jr., “Like life, racial understanding is not something that we find, but something that we must create.” Thus the Beit Hashoah articulates the history of the Holocaust to an American landscape of prejudice and racism, a more liberal narrative that, to some degree, troubles our sense of national identity if not, as will be noted later, our fictions of nationhood. Moreover, given its claim to respond to and represent the international, the national, and the local, the focus of the museum is as diffuse (despite the presence of Holocaust exhibits that take up a fair share, but by no means most, of the museum’s space and much, but not all, of the fundraising descriptions) as the U.S. Memorial Holocaust Museum’s focus is specific. This diverse range of arenas configured under the rubric of intolerance is represented in the fundraising materials which describe the path of this museum as follows: First, visitors are confronted by ethnic and minority stereotypes as a means to challenge their current attitudes and perceptions. Second, they enter a Tolerance Workshop where they are given an “authentic social dilemma” and asked to choose and motivate others to moral action. Third, visitors view “stereotypical ethnic and racial depictions from early movies,” hear demagogues vilifying minorities, and “meet” via video “individuals who have made a difference.” Fourth, “in a series of illuminated, computer-synchronized tableaux,” visitors “go back in time” to experience “the events of the Holocaust” and Nazism. Fifth, and finally, visitors stand
before a replica of the Gates of Auschwitz and hear the voices of Holocaust victims speak of "suffering and heroism."

While I can appreciate the goals of a Holocaust museum that seeks to serve not only as a place to memorialize victims of persecution, but as a laboratory for combating hate, violence, and prejudice in the present, I note several problems in the strategies proposed to achieve this. The continued insistence that the museum presents "real life" obscures the way it is adjusting the parameters of a discourse. Moreover, while "persecution and devastation" have been the results of both anti-Semitism and racism, the museum risks creating an abstract equivalence between the two by configuring both as an internalized matter of prejudice" (Bourne 14). When tolerance becomes a personal matter, it cannot, for example, take into account the way racism functions as "a structural and institutional issue" within a system of power "hierarchically structured to get the maximum benefit from differentiation" (14). Showing this system of exploitative differentiation is especially critical for a museum about genocide, since it is just this system that would profit most from the construction of competing narratives about the suffering of various groups, creating the divisiveness of what Berenbaum called "a calculus of calamity" (1990 34). I recognize this is exactly what the Beit Hashoah Museum of Tolerance is trying to avoid, but I don't think it takes its goals far enough. And missing from the museum's landscape of intolerance are the violent outbreaks of homophobia now occurring in the United States, as well as much mention of sexism: in practice the museum privileges racism as the site of intolerance, which is not surprising if its purpose is to forge links with other genocidal situations using the more traditional notions of "group" that govern definitions of genocide. Finally, the threat of genocide and even actions deemed potentially genocidal may not be the best measure for evaluating the everyday oppressions to which people and groups are subject, and such a treatment may even serve to minimize the importance of daily oppressions, especially when they are not in line with a teleological narrative of escalating violence.

And, despite its emphasis on the interactive, by ending with the gates of Auschwitz the museum takes the space it tries to open up for a consideration of the interconnections among oppressions and recontextualizes it into a (computer-synchronized) place. Auschwitz becomes a monumental metonymy for the Holocaust, for all anti-Semitism(s), and for the consequences of intolerance. Using Auschwitz as an emblem of all anti-Semitism(s) may actually obscure the current mechanisms by which they function. Using Auschwitz as a metonymy for the consequences of intolerance facilitates the museum's Eurocentric gesture of locating its history of genocide only in the twentieth century. In so doing, the museum erases the historical reality that not only could genocide happen here, it has happened here, if not with the same obsessive deliberateness associated with the Final Solution. A museum with the goals of this one must take into account the massive genocidal annihilations in the Americas, and in particular, the United States, committed against indigenous peoples and against Africans during slavery.

Why doesn't it? Is showing genocide within our borders "going too far" for such a museum? More generally, should we assume that if the Jewish genocide in Europe were foregrounded in a site dedicated to showing intolerance, other genocides, indigenous to the United States, would inevitably become foregrounded, historically more visible? There are African American and Native American museums slated for the Smithsonian Mall, but, as Philip Gourevitch has noted (62), no Museum of Slavery or Trail of Tears museum. Perhaps recognizing the contributions of specific ethnicities, emphasizing what their continuing presence and vitality offers us as a nation, constitutes a celebratory means of covering over what was done to them and who and what has been permanently lost. Our democratic discourse must repress highly visible representations of any genocide that occurred within our own national borders.

In order to sustain its fictions of nationhood and its imagined community, it must produce yet another set of highly visible representations of what it marks as a genocide occurring "elsewhere." From this perspective, it is the very performance of hegemonic democratic discourse, more pertinently our own "hard wired" fictions of nationhood, that we would need to interrogate and revise in order to make genocide "at home" visible.

But that still doesn't fully account for what is shown at the Beit Hashoah as the last big exhibit before the Holocaust wing and how it is situated: the multiscreen feature on the civil rights struggle, "Ain't You Gotta Right?", directed by Orlando Bagwell, who also directed the series "Eyes on the Prize." Between the civil rights film viewing area and the Holocaust wing, there's a peculiar little film displaying the lives of the rich in the 1920s. It's like a sorbet, a palette cleanser between two gourmet courses. Why this rupture? Perhaps because historically, the directional signals are different: the call for African American civil rights is the call for removing the last vestiges of genocidal slavery (when is massive slavery not genocidal?); the elimination of civil rights for Jews in Germany is the beginning of the escalation toward genocide, a teleological narrative that would not suit the African American example. The introduction to Nationalisms and Sexualities notes a convergence between the "persistence of nationalism explained as a passionate 'need,'" and "the rights of sexual minorities legitimated through a discourse of civil liberties" (Parker et al. 2), suggesting our deep ideological and political investment in the arguments of legal personhood. Moreover, the call for extending democracy to everyone fits with our "imagined communities of nationalism" even if this assimilative model, drawing as it does on the experience of white ethnic immigrants to the U.S., fails to describe the circumstances of those brought here forcibly to genocidal conditions or those here before us submitted to them. The historical reality of slavery existing legally within democracy does not fit our national ideological fictions and is therefore always already in danger of being suppressed.
To some degree, then, the model of civil rights and tolerance used by the museum, though certainly useful, glosses over very different histories and obscures the ideological interconnections of genocidal events that "happened here" and "happened there." In other words it is problematic to assume that because of the history of the Holocaust, Jews can function as the best guides to the larger landscape of intolerance in this country; such an assumption imperils an overarching symbolic significance to the events of the Holocaust. And yet, to the degree that this museum and this ethnicity assume the responsibilities of representing oppressions beyond their own, they make a gesture more unparalleled in the U.S. than dismissals of this museum as a Disneyesque themepark would acknowledge. This museum, though flawed, is at least an ambitious first step toward putting the mechanisms of oppression (and not simply diversity) into public discourse.

**Performing presence, absence, and traumatic history at U.S. Holocaust Museums**

It is the museum-goers (along with the guards) who constitute the live, performing bodies in museums. They are the focus of a variety of performance strategies deployed by museums for the sake of "the production of knowledge taken in and taken home" (Bal 56). Some of these strategies produce the passivity and fascination of "gawking," some induce a confirming sense of "seeing" by covering over what cannot be "seen," and some position us to struggle to see at the same time we are conscious of our own difficult engagement in "seeing."

If this applies generally to museums, it has special significance for museums that represent the Holocaust. In a museum of the dead, the critical actors are gone, and it is up to us to perform acts of reinterpretation to make meaning and memory. To some degree, then, the usual museum situation (us looking at objects) is deployed/exploited to underscore the "goneseness" of which they are only the remains. That is, a Holocaust museum can constitute a particular metonymic situation: inanimate material objects document and mark the "goneseness" and the loss instead of simply substituting for them through representation. In this case, the enmity of the absent referent is neither contained nor scaled down through a representation that claims its presence over the terrible absence produced by genocide.

**Holocaust museum as performance site**

Along with the notion of a moving spectatorship, the museum is a performance site in the sense that the architect, the designers, and the management of the museum produce representations through objects and so produce a space and a subjectivity for the spectator. The museum is a complicated, crowded stage, always soliciting a certain spectatorial gaze through very skilled presentations. Everything one sees in a museum is a production by somebody. A Holocaust museum, in particular, can be a performance environment where we are asked to change from spectator/bystander to witness, where we are asked to make our specific memory into historical memory. In a Holocaust museum, when we are really solicited to change, we are asked to become performers in the event of understanding and remembering the Holocaust. If the self-depiction of the D.C. museum as "living memorial" is to be accurate, it is precisely because of this spectatorial performance.

**Performance place and space**

How is the concept of De Certeauian place versus space related to these museum sites? For my purposes, place refers to a pre-scripted performance of interpretation, while space produces sites for multiple performances of interpretation which situate/produce the spectator as historical subject. Performance place, then, is narrativized in advance, soliciting us to perform the script that is organized for and given to us. A clear example of such a performance place is the entrance to the tolerance section of the Beit Hashoah. We are faced with two sets of doors by which to enter—one set, outlined in bright red light, is marked "Prejudiced" and one set, outlined in green light, is marked "Unprejudiced." In actuality, the museum makes the decision for us: the "unprejudiced" doors are just a prop, unusable, and everyone is herded through the "prejudiced" doors when the computer-synchronized exhibit mechanism opens them. Although linked to a single narrative, place is more than that: it is a single performance of interpretation elicited by that narrative, in this case a forced acknowledgment of our own inevitable status as prejudiced. Moreover, our bodies are implicated in the task by performing the required movement.

De Certeau maintains that we all live in places but should think of them as spaces. The liberating move that allows us to understand the experience of everyday life is a move from place to space. When linked to performance, the de Certeauian model would suggest the difference between a pre-scripted performance and a site that invites multiple acts of interpretation. Indeed in de Certeauian space, interpretation itself becomes a kind of complex performance, a way of experiencing subjectivity. The environment of the museum is also performative: not only does it permit multiple acts of interpretation, museum design also provides multiple scenarios for these performances—scenarios whose relationship to each other is not narrativized in advance.

In one sense we can understand representation as a place concept, while performance is about space. But in another sense, both place and space construct the subject as a performer. If both are performances, the place of performance is more likely to be rigid, more about the spectacular or the quest for the Real, whereas performance space suggests multiple crisscrossing
of this exhibit space creates a site for community of witness; as strangers we are confronted with the presence of others, other bodies with whom we must cooperate. We experience multiple perspectives, the sense that no single perspective can absorb this information.

In the Beit Hashoah, on the other hand, due to its more explicit pedagogical purpose, the spectator's experience is more akin to the delimiting place of representational theater. The materials in the first half of this exhibit are enclosed in raised dioramas, suggesting information that can be contained by a single representational frame. Each diorama includes the same three figures—an historian, a researcher, and an exhibit designer—cast out of plaster, 1/3 sized (scale as a way of manipulating performance space), and unmovable. They could function in a self-referential way to make viewers aware of the constructedness of the narrative being presented, but they actually constitute another fixed frame for making meaning. Although the three “characters” can’t “perform” physically on stage, media technologies such as voice-overs represent them, and films and videos that relate Holocaust history do the performing. Moreover, each diorama exhibit is computer-synchronized; each lights up and, after the timed presentation is finished, blacks out, just like a little theater. Groups of spectators led by a volunteer walk from the now-darkened site to the next one lighting up (against the darkness of the larger space for spectator movement) in the prescribed path. This mode of framed display means spectators have more equal access to the Holocaust information, but the guarantee of an equal place to each viewer comes at the price of restricted movement, passivity in response to “the show,” and a place everyone engages in and moves through in a standardized way.

**Holocaust history and “manageability”**

The exhibition was designed, in a number of places, to make you feel confused, disoriented, closed in. The same way that the people who lived during the Holocaust felt. It’s narrow in more than one place during the exhibition. You think everything is going all right, you’ve come into a lot of space, and then all of a sudden it gets narrow again. It creates a mood. The whole exhibition.

Museum guard at the United States Memorial Holocaust Museum, speaking to the author

You have to personalize the story. We are using technology to that end.

Rabbi Marvin Hier, founder and Dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, about the Beit Hashoah

In answer to the question of “How can we know the Holocaust?” both museums try to impart knowledge, not only about the history of these events,
but about how to remember them. Ostensibly, the project of both museums is to make the unmanageable history of the Holocaust manageable.

Much of the U.S. Memorial Holocaust Museum presents the history of the Holocaust as an accretion of detail - shoes, documents, photographs, artifacts. The irony is that in an effort to make the unmanageable manageable, to give a sense of presence, of place, the D.C. museum conveys the incommensurability of loss by making the density of detail unmanageable for the spectator. We are forced to enact this unmanageability at what I refer to as the tower of pictures. During the exhibit, we must cross via walkways through a tower of pictures that is taller than the exhibit's three stories. The enlarged photographs, taken between 1890 and 1941, convey the quality of Jewish life and culture that was extinguished in the Polish town of Ejszyszki where no one Jewish survived. One virtue of these pictures is that they represent how these people wanted to be seen, rather than how the Nazis made them look or how they looked when the liberators found them. But while the photographs' arrangement in the structure of a tower keeps directing us to look up, the top photos are so high they recede into invisibility. So we rehearse with our bodies not only the immeasurability of the loss, but the imperfect structure of memory itself.

The museum's choice to include a roomful of nothing but piles of shoes produces another experience of unmanageable detail. The pile of shoes, a fraction of the masses of shoes collected by the Nazis, metonymically represents the murdered people who wore them and thus the unmanageability of the history to which they point. Because they are malleable enough to retain the shape of their owners with, here and there, a frivolous bow or tassel, each shoe provides an intimate remnant of an individual, which multiplied by thousands, conveys the magnitude of human loss without becoming abstracted or aestheticized. Moreover, in their very materiality the shoes mark presence as much as absence. Despite constantly blowing fans, the shoes smell from their own disintegration, and thus involve our bodies in making memory. The smell of the shoes is organic, like a live body, and in this way they become performers, standing in for the live bodies that are absent. To borrow Peggy Phelan's words in Unmarked, the shoes, as objects made to perform, do "not reproduce" what is lost, but "rather help us to restage and restate the effort to remember what is lost." The performativity of the shoes "rehearses and repeats the disappearance of the subject who longs always to be remembered" (Phelan 147).

In fact, the D.C. museum seems to acknowledge in its very architecture that such a modernist project of accretion is only a rearguard effort to produce manageability. The sense of this history as absence and as loss echoes through the great empty halls that alternate with the densely detailed exhibits. These large spaces of absence become part of the performance space: the horrific notion of absence, which is all one can really experience of the slaughter, is built into the museum architecture itself. Edifice produces edification. Inviting us into emptiness allows us an awareness of the unseizable of genocide. And, by its creation of subtle links among objects, repeating structures, and movement elicited from spectators, the D.C. museum provides resonances that are not limited to one narrative performance but positions spectators to perform in spaces that are, ultimately, unmanageable.

Even the seeming obviousness of the ideological envelope of democracy and liberation that encases the museum is overlaid with a subtler, less manageable narrative. There are metal gates throughout the inside and surrounding the outside of the museum (including the loading dock). They look, at first glance, like prison doors and so seem to fit in with the resonating architectural details I mentioned earlier. But within the Holocaust exhibit, unobtrusively located among other exhibits, is the artifact that inspired this repeated design: the double gates of a Jewish cemetery. We move in the topography of the desecrated dead of Jewish genocide whenever we enter this museum. The gates of the cemetery and the gates of the museum make it clear that the whole museum is a graveyard. Even the presidential inscriptions on the outside of the museum that confirm the "Americanness" of this project also look like inscriptions on giant tombstones, so that not even the most obvious ideological narrative is wholly manageable or usable. These gates in relation to this cemetery lend the museum a sense of unreality: it bursts out of the boxes, the containment, of the usual museum exhibit.

Moreover, this repeating graveyard structure relates to what I believe to be an unstated mission of this museum: the consolidation of a Jewish American identity that can include the Jewish genocide in Europe within the frame of Jewish identity in the United States. Whatever else can be said about its ideological implications and motives, this performance of "Americanization" is about living in the United States (in the wake of the Holocaust) and bringing our dead with us. Although this construction of Jewish collectivity is one to which we may have no right, at our American distance from these events, the designers of this museum appear to assert just such a claim.

While the D.C. museum acknowledges that it can never manage, the Beit Hashoah in L.A. primarily asserts the manageability of Holocaust history and of its relation to our experience and world view, however reverently it seeks to do this. In this it foregrounds its use of postmodern technologies, its applications of what Constance Penley and Andrew Ross term "technoculture," with its "postmodernist celebrations of the technological" and its employment of "new information and media technologies" (Penley and Ross xii). Much more of its design relies on computer-synchronized and computer-created exhibits. This, in a way, reduces history to information - information that can then be simulated and re-simulated through various performance technologies. That these media technologies are performance technologies is made especially clear when they are used to simulate and invoke live presence. The "Agent Provocator," as the museum calls him in its publicity - the white male middle-class guide to the tolerance exhibit who is designed to
express "polite" or unthinking intolerance—repeatedly turns up. He appears as on a pile-up of video monitors, each one a screen for a different part of his body. Since he only simulates tolerance in the first place, simulating him on multiple screens (like a creature with multiple media parts threatening to impinge on our frames of reference) is an effective visual deconstruction, as well as a comment on his cultural ubiquity.

The techniques of simulation (combined with the 1960s-type exhibit technologies of the 1/4-sized plaster-cast figures in the dioramas) employed to perform live presence are more problematic as used in the Holocaust section. If, generally at the Beit Hashoah, what is heard by visitors is privileged over what is read, this is especially true here. Music is used to narrate how our emotions in advance throughout the exhibit. Actor voice-overs, most often performing survivor testimony, are heard throughout as well. We are offered a kind of "you are there" melodrama of plaster figures seated at tables in a cafe (not in a diorama, but at our level) with voices of actors representing the figures' conversations about whether they should flee 1930s' Germany. We then are given a narrative of what happened to each of them, so it turns out these were "real" people whose situations are being simulated to create a theater of identification for us.

Finally, one diorama contains a holographic image of the table at Wannsee at which the Final Solution was planned. The table is littered with glasses, filled ashtrays, and so on, while voice-overs convey the Nazi presence. I know this "scene" ought to induce horror, but when I saw it, I was fascinated by the simulation itself and by how they made it and faintly embarrassed that I was peering at it as I would into a department-store window. Yet this is not surprising. Because in simulation there is no longer a link to the referent the copy passes itself off as the real, thereby covering over the historical trauma of the incommensurable absence of the genocidal referent.

More successful is another section of the museum called the Other America. It includes a large wooden colored map of the U.S. that charts the locations, state by state, of 230 hate groups. By touching a computer screen, visitors can choose to learn more about each group, but the entire body of information becomes unmanageable for a viewer. The map, itself frighteningly effective, is made more so by the use of computers, thereby constituting a combination of low and high tech that creates an unmanageable space.

In general, the Beit Hashoah has a postmodern project of presenting history as a flow of information. Sometimes it is a "one-way flow" of information (places for single performances of interpretation); sometimes there is a "multidirectional distribution of cultural and data flows" (spaces for multiple performances of interpretation) (Penley and Ross x-xi). Interestingly, one of the most extensive sites for multiple performances at the Beit Hashoah occurs in hyperspace. When visitors come in, they are directed to the top floor of the museum first. This floor contains an archival collection room, with the rest of it devoted to computer stations. Volunteer greeters of various ages and

Note

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1 As quoted in James Anderson's "A high-tech tour through hate," Orange County Register, 31 Jan. 1993.
References

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Fundraising letters, especially from 1991 through 1992, including its “Charter Supporter Acceptance Form.”

2.2 Political Activism and Performance

58

SPECTACLES AND SCENARIOS

A dramaturgy of radical activity

Lee Baxandall


Reproduced here is the main body of text from the article published in The Drama Review 13(4) (1969). The original article also included a number of photos and commentaries which are not included in this version.

[A constitutional republic] cannot forever withstand continual carnival on the streets of its cities and the campuses of the nation. Unless sage debate replaces the belligerent strutting now used so extensively, reason will be consumed and the death of logic will surely follow.

Vice President Agnew, Honolulu Address to the Young Presidents Organization, May 2, 1969

There is so much upheaval in the world, it’s more theatrical than the theatre. The theatre is in a state of unrest and we’re all trying to find out what its function is.

Milord Dunnock, N.Y. Times, January 18, 1969

Action from principle, the perception and the performance of right, changes things and relations; it is essentially revolutionary, and does not consist wholly with anything which was.

Henry David Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience”

In an essay on revolutionary drama in TDR (T42), I indicated, with the term “revolutionary,” a relative handful of major plays which—more than depicting social life critically and in a manner to express despair or perhaps anger at the way things are—take an added and very difficult step, which is the depiction of effective revolutionary conduct upon the stage. Study of these plays suggested that their authors had become capable of producing them only under the impress of revolutionary examples in life.
Briefly the article touched on John Reed. Although his plays were performed at the Provincetown Players, the *theatrum mundi* very soon claimed Reed’s attention, and his dramatic genius found realization in revolutionary action. His case appears, in today’s perspective, to be anything but unique. We seem to have entered an era in which the human dramatic potential is to be realized foremost in the arts, and for life. The stage once again follows along. It tries with audience participation experiments and guerrilla theatre to become more like the drama of history.

What follows is a dossier: several photo-analyses of the performance of history in terms of the essential dramatic ingredient. And two arguments—conservative and libertarian—to represent the opposed bodies of values and knowledge which now animate the actors of the world stage.

I

(Transcript of the Edmund Burke Memorial Lecture for 1969, delivered to a Meeting of the Rand Corporation by a Spectacle Manager.)

Gentlemen, we gather at a most difficult time. The principles and causes of the prosperity and consensual order of our system are being questioned. In many cases the most promising of our young people, white and black, are responsible. I don’t know, perhaps some of your children are mixed in.... [general laughter] The problem is not that the malcontents exist; for they always have, and shall. The vexation is that our radicals once obligingly limited themselves to the spoken and printed word, for the most part. And today they do not: they act. They do these spectacular things which get in the press and on television and heat up others. Then they have the temerity to come into our courts claiming that to burn a draft card, or to hurl blood in the Dow Chemical headquarters, is “symbolic speech”—a kind of communication protected by the Bill of Rights! Thus the new radicals are exploiting, or better perverting, the natural and usually wholesome tendency of our public to react strongly to events—not words, events—as a drama.

I advisedly say “perverting” for traditionally, as we all know or should know, the social dramaticism has belonged to us. It has been a key and vital bulwark of government. Dismay is justified, inasmuch as the New Left—how consciously is not yet clear—has discovered the performance element of politics for its own ends [distress in the hall].

The annual Edmund Burke Lecture honors a great theorist of the preservation of Anglo-Saxon government. He counseled us from across the years, in our latest crunch. The universality and timelessness of Burke are seen in the stress he gave the fact that a lucid theatricality is essential to maintaining the consensus. I need but quote from his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* to illustrate, for example, what flows from an undermining of our effective monopoly control of dramaticism: “Now all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle, and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society, are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of light and reason. All the decent dexterity of life is to be rudely torn off....”

The radicals we face, gentlemen, speak disdainfully of “the puppet show of state,” as once did Burke’s opponent, Tom Paine. They invent for themselves, and even go beyond, the tactical insights of Paine, e.g.—“A single expression, boldly conceived and uttered, will sometimes put a whole company into their proper feelings, and whole nations are acted upon in the same manner,” to quote *The Rights of Man*. Our opponents thus armed, gentlemen, we must affirm and newly promulgate the rules of our traditional stagecraft. The Rand Corporation relies on you, urgently, to take and perform the dramatic insights in your industries, military bases, universities, and other walks of life. Bear in mind that Plato termed stagecraft the highest art.

First, and to take nothing for granted: is politics performance, and everyday activity dramatic? Our language—the American idiom especially—seems to confirm it. We speak of a theatre of war, making a scene, properly acting in the spotlight, staging an event from behind the scenes. This might merely be misleading though ornamental metaphor. That it is not is affirmed by the peers and compatriots of Burke through the ages. Plato, the Stoic philosophers, Roman authors, and medieval writers such as Salisbury, declared with Shakespeare that “all the world’s a stage.” And generally, they go on to concur with Calvin that the world is “the theatre of God’s glory”—one performs according to divine will, that is, a high or (usually) low role in the Great Chain of Being. This is an essential item, whether or not dressed out in a religious garb, from our point of view. If time-honored thinking on this matter is correct, can we discern a function of theatricalizing politics not to be had by government in any other way?

Permit me to analyze this point in perfect candor. Mimed words would not be respected by you, who well know how few in effect take basic decisions for and reap the basic benefits from the society as a whole. The importance of performance to our politics is summed up in the phrase of Thomas Hobbes: “reputation of power, is Power.” Not merely force and status, but the skilful show of force and status achieves our hegemony. Those who rule are a small minority, always. They—we, therefore—have not sufficient pooled powers to maintain a right attitude among the majority, so to prevent civil wars, unless the otherwise scant personal status and capacity for violence of those who govern are multiplied geometrically by a usage of history as theatre, to which the term spectacle may be applied.

Some among us may object that in the last instance not fine words nor show of force, but the actual violence of a police and army keep a fragile order—as in Vietnam, Watts, Detroit, or San Francisco State College. True: a governing class is finally sustained by the obedience of a host of warrior recruits. But these are drawn largely from the underclasses, and it is a caution to recall that
at precarious moments the salaried legions of enfranchised violence may waver, ignore their duties, even go over to "the people." Thus order in a state is always more tenuous than appears, and the reputation of power especially has to be nurtured in those whose violence will be called upon, when the spectacle has faltered in the other domains.

Walter Bagehot, a founder of modern political liberalism, put it as follows in *The English Constitution*, 1867. "The ruder sort of men," Bagehot said, must he finagled into a "reverence" toward the regrettable "plain, palpable ends of government" by the usage of "theatrical elements."

To this end the state has uncounted stages, plot-lines, and "routines." All of course is not pomp and intimidation. The show is sugared with entertainments: mitigated by allowance for private diversions; and indeed, best secured by seeing that many of the ruled, the armed forces especially, are assigned gratifying and in some respects commanding roles to play. The Great Chain of Being may be preserved and beautified best when most confused among tributary chains of command and obedience all mixed into one another. Thus Thomas Hobbes wrote in his *Leviathan*: "The Athenians were taught (to keep them from desire of changing their Government) that they were Freemen." Couple that thought with the aphorism at one time widely displayed in officer training schools, and attributed to General Eisenhower: "Leadership is the art of getting men to do what you want them to do, because they want to do it."

Neither force nor show of force, then, can of themselves and on all occasions guarantee a plant civil population or warrior class, where it may be afforded the show of liberty becomes as important. Ultimately this liberty can be defined as a spectacle made of prerogatives left to others, which—though channelized, few, and insufficient—owing to the apparent stability of your system of spectacle, the ruled are led to believe they could not equal or get in any other way.

Force or liberty, whichever the profile of power displayed; the whole of the spectacle is distilled and celebrated in the drama of the central authority figure; and conversely, the head of state's example instructs authority in its conduct on the tributary stages. The theatrical principle known as empathy coordinates this minimizing, this harmonizing of the performance style differences you would expect between the great stage and the many small. Vicarious experience and emulation, as well as mystifying impression and admiration, mar for example the man at the head of the family to this man at the head of the state.

Admittedly we have lately hit a crisis-of-empathy snag. Lyndon Johnson stepped down solely because his performance was too widely jeered. Aside from the dramatistic failing, his politics were "functional" and are being carried on, but that is just the point; the dramatism is not an "aside," it is functionally integral. A decade or so ago this could not have occurred. The public was not offered competing dramatistic styles and it scarcely knew how it acted. Now the head of state must play to divergent and competing empathy wants among the spectators and these, in truth, scarcely may be reconciled in a single man's performance. Look at Mr. Johnson's replacement. Unfortunately, his historio-esthetic instinct is most expressed in the thrusting of balled fists into the air while his head becomes lost in the suit jacket... [some suppressed laughter]. Plainly the needed deference to the drama of the Presidency continues in trouble.

As perhaps never before our supremacy on the terrain of social dramaticism is heckled and flaunted, challenged or ignored. We must not countenance any loss of our lease on this psychological property; for it constitutes the holding corporation through which our otherwise scanty personal powers secure the property order of society generally. We do at least still enact the everyday hegemony within the public school systems, the army training camps, and the like. Although even here a small if potently dangerous minority is out of hand, the majority continue on the whole to absorb their exercises in spectacle obsqueness. And clearly we still have the greater lucidity.

The radicals, I believe, do not conduct classes in their performance problems and techniques; nor have they done theoretical work which would be of consequence, for their thinking seldom seems to go beyond vague references to life style. Where the radicals remain instinctive, we of course possess uncounted management training schools and seminars, Dale Carnegie Courses, etc., for study and rehearsal of concrete performance politics. We have sociologists who strictly write and are resource consultants on "sociological" through dramatic interaction—for example, Erving Goffman, author of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, a commendable work which offers radicals no guidance whatsoever in their trend of dramaticism. It is this edge in lucidity which should prove decisive for us. Normally it does, through history.

Let us get firmly in mind the asset of a monopoly on tutelage in history as theatre. During all the centuries of organized society the ruled might, and would, imbibe their outlook and demeanor unwittingly through performance opportunities within and between the classes; rulership has never taken the chance that its youth would stumble onto the precepts of spectacle, left to themselves. Perhaps the first well-ordered stratum of spectacle tutors, the Chinese mandarins, are described by Max Weber as "keepers of the rites" who through many centuries conferred status honor on the style of life of the privileged by teaching and refining the ceremonies which sanctified power. Plato was such an instructor, although he had to compete with philosophers more prized by the rising merchant class. We still accept uncritically the contempt with which Plato spoke of the Sophists, these tutors of a culture opposed to the Athenian aristocracy and which became, indeed, a forebear of our own establishment.

During the Renaissance, Castiglione deftly distilled the essence of performance insight in *The Book of the Courtier*. Let's not ignore Machiavelli,
He became the public's denounced, and avidly read, political philosopher in all civilized lands for decades, because he spelt out uncompromisingly both the technicalities and the show of power. For every such "name" tutor, the spectacle has been preserved through the marshalling of many thousands of the unproportioned educated to the task of immensely instructing the sons of nobility, and later of the high bourgeoisie, in religion, deportment, and the "science of rhetoric" (you will recall that even today most college theatre study remains located in Departments of Speech).

Education has changed, religion waned. But counterbalancing this, recall that a number of recent giants in the human sciences have actually helped reinforce the theatre of God's glory. Darwin presented himself as a religious man. Sigmund Freud argued in his later works that all but an enlightened few must be vouchsafed their sacred dramas and authority figures whom they will revere and who can essentially act for them. James G. Frazer drew from the vast study of primitive myth for his _Golden Bough_ a lesson repeated by most anthropologists to our own day: men must have sacred drama if social integration is to be preserved. Gentlemen, we still enjoy the assistance of highly-skilled spectacle tutors and of thinkers of great reputation.

The arts, which become more pervasive all the time, likewise build the reputation of our legitimacy. Edmund Burke was not in error when he said, "the theatre is a better school of moral sentiments than the churches." Excuse me—[a battering or striking without has made hearing difficult]—would someone check out the reason for that noise?

The artists nowadays conceive many "audacities." They quickly use the term "revolutionary" for their work. Some want to universalize the license permitted their stratum. These ends, however, are frustrated and art chiefly lends reinforcement to social integration, due to empathy and another psychological property noted by Aristotle, catharsis. Can't that noise be stopped? _[The beating and now yelling has distracted the audience.]_ Empathy and catharsis permit the public, I say, vicariously to live and timorously to purge, all in one operation, their curiosity about the most dangerous kinds of denied experience. The spectacle of allowing the imaginative events to be staged, shown, or written about meanwhile builds the reputation of government for liberality and stability. Finally, a flourishing cultural scene comes to appear to the great majority as the sole terrain for the serious practice of human aesthetic capacity. This illusion diverts many radicals as well from realizing the aesthetic dimension of their politics.

I shall speak more loudly. Can art ever surmount these factors to act dangerously upon our encapsulating spectacle? To do so it would have to depict, I believe, vivid models of directly emulable conduct more viable, vigorous, and gratifying than that of spectacle society and irreconcilable with it. We know, gentlemen, how rare is the artist who manages to this extent to release himself from spectacle obsequiousness. And if he appears—probably due to the encouragement and example of a radical constituency—and can somehow get his work before the public, despite the legal and informal web of spectacle checks and pressures to the contrary: would the public sympathetic to his paradigm want to absorb itself in his surrogate of an alternative conduct? Wouldn't the public thus prone to break with the spectacle prove impotent of all fictions, however emulable and laudable they think them?

Thus the arts appear always beneficial, or at least harmless to public order. . . Can we have, please, an end to the commotion outside? . . . _[The doors have burst open—black and white youths shouting swarm everywhere they seem to demand...]_

II

(To an activist who shall be known as "Rimbaud Vivant," our thanks for the following, and for making available to us the Burke Lecture transcript.)

A fresh vision of 1984: the world's populace liberated, you and everyone performing needs and abilities with one another freely—except for the spectacle managers and addicts, who despite themselves carry on as today in theatres especially designated for them.

The Rand Corp. expert talked straight as he knew. No crap about progress through pluralism with fun politics for all, no pray together to stay together in the greatest society ever. But their understanding of "dramaticism" ends with the grimaces they agree to pass for smiles, and Yeats' "coat upon a stick." They con their show of powers from the tattered promptbook of a court tragedy they do not quite understand, but even less know how to put aside. We have today the chance to grow joyous naked, to continuously discover and invent ourselves in the concerted white heat of expressive realization; and still the spectacle managers think themselves wise, as they mumble each one their paraphrases of the words uttered by Henri IV when told he had to turn Catholic to become Henri IV: "Paris is well worth a mass."

In the performance of yourself to others many see only a burden, if not the betrayal of an inner "real" self. Pirandello's theatre universalizes the bafflement and rage of that sense of betrayal. Failing to recognize its origin in the spectacle genre which makes you narrow and stupid, Pirandello projected his distress onto every mode of self enactment. He embraced, moreover, the pseudo-alternative of the Fascist State, which was in fact more of the same.

We create the dramaturgy of radical activity.

_Dramaturgy_ retains its dictionary sense: "the art of making dramas and placing them properly on the stage; dramatic composition and representation." We add that the world stage takes precedence and that most human beings, freed of spectacle obsequiousness, could well compose and realize in activity their root nature. Radical is thus to be understood in its original sense: "going to the roots." Class domination and its spectacle society sharply frustrate,
pervert your root potential. If overcoming this material and psychological alienation requires a role condemned by spectacle managers as "radical," i.e., "extremist," take heart in knowing the spectacle addict to be the authentic extremist: alienated from humanity. Activity in our sense is therefore not a mere expenditure of energy in movement, but a unification of theory and sensuous conduct, a praxis, a free intelligent activity: a performance of capabilities, taking into account all biological and social data, which ignores no biological and social potential.

The dramaturgy is realized in scenarios, which are—rather like the improvisation of the commedia dell'arte—projected and agreed beforehand in part, and in part created as opportunities and fortunes rise in performance. If acting among friends and the likeminded, you perform peace scenarios. The ends and means will more or less be understood and agreed. Needs and capabilities are transposed to interactive expression by an invention of strategies which strive toward universality.

The terrain for peace scenarios—found this day most often in the love affair—is not only limited but highly vulnerable to the totality of impinging social relations and values. Thus the necessity of mounting concerted war scenarios to dismay and rout the spectacle managers. A war scenario certainly does not by definition entail bloodshed (though the spectacle managers may seek the show of blood). It does assume the opponents' values to be irreconcilable with your own. Not cooperation and kindliness but surprise and relentless audacity can alone win through. Especially here, every tried and tired script not thrown aside is quoted merely for irony or as a diversionary tactic, or at worst used, when imagination weakens, for linking bits and pieces (others may recognize them as such to your loss). Total resource-exposure and esteem-risk occur. Certainly you elicit of your collaborators and of the foe. For if you and the like-minded will not venture all to create and enlarge the liberated zones, your fate too is finally to perform as a spectacle husk. (Of course the spectacle too has its quiet reinforceable scenarios: but these are not necessary, not of its essence, not worth your life.)

The liberation drama of history has also had tutors. Not only Paine. Every solid radical has manifested the consciousness of dramaturgy; and many, significantly, wrote plays in going from youth to a mature identity. For instance, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Leon Trotsky, and John of Leyden—who led the rebellion and Anabaptist commune of 1534 in Münster. Others like Antonio Gramsci, Georg Lukács, and Kurt Eisner, lived their transition as drama critics. Gustav Landauer was a Shakespeare authority and, with Eisner, a leader of the 1919 Bavarian Soviet (his grandson is Mike Nichols). (Peter Brook is the son of a Menshevik revolutionary of 1917.) Ernst Toller apprenticed in the Bavarian Soviet. Geoge Büchner wrote Danton's Death as second best to carrying on the revolutionary society he'd founded, which just weeks earlier the police had uncovered and dispersed. Still others were initially actors: B. Travon, who was in the Bavarian Soviet leadership, and

Sandor Petőfi, the Hungarian poet-revolutionary who died on the battlefield in 1848.

Engels' play was performed before the German workers' union of Brussels in 1847. The text has been lost, but a witness recalls the "amazing clarity" with which the necessary course of the February, 1848 uprising was foreseen. Trotsky, in My Life, recalls the stunning effect a visit of Christmas mummers had upon him when he was seven. During evening tea they invaded his father's farmhouse on the South Russia steppes and recited the piece "Czar Maximilian." Trotsky pursued the actor of the Czar and made him dictate the part to him. "A fantastic world was revealed to me, a world transformed into a theatrical reality." Thereafter he recited and composed dramatic verses frequently. Sent to school in Odessa, "my first visit to the theatre was like no other experience, and beggars description." One summer Trotsky spent weeks rehearsing a Pushkin play. At seventeen he collaborated on a drama about the Russian Socialist movement, "full of social tendencies, against a background of conflict of generations." Just months later he first transposed his consciousness to the task of founding and leading a clandestine union of workers.

He was the dramaturgical dynamo of the 1905 Revolution. To understand those skills, we may look at a strategic scenario he wrote out a few months prior to the events.

Tear the workers away from the machines and workshops; lead them through the factory gate out into the street; direct them to neighboring factories; proclaim a stoppage there; and carry new masses into the street. Thus, moving from factory to factory, from workshop to workshop, growing under way and sweeping away police obstacles, haranguing and attracting passers-by, absorbing groups that come from the opposite direction, filling the streets, taking possession of the first suitable buildings for public meetings, entrenching yourselfs in those buildings, using them for uninterrupted revolutionary meetings with a permanently shifting and changing audience, you shall bring order into the movement of the masses, raise their confidence, explain to them the purpose and the sense of events; and thus you shall eventually transform the city into a revolutionary camp—this, by and large, is the plan of action.

Brilliantly actable, this text is the result of a close analysis of the political "factors" so often conceived as abstractions.

Lenin was in hiding during many crucial days in 1917, and Trotsky was again the most motive figure, if not quite as predominantly as in 1905. His book on 1917, The Russian Revolution, is a virtual promptbook of radical dramaturgy. Trotsky remarks for example the little latitude left to the spectacle managers once things get going: "the scripts for the roles of Romanov and
Capet were prescribed by the general development of the historic drama; only the nuances of interpretation fell to the lot of the actors. The rebels' scenario inventiveness is brought out—unto the February overthrow, when a unit of the feared mounted Cossacks appeared before a group of unarmed workers, who "took off" their caps and approached the Cossacks with the words: 'Brothers—Cossacks, help the workers in a struggle for their peaceable demands; you see how the Pharaohs treat us, hungry workers. Help us!' This consciously humble manner, those caps in their hands—what an accurate psychological calculation! Imitable gesture! The whole history of street fights and revolutionary victories swarms with such improvisations."

Lenin was not known to have taken more than a spectator's interest in theatre, and the flamboyance of Trotsky was alien to him, though he respected its efficacy. Gorky, however, has recorded that Lenin used both laughter and temper masterfully to shape an intimate discussion; and his public speaking style, if unembellished, was "a very work of classic art." In brief one might say that Lenin deeply distrusted spectacle and every radical tendency toward it—"the human yearning for the beautiful, dramatic and striking," as he once wrote. On the other hand he stressed scenario action: as in his famous instructions of Summer, 1917, which urge repeatedly that insurrection "must be treated as an art, that one must win the first success and then proceed from success to success, never ceasing the offensive against the enemy, taking advantage of his confusion, etc."

Given a matrix of scenarist initiative, elements of radical dramaturgy were valuable, Lenin held. For instance: workers once having actually gone out on strike, "the sight of their comrades ceasing, if only momentarily, to be slaves and becoming the equals of the wealthy is infectious for them." And finally: "revolutions are festivals of the oppressed."

The French Revolution of 1789 was spectacle vs. scenarism from start to finish. George Plekhanov remarks justly that as the culture of the monarchy went under, the "aesthetic requirements" of the citizens, "far from stifled," turned rather toward a "poetry of action" and "the beauty of civic achievement." The seizing of the Bastille, the signal event, was provoked by a show of mercenary troops deployed near Paris by the King. An unemployed actor—Camille Desmoulins—transformed an angry but aimless mood among the crowd at the Palais-Royal into a pledge by every individual to adopt armed resistance; he plucked a leaf from a garden tree as a sign of his commitment; shortly all the trees were stripped. A playwright, Marat, among Desmoulins' listeners urged the next action: close every theatre, spectacle and ball that evening. This was done, the rebels creating their own theatre of the streets. Two nights later the Bastille fell.

Indeed the theatres of Paris were barometers of the conflict of power and values, as the struggle to put Beaumarchais' *Marriage de Figaro* on the stage, finally successful in 1784, had already proven. Now Desmoulins, Mirabeau, Danton, much of the revolutionary party bent efforts to have staged *Charles IX* by Marie-Joseph Chénier. The spectacle of what lines and images would hold the stage was as nothing to the spectacles of vituperation and combat in the theatre stalls with results that reached to Versailles. "If *Figaro* killed the aristocracy," Danton remarked as the new play made its debut, "*Charles IX* will kill the royalty." Mr. Edmund Burke rather agreed. He was shocked the author had not been clapped in chains.

The King meanwhile had been taken virtual prisoner and brought by multitudes from Versailles to live in the Paris Tuileries, following a peculiarly inept spectacle of disrespect for the nation—actually staged during an uproarious banquet in the palace theatre! It is impossible here to give further account of the French dramaturgy, or of its transformation into a new mode of spectacle representing the requirements of the bourgeoisie victorious.

Equally it is impossible to describe here the subtle, profound analysis permeating the book of Marx and Engels (The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte by Marx is a good introduction). I want not to ignore, though, that Marx found the beginnings of a liberating dramaturgy in the erotic nexus. "Love...first really teaches man to believe in the objective world outside himself," he wrote in *The Holy Family* of 1845. It "not only makes man an object, but the object a man!" He adds, in *The German Ideology* of 1846: "Philosophy, and the study of the actual world, stand in the same relation to one another as masturbation and sexual love."

The conscious poet of this dramaturgy of one-to-one has been Louis Aragon; he calls it "the intimate theatre." A campaign to end its repressive privatization, and to pervade society with the values discovered in the sexual congress, is being led by the new rock groups. As Jim Morrison of The Doors says:

When I sing my songs in public, that's a dramatic act, but not just acting as in theatre, but a social act, real action. A Doors concert is a public meeting called by us for a special kind of dramatic discussion and entertainment. We make concerts sexual politics. The sex starts with me, then moves out to include the charmed circle of musicians on stage. The music we make goes out to the audience and interacts with them; they go home and interact with the rest of reality, then I get it all back by interacting with *that* reality. When we perform, we're participating in the creation of a world, and we celebrate that creation with the audience.

Beyond the present war scenarios and beyond the privatizing and privational peace scenarios: What Is Our Program? It is this. To employ the now achieved material and technological abundance of our planet as the basis of a universalized peace scenarium.

Given the present and growing abundance, and the success of our war scenarios—and this unity of objective and subjective factors spells the abolition
of class society—we could live a pacific permanent revolution. Potentials and conflicts would be hallowed out, and root human needs thus fulfilled, without basic recourse to violence or the repressive show of it. There seems no reason why this social dramaturgy of a creative and non-violent stamp cannot serve as, in the phrase of William James, the moral equivalent to war.

The concomitant is, of course, that the human aesthetic capacities shall no longer be repressed chiefly to the Other World of the stage play, artwork, poem, novel, etc. On the one hand, the making and contemplation of Aesthetic Objects will always have a felt function for us. Experience and expression in life can rarely be as distilled and achieved as in the compression won in this activity, especially by unusually gifted men and women. On the other hand, in our present social order the aesthetic traits of experience are clearly far out of kilter—alienated from the world of the everyday, preserved as in alcohol by museums, cultural centers, a specialized breed of men. This scarcely is normal. In so-called primitive societies, every aspect of the life of every member of the social unit is imbued with aesthetic expression; there is not even a concept or word for what we have reified as “art.” Our lives are impoverished of the aesthetic qualities of rhythm and grace and harmony. We are sick for the lack of coherence and intensity of expression. What we want—and return to the drawbacks of “primitive” society is not necessary, of course—is the integration of the aesthetic with man’s other capacities.

Herbert Marcuse calls for a new “aesthetic ethos” in his Essay on Liberation. Surprisingly, Marcuse omits any idea of the performance of self with others; he takes his model from painting, rather than theatre which has to be the paradigm. Schiller’s letters on aesthetic education were more to the point. Homo Ludens by Johan Huizinga is an important historical account of the “play” element in social contest. But the best previsions of universalized scenarism are perhaps found in Charles Fourier’s notion of cabalism, and in Marx’s passage in volume III of Capital on “the art of consuming labor-power.”

Marx, noting the introduction of “self-actor” machines to industry (automation), believed the supervisor of complex factory production would eventually function on the model of an “orchestra conductor.” A conductor need not own the instruments of his orchestra, nor is it within the scope of his duties as conductor to have anything to do with the “wages” of the other musicians. Co-operative factories furnish proof that the capitalist has become... redundant as a functionary in production” and may be replaced by the “combination and co-operation of many in pursuance of a common result.” In feudal France, Marx adds, the production manager was known as the régisseur (still the German name for a stage director).

Fourier speaks to our time away from work and offered, said Marx, “the presentiment and imaginative expression of a new world.” His cabalist passion—“far removed from the insipid calm whose charms are extolled by morality”—to be realized in the future, entailed the scenarist notion in embryo:

The cabalistic spirit is the true destination of man. Plotting doubles his resources, enlarges his faculties. Compare the tone of a formal social gathering, its moral, stilted, languishing jargon, with the tone of these same people united in a cabal: they will appear transformed to you; you will admire their terseness, their animation, the quick play of ideas, the alertness of action, of decision; in a word, the rapidity of the spiritual or material motion.

The spectacle managers will believe this to be nonsense. But their show cannot survive. Not in this time when a black youth in Watts, asked his attitude about serving in Vietnam, replies: “Man, they ain’t going to put me in that movie, even if they make me the star!”
FIGHTING IN THE STREETS

Dramaturgies of popular protest, 1968–1989

Baz Kershaw


Everybody would agree that agitational political theatre has fallen on hard times, but whether this is due to a changed political climate, a changed theatre, or a more politicized relationship between companies and funding bodies remains a matter for debate. Here Baz Kershaw adopts a lateral approach to the problem, looking not at dramatized forms of protest but at protest as an action which has itself become increasingly theatricalized – in part owing to its own tactics and choices, in part to the ways in which media coverage creates its own version of politics as performance. After looking at the major focuses of protest in two decades after 1968, Baz Kershaw examines the ways in which political and performance theory has and has not addressed the issue. Presently Head of the Department of Theatre Studies in the University of Lancaster, his previous publications include "Engineers of the Imagination: the Welfare State Handbook" (with Tony Cout, 1983) and "The Politics of Performance: Political Theatre as Cultural Intervention" (1992).

"Another victory like that and we're done for."

Pyrrhus

1 The end of 'political theatre'?

For some time now the idea of 'political theatre' has been in crisis. The ideological relativities introduced into critical discourse by postmodernism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, even (Cixous help us) post-feminism, have profoundly upset the orthodoxies that yoked politics and theatre together under the twin signs of 'intention' and/or 'content'. Those orthodoxies grew strong by identifying what was overtly political in theatre or performance: ah, this play is about racism (that's what its author claims), so it must be political.

That analytical strategy of course produced some marvellously incisive writing about the ideological power of theatre – think of Bentely on Brecht, for example – but it tended also to promote what was always a problematic identification of political theatre with left-wing or socialist/Communist ideologies. Right-wing theatre, by implication, was not political. The problem is now compounded because left-progressive ideologies appear to be in decline, but more importantly also because the political has become, as it were, promiscuous. Since the personal became political, in the 1980s, the political has found its way into almost every nook and cranny of culture. Identity politics, the politics of camp, body politics, sexual politics – the political is now ubiquitous and can thus be identified in all theatre, no matter what it appears to be about or what it might have been meant to mean. So the traditional category of 'political theatre' may no longer make much sense, except, perhaps, as an historical construct.1

If the promiscuity of the political has introduced the potential for a new flexibility in the analysis of the ideologies of theatre, it has also bred a new kind of confusion. As all theatre and performance is now political, how might we judge one aesthetic approach to be more politically promising than another? Is live art's deconstruction of the politics of representation, say, any more or less potent than community celebration's political reinforcement of collective identity? The difficulty of such questions then tends to reinforce the relativities which gave rise to them in the first place: it all depends just where you're standing when.

Given this predicament, some critical progress might be secured if we determined more precisely the kinds of politics at play in any particular performance; but that procedure might itself make generalizations about the politics of performance ever harder to frame convincingly, thus pushing critical discourse even further back into dependence on the provisional and the contingent. This piece of theatre may have tremendous political resonance for its audiences, but someone somewhere else is bound to find it ideologically vacuous.

Whilst one might happily applaud the celebration of difference implied by such relativism, clearly it also has the potential to impose a debilitating limitation on analysis. Any conclusions about the potential political efficacy of any one approach to theatre practice will inevitably be constrained in their scope. Most worrying of all, the general contribution of theatre and performance to social and political histories may become impossible to determine. The vision of a Brecht, which might include, say, a world enjoying a growing measure of freedom and justice, will forever be a thing of the past.
How, then, might we find a way out of the *impasse* created by the death throes of 'political theatre'? There was no gaining that Barthes had finally done for the intentional fallacy when he murdered the author. Foucault had shown incontrovertibly that power is everywhere. Derrida may have uncoupled the signified from the signifiers forever. Lyotard had raised incredulity about meta-narratives to a new order of intensity. Butler had demonstrated that even gender is a cultural construct, and Baudrillard possibly had capped it all by banishing the real. Yet I was still seeing 'political' performances that seemed to me to have both the potential for extensive local ideological effect and to offer models of practice that could subversively adapt to many different types of context.

What is more, their political force was generated by a polyphonic semiotics as diverse as any mounted by even the most abstrusely allusive companies of the new avant-garde, and they were accessible and popular in ways that even Brecht would probably have admitted. One such show was Welfare State International's *Glasgow All Lit Up* - a lantern procession of 10,000 people which for me demonstrated that postmodern forms could have much greater political resonance than even their most sympathetic apologists tend to assume.3 If the evolution of such forms could be related to wider socio-political histories - recommended by Raymond Williams as a project central to our understanding of the power of culture to shape society4 - then perhaps the new paradigms of critical discourse could be acknowledged without having completely to abandon the hope of making generalizations that will stick about the politics of performance.

To achieve this, though, would require a new analytical methodology appropriate to the forms to be studied, and as the problem of 'political theatre' was in part a product of the identification of the political as theatre, then perhaps a simple reversal of the terms might turn the methodological trick. Rather than search for the political as theatre it might be useful to investigate the theatrical as the political. A study of the performative occasions which are likely to be recognized by everyone as political and radical - say, protest events might provide some grounds for a revived politics of performance.

Taking a lead from John Lahr and Jonathan Price's new forgotten *Life Show*, and picking up on some points that Richard Schechner had raised at a 1990 conference in Lancaster, I embarked on an analysis of post-war rallies, demonstrations, marches, sit-ins, peace camps, vigils, and so on.5 If one could identify a changing *dramaturgy of popular protest* in the past forty years or so, then this might shed some light on the wider cultural histories of the period.

From this starting point grew a fascination with how the symbolic and the real may have become reconfigured in their relations by innovations in the politics of protest, and a gradual realization that an understanding of such reconstructions may resolve some of the issues raised by the current crisis for traditional concepts of political theatre.

So what can the changing forms of popular protest - marches, demonstrations, occupations, riots - tell us about the cultures of their time? More precisely, what might such forms signify at moments of crisis in history, when radical social and political change is or appears to be immanent? How do the forms of popular protest embody their historical context through their location in identifiable traditions; and how do these forms crack open traditions, disrupt socio-political expectations, and produce new kinds of public discourse in our increasingly mediatized and globalized world?

2 The forms of popular protest

I will address these questions through an investigation of a few selected events: the Grosvenor Square demonstration in London of March 1968, the White House demonstrations in Washington of May 1970, and the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Tiananmen Square occupation of 1989. I have chosen these partly for the apparently transparent relationships that they bear to their historical 'moment', in that they are commonly noted by cultural historians as indicative of more widespread or popular discontent, and as signals of deep rifts and schisms in society.6 The relationships between micro and macro politics, specific events and general histories, can be framed in many ways, of course, but the version informing this type of analysis is one of *synechdoche*, as a part of the social (protest) is made to stand for the whole (society).

I suggest that this may be an especially appropriate perspective to take on protest events in the late twentieth century because, like terrorism, they have become integral to the production of the society of the spectacle, and, if we follow the logic of situationism a couple of steps further, even the society of the simulacra and the hyper-real.7 In this version of the cultural economy, the synechdochic spectacle of protest challenges a system of authority in *its own terms*, because in such societies the *display of power* - its symbolic representation in multifarious forms of public custom, ceremony, and ritual, and then their reproduction throughout the media - has become in some senses more important to the maintenance of law and order than authority's actual powers of coercion and control.8

In such a culture, the synechdochic nature of protest events may produce enormous political potency, for they double society back on itself, as it were: they present a reflexive critique of the foundations of authority by showing that the assumption of power by the state, for example, may ultimately be based on nothing more substantial than the chimera of presumption or a predisposition to violence.

I would argue that protest has gained this new kind of potency - particularly in the multi-party democracies - because liberal democratic systems weave political conflict into the very fabric of society. It follows that, especially in highly mediatized societies, the performative becomes a major element of the daily struggle for power and against authority. Modern democracies,
including the new ones thrown up in the wake of 1989, may be described with some accuracy as 'performative democracies' in order to indicate how fully they rely upon various types of performance for the maintenance of their political processes.

Moreover, late-capitalist liberal democracies reinforce this tendency by making the market so central to their social organization. Although the 'performance' of companies, firms, shares, employees, institutions, etc., may be measured primarily in mundane material and/or statistical ways, the notion that they are 'players' on an economic or industrial or civil 'stage' is often implied by the usage. Late-capitalist multi-party democracies produce societies in which performance is central to all socio-political processes, producing a 'performative society'.

In such a society the performative becomes a powerful weapon of political conflict, and therefore the aesthetics of performance are relevant to the analysis of political – especially politically conflictual – events. This is why a dramaturgy of protest events may prove to be an effective key to an understanding of major socio-political change in the late twentieth century.

3 Grosvenor square, London, 1968

I take this event as a starting point for detailed analysis because it can be located in relation to two great modernist traditions of protest, and the contrasts between them may help to clarify the dramaturgic nature of mass public protest. It took place in March 1968, when, following a CND rally in Trafalgar Square, 25,000 people (Vanessa Redgrave and Tariq Ali among them) marched under the banners of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign to protest against the Vietnam War outside the American Embassy in Grosvenor Square. The demonstration is generally considered to be a watershed in the history of British contemporary protest because it became very violent. Certainly media representations projected onto it a near apocalyptic significance. The following commentary from the Pathé News film report is typical:

London: it started as an anti-Vietnam War demonstration in Trafalgar Square. About 10,000 gathered. Most of them were young, most of them were sincere - they wanted peace... Vanessa Redgrave, as usual, was in the vanguard of the would-be peacemakers, but also there were troublemakers... a hard core with intentions to drag the majority of well-intentioned demonstrators down to their sickening level... And so they marched through the Sunday streets of London to Grosvenor Square, and the American Embassy. Riot was being incited. At Grosvenor Square, police... waited - their intention to keep the peace, prevent trouble. But at the head and in the midst of the advancing column the hate-makers were at work. This was how they turned a demonstration for peace into a bloody riot, such as Britain has never before witnessed... on a day when a demonstration for peace ended as a war in the heart of London.

The similarities implied between the non-violent protests of Mahatma Ghandi and the well-practised tactics of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament are fairly obvious, and examples of marches that gather numbers to end in a rally with speeches would have been familiar to the British public from earlier Pathé News coverage of, for example, the Aldermaston marches: and the tone of guarded respect in the film's commentary on this part of the march - 'their motives seemed honourable' - indicates the power of this tradition of peaceful protest as an acceptable component of democracy. By contrast, the near virulent denunciation of the events in Grosvenor Square suggests something much more disturbing to the conventional British psyche than a few bloodied heads, even if they do happen to belong to the friendliest of bobbies. The public is being warned off some imagined and far more sinister threat to British society.

A brief analysis of the relatively simple symbolism of the demonstration will take us some way towards an explanation of this revulsion. Obviously Grosvenor Square was chosen for the climax of the day's events because the American Embassy represents the United States, the then world-leader in developing what was commonly called by radicals the 'capitalist military-industrial complex'. Thus, the attacks on the Embassy were, metaphorically speaking, not simply aimed at American action in Vietnam, but also at the economic, social, and political system that was the source of the growing British affluence of the sixties. This was not simply a revolt against a foreign invasion of a far-off eastern country, but a representation of the potential for bloody revolution at home.

The revolutionary implications of the event may also have been reinforced in the popular imagination by such songs as the Beatles' 'Revolution' (1968) and the Rolling Stones' 'Street Fighting Man' (1968), as well as by the counter-culture's shallow lionization of Che Guevara. In political circles the connections between the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign and far-leftist groups such as the Socialist Labour League (which in 1969 became the Workers' Revolutionary Party) and the International Marxist Group were well-known. These links are a clue to the source of the demonstration's main dramaturgy. Not long before the Russian revolution of 1905, Trotsky had written:

To make the workers quit their machines and stand; to make them walk out of the factory premises into the street; to lead them to the neighbouring plant... to go thus from factory to factory, from plant to plant, incessantly growing in numbers, sweeping aside police barriers, absorbing new masses... crowding the streets, taking possession of buildings... fortifying those buildings... holding continuous
revolutionary meetings with audiences coming and going... arousing their spirit... to turn finally, the entire city into one revolutionary camp, this is, broadly speaking, the plan of action. 13

The Grosvenor Square protest, then, appears to have been based on a dramaturgy of complete revolutionary opposition, in which the enemy—the antagonist—is assumed to be known: the war in Vietnam, American imperialism, western capitalism.14 Its dramaturgy, though, deviates significantly from the last scene of Trotsky's scenario: if the protesters had ever intended to lead up to a 'revolutionary meeting', or even create a 'revolutionary camp', they were thwarted by the authorities.

Paradoxically, perhaps, the demonstration ended up as a pale reflection of its overt object: the actual confusion and chaos of the war in Vietnam, which of course the US government had fairly successfully disguised (at least up to the Mai Lai massacre of 1969), was reproduced as 'bloody war' on the streets of London. The symbolic protest slips, perhaps intentionally, into a scaled-down version of the irrevocably real violence that it aims to prevent.

This contradiction, together with the fact that the key antagonist for the protesters is not clearly identified in the symbolism of the march, make it unusually open to deliberate misreadings by commentators. The lack of a clear object renders the subject—the protagonists—vulnerable to easy re-identification: instead of a recognition of, say, coherent politicians who know how to unite action and ideology—the Gandi model—we have rabble-rousers, hooligans, opportunistic thugs, 'hate-makers'.

The significance of the event may thus more easily be turned against the authors because they had not clearly 'written' the central metaphors of the drama. In a sense, they had lost control over the relationships between the symbolic and the real because they assumed a transparency that could not be sustained in the face of the contradictions produced by events.

4 Methodological considerations

This analysis of the Grosvenor Square protest raises a number of methodological issues for the construction of dramaturgies of protest. Firstly, the relationships between protest events and their socio-political context may turn out as by no means as transparent as protesters might wish them. This is not simply a function of the Derridean difference of signs, their undecidability, but also of the instability of signification (or meaning) that the performative always promotes.15 Divergent interpretations of the wider cultural significance of the same demonstrations seem to bear this out, as we shall see.

So while we may be able to identify dramaturgic sources for particular demonstrations—the Gandi and Trotskyite in the case of Grosvenor Square—their destination, so to speak, may always surprise us through a fresh inflection of old or an invention of new forms. In these ways the messy complexity of performance—and especially performances as relatively unprecedented as protest events—produces especially rich exchange between symbolic action and socio-political reality, and one which constantly defies closure, keeping open the possibilities for re-interpretation and change. Such a prospect seems particularly appropriate for an analysis of events whose outcome, as they were happening, was steeped in profound uncertainty.

Secondly, while the performativity of protest may always evade the closure of interpretation, the analysis of protest as performance may reveal dimensions to the action which are relatively opaque to other approaches. It is obviously an assumption of my argument that most forms of contemporary protest—excluding perhaps the most spontaneous outbreaks of violence—are in part shaped by performative considerations. Though they often involve a good deal of spontaneity, they also follow scripts or scenarios.

Moreover, contemporary protest almost always assumes an audience, onlookers for whom events are 'played out'. It is almost always other-directed, and therefore often reflexively aware of the symbolic potential of its own sometimes all too real action. It follows that in the analysis of protest events we should always be alert to the particular ways in which they are reflexively articulated to their socio-political context. In this respect, at least, performance analysis may discover aspects to protest which resonate with their historical moment in especially telling ways.

Thirdly, in discussing protest events we are almost always dealing with mediations of those events rather than the events themselves. However, for the kinds of event we are considering this is not necessarily a disadvantage, because in its desire to capture the high points of the 'news' the media may well play into the hands of the people creating the events. The media tend to pick out the performative precisely because the performative stages the dramas that the media consider to be the 'news'.

Of course, since the late 'sixties there has been a rich tradition of radical theory and practice that has celebrated this key characteristic of the society of the spectacle, beginning with Guy Debord and the situationists, and Abbie Hoffman, Gerry Rubin, and the American yippies. Their ideas are in turn related to Marshall McLuhan's theories of the media, to Herbert Marcuse's sociopolitical philosophy, and beyond that to the traditions of the Frankfurt School.16

My fourth point concerns the aesthetics of the performative in protest events. We are dealing with forms in which spontaneity and improvisation are often very much to the fore, and this is partly because large numbers of people in situations of conflict are very difficult to organize. But it is also because the unexpected and the surprising are especially potent tactical—and sometimes even strategic—weapons for challenging authority and disrupting the spectacle.17 So a general dramaturgy of protest events, an account of their performative structures, is likely to look very unlike anything outlined by Aristotle.
Even given examples such as Grosvenor Square, which up until the break-away to the Square appeared to be following a linear modernist scenario, it would sound odd to suggest that such events are organized to the principles of a unitary action, or that everyone involved is working off a single script, or its equivalent. There may be scripts, or at least quasi-scripts, but they might be only loosely related to each other. In similar fashion we should probably be talking about an interweave of actions, any one of which may dominate the event for a time—a charge at police lines, say—but which will inevitably be reabsorbed in a series of multiple actions that are running simultaneously.

In other words, we would be constructing a dramaturgy which stressed qualities such as multiplicity, discontinuity, abrupt eruptions of dramatic intensity, sudden shifts and changes of direction, tempo, focus. If it wasn’t already going out of fashion, we might even be tempted, as does Richard Schechner, to draw on chaos theory in order to spot the strange attractors, Mandelbrot sets, and fractal boundaries in the swirls and eddies of your average demonstration, which often appears to incorporate random happenings within a somehow coherent disorder.

It is this paradoxical quality—the order within disorder, the disorder arising out of order—which is at the heart of protest events as paradigms for the cultural economies of their times, for in a sense they aim to latch onto the cusp of major historical change at the moment in which it is happening. To achieve that they must develop dramaturgies which draw on tradition to produce a more or less recognizably ordered socio-political action while never foreclosing on unpredictability, the potential of disorder. It is that dynamic which, given the right place and time, articulates them to history in ways that are often revealingly unprecedented.


Just two months after Grosvenor Square, Paris was beset by an even more violent uprising. Les événements de Mai 1968 are usually seen as the high point of counter-cultural protest, combining ambitions of political revolution with a desire for totally free expression.31 Protest graffiti coupled the personal and the political in symbiotic and often erotically-linked ecstasy—'The more I revolt, the more I love' an especially popular one. Politics and art are supposed to have merged together as news-sheets, posters, and banners proliferated, and as situationist slogans underlined the theatre in the events.32

Yet the marriage of politics and art happened perhaps more in theory than in practice. It is true, of course, that Jean-Jacques Lebel led an attack on the Odéon theatre which was occupied for the duration and became a focus for the whole revolt. But the theatricalization of this particular protest was perhaps closer to costume drama than to the radical symbolic disruption of the spectacle envisaged by Deleuze. Richard Neville indicates as much—perhaps unwittingly—when he points out that:

The Odéon occupation was the first time the revolt engulfed non-university territory. The wardrobe department was ransacked and dozens faced the tear gas dressed as centurions, pirates and princesses. The theatre came into the streets.33

I want to suggest, then, that the overtly symbolic gestures of the Parisian uprising were less crucial to its dramaturgy than the actual fighting in the streets: the dominant images of the protest are barricades, the petrol-bombs, the torn-up paving stones, the wrecked cars—not the graffiti, nor the costumes. As with Grosvenor Square, the scenarios of this revolt were rooted less in the exhortations of the Situationist Manifesto or in Deleuze’s analysis in the society of the spectacle than in Trotsky’s promptbook for insurrection, his report on the Russian Revolution.34 The Parisian uprising of 1968, like the Grosvenor Square protests, was still, I think, primarily related to the tradition of modernist radical dramaturgy.

To find examples of a contrasting dramaturgy of protest we need to turn to the United States in the late ‘sixties and early seventies, when the civil rights and anti-Vietnam movements coalesced to stage demonstrations that, at their best, had all the polyphonic eloquence which Bakhtin had claimed for classic carnival, plus original forms of theatricalized spectacle that, true to Deleuze’s recipes for symbolic revolution, fashioned new relations between the imaginary and the real.

There are many examples, but I will briefly focus on one discussed by Schechner: the occupation of the White House lawn in Washington by many thousands of demonstrators on 9 May 1970.35 This followed the Kent State University killings of 4 May and the first bombings of Cambodia, and so had a great potential for violence. However, the conflict that did ensue were entirely symbolic, and it is precisely this contrast between the nature of the object of revolt—violence and war—and the style of the event that marked it out as a significant moment in the development of new dramaturgies of protest.

First we should note that the demonstration combined the identification of the ‘enemy’ as in Grosvenor Square—the White House and the US Government—with the occupation of his territory, the White House lawn, as in Paris: but it lacked the directly violent confrontational tactics of both. Rather, the conflict was played out symbolically, sometimes in anger but mostly in an atmosphere of celebration. Schechner rightly links this celebratory ethos to the development of the so-called Woodstock Nation—the hippy movement for love and peace—and he stresses its carnivalesque qualities:

The frolic—with its characteristic whirling choreography, the dispersal of orderly ranks into many intense and volatile groups, the show of private pleasures satisfied in public places—subverted and mocked the neo-Roman monuments and pretensions of imperialist Washington.36
He is drawn to this interpretation mainly by the butchers, some of them naked, who took to the Reflecting Pool of the Lincoln Memorial—an immersion en masse in the water in which the memorial to state protected liberty was reflected. This generated popular pleasure, as the collective body of the populace ironically obliterated the evanescent image of what to them was the state’s false promise of freedom.

But it was also in the more direct confrontations of the event that the principles of a new dramaturgy can be detected. Earlier in the morning President Nixon had himself come out onto the lawn to talk to the demonstrators. According to Schenker, he was greeted with shouts of ‘Fuck Nixon! Trash Nixon!’ and a few lifted up Dustin lids with his picture stuck on their underside. This metaphor in this moment of high drama is both witty and sinister, as it rests on the ambiguous sign of the lids as shields and as ironic picture frames for the President’s image: as we might say, political elevation brought low through a comedy of dirt and darkness.

Such parodic mockery is the stuff of the carnivalesque, but the context pushes the drama beyond carnival in at least two crucial respects. Firstly, the transgression of the demonstration (unlike in carnival) is decidedly not licensed. This is not just time out from the mundane and everyday, framed by the law and the state: it is, in a sense, new or perhaps stolen time—time (and space) taken on the terms of the demonstrators, not contained by the law but beyond the law (at least until the police and troops move in).

Secondly, it is more precisely other-directed than carnival, for not only is it a face-to-face statement against the most powerful authority, it is a gesture made for the media, an image that can be quickly captured and transmitted through the world’s airwaves, reproduced and read across national boundaries. Thus the drama aims to utilize the processes of globalization to magnify the wit, determination, bravery, and tactical skill of the protagonists—the demonstrators. And through these processes the imaginary (the President in a dustbin) and the real (the President in the White House) are placed in new relationships for the spectator.

In the wake of this demonstration, another dimension of the new protest dramaturgy was created in Washington. By 1971 around 1,500 supporters of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War campaign had set up a camp on the green around the Washington Monument. From there small groups of veterans marched in double file around Congress and through the streets of the capitol.

They wore white-face, carried toy guns, and had their real purple hearts, silver stars, and other war decorations pinned to their combat fatigues. According to Lee Baxandall, as they marched they shouted:

“Where are our dead brothers? We’re looking for our 50,000 brothers. Have you seen them?” … [while] other troupes of veterans paraded mock Vietnamese prisoners, hands tied behind their backs, past government workers and visiting tourists. They did it for real. The prisoners were kicked, screamed at, slapped, and shoved. At the end of the week, the Vets throw their medals and papers onto the steps of Congress.27

The combination of the camp and these enacted provocations shift this protest into yet newer dramaturgic territory. Relations between the real and the imaginary are deliberately distorted: the fact that these are real veterans living under canvas much as they would have done in Vietnam validates the play-acting, yet some of the play-acting is done ‘for real’. The camp and the performances metaphorize the Washington streets, which become both an extension of the Vietnam jungle and a limbo for dead soldiers searching for their lost comrades. We might thus justifiably talk of an imaginative hyperrealism which challenges the spectator with both the immediacy and the distance of the war, carrying an intensity which may make the action impossible both to accept or reject.

This dramaturgy aims to by-pass the rational, subverting the logic of critical containment, in order to provoke an unprecedented response. Significantly, it is not, as it were, recommending an action: it is giving opportunity for revulsion/fascination with one of the vilest wars in human history, but by confounding the real and the imaginary so thoroughly that it leaves the nature of any subsequent action open to the spectator. This is a protest which leaves the future radically undecided.

6 A new dramaturgy and its theorists

Sources for this new dramaturgy can be identified in the work of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, which combined Brecht and the techniques of commedia dell’arte to produce popular political theatre. In the mid-sixties the Troupe’s founder, Ron Davis, first used the term ‘guerrilla theatre’ to indicate an action that aims to ‘teach, direct towards change, be an example of change’. Guerrilla theatre was distinguished from more traditional political theatre (excepting some agit-prop) by being staged in the environment of political conflict—the streets of ghettos, the grounds of government buildings—whence the analogy with real guerrilla warfare: but it was allied to traditional political theatre by being often didactic in purpose.

Equally influential was the Bread and Puppet Theatre, which introduced archetypal and satirical imagery to street protests, usually in the form of giant puppets. These combined the techniques of religious spectacle with ideas drawn from Artaud, and so had a less specific symbolic charge than the stereotypes of guerrilla theatre. Similarly, the Living Theatre aimed to subvert rational analysis by turning spectators into participants in excessive theatrical actions. The ritualized, hieratic gestures of ecstatic or sublime experience were supposed to signify a reality in which authority and oppression,
the law and exploitation, simply did not exist—a kind of pan-humanistic utopia.\(^\text{26}\)

These sources for the dramaturgy of late 'sixties protest events variously combined Brecht and Artaud to produce a politics of ecstasy, fun, or celebration. Brecht's notion of gesuch (the moment of action which perfectly expresses social relations) can explain the penchant for the quickly read image; while Artaud's idea of cruelty (the transcendent disruption of received realities) may illuminate the forms of excess which were often on display. Moreover, both theorists (though in different ways) spoke of the power of the symbolic to penetrate the real, to intervene so fundamentally in the real as to render its hegemonic oppressions entirely transparent and so subject to radical change.

Drawing on such sources, the central focus of protest dramaturgy shifted in the early 'seventies away from the modernist notion of an attack on a known enemy in the name of revolutionary progress towards a more improvisatory and hyper-real scenario style. Although protest was still directed against authority, it increasingly aimed to produce for both participants and spectators an image or an experience that gave a glimpse of the future as pure freedom from the constraints of the real, a hint of utopia at the very moment in which it engaged in the messy business of street marches and peace camps.

Hence protest, whether in the form of procession or occupation, became multi-vocal, polyphonic, as much an expression of difference as of unity. And it could achieve this because, in a sense, the symbolic content of protest was repositioned in relation to the real: while earlier protests usually drew primarily on political sources for their dramaturgies, in the sense of political theory or ideologies, these later events derived much of their dramaturgical power from theatrical origins. This adjustment of focus opened up a much wider perspective on the potential of protest: in a sense the imaginary became more important than the possible, and the visionary more persuasive than the rational.

We would expect such a significant re-orientation to produce its own brand of theorist-practitioner, and the most outrageously funny ones. At least in America, were Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, leading members of the yuppies. (Richard Neville is perhaps their closest British equivalent.) Schechner notes how they were committed to the theatricalization of political action. In Revolution for the Hell of It, for example, Hoffman wrote, in typical anarchistic vein, that 'Drama is anything you can get away with... Guerrilla theatre is only a transitional step in the development of total life.'\(^\text{27}\)

In almost identical vein, Rubin argues that 'Life is theatre and we are the guerrillas attacking the shrines of authority... the street is the stage. You are the star of the show and everything you were once taught is up for grabs.'\(^\text{28}\) These claims take the sociological theatre-life analogy most fully developed by Hoffman into a new dimension, where the symbolic and the real overlap to produce new forms of political protest and new arenas for action. In this dimension the verbal aphorism and the paradoxical image are crucial weapons, and Hoffman was a master of their use.

7 Carnival and protests

It has become an orthodoxy among performance analysts to associate performative excessiveness with notions of carnival and festival—bacchanalian riotousness. Thus, in 'The Street is the Stage'. Schechner draws on Bakhtin to explain how both protest events and celebratory gatherings may activate the basic functions of carnival, (a) by transgressing, up-ending, mocking, and by other means destabilizing the images and the structures of authority of the society within which they occur, and (b) by returning the participants to a social order which, whether the same as before or modified, has been reinforced by the pleasurable 'time out', the holiday from law.\(^\text{32}\)

In many events, such action may be confined to the symbolic realm, in which case there is likely to be little (if any) change to the structures of power and authority in society. But in some events the irrevocable happens, in the form of 'violence...', or the playing out of irreconcilable differences. Schechner forcefully links this prospect to the idea of sacrifice, and approvingly quotes René Girard, who argues that 'the fundamental purpose of the festival is to set the stage for a sacrificial act that marks at once the climax and the termination of the festivities.'\(^\text{33}\) It is then just a short step to the idea of ritual purgation, to the proposition that protest events which transcend the symbolic, whether they change society or not, operate as a kind of vent for the pressures of discontent, dissatisfaction, and disidence. In this version of a dramaturgy for protest events we are not so far from Aristotle, and especially his claims for catharsis, after all.

I have doubts about such totalizing explanations, for two main reasons. Firstly, they tend, of course, to gloss over difference; in particular they tend to usurp the creativity of practice by recommending a primacy of schema. Thus Schechner's recourse to ritual seems to prevent him from discriminating sufficiently between events which change and those which reinforce existing social orders—so that revolutionary and reactionary events are contained by the same theoretical rubric. That rubric tends to restrict the relations between the symbolic and the real to a fairly limited repertoire, whereas, as I am arguing,
the whole purpose of much contemporary protest has been to achieve efficacy by inventing unprecedented symbolic-real configurations.

Secondly, the tendency towards structuralist analysis downsplays the ideological content, the political significance of particular events as part of a wider historical process. As a result events as different as the New Orleans Mardi Gras and the occupation of Tienanmen Square are given a notional equivalence. Of course there are some similarities of form between the two types of event, but in Schechner’s account the linkage at times teeters uncomfortably close to historical formalism. The ‘art’ in the events appears to become more important than the purposes for which it was probably created.

Such analytic characteristics as these place Schechner firmly in the ‘ritualist’ camp identified by Clifford Geertz in his celebrated essay on blurred genres, where he notes that the ritualist approach to analysis can expose some of the profoundest features of social process, but at the expense of making vividly disparate matters look drably homogenous. Geertz goes on to suggest that the underlying epistemological problematic in this approach is revealed as a ‘separation of data from theory’, which, however, cannot ‘prosper when explanation comes to be regarded as a matter of connecting action to its sense, rather than behaviour to its determinants’.

Schechner’s view of protest as ritual is not crudely determinist in this sense, of course, and he recognizes that protest can contribute to profound socio-political change. But his claim that ‘revolutionary street actions are rare examples of history in its molten state’ reveals a curiously hypocractic perspective on human action, which separates it from its sense: how else might we understand a view of history as normally consisting of some kind of solid state?

What I am arguing for is an analysis which articulates the dramaturgy of protest to the complex processes of global historical change in the past forty years. An approach which mainly stresses the aesthetics of protest, especially through its links to the carnivalesque, offers a useful model, but its concentration on formal similarities tends to detract from protest’s place in the major ideological struggles of specific periods. Connecting ‘action to its sense’ in this way is not simply a matter of noting the immediate and explicit purposes of particular protests - Grosvenor Square as a reaction to the war in Vietnam, for example - but of trying also to discern how they are a part of any historical paradigm shifts which may be under way in the moment of their happening.

The relationship of late ‘sixties and early ‘seventies protest to the first of the major post-war counter cultures offers some purchase on this problem: the paradigm shift can be detected in western democracies through the repositioning of generational formations via, for example, the increased educational opportunities and growing purchasing power of the young. Hence, the contrasts between the protest march (CND/Grosvenor Square) and the peace camp (Vietnam Solidarity Campaign/White House) outlined above could be read synecdochically as ‘evidence’ of the gain in cultural power of the younger generation: the greater permanence of the camp then provides the kinds of time/space needed to fashion new relations between the symbolic and the real. But this type of theorization now needs to be tested against contrasting examples, such as the East European protests which led to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the cataclysmic events of Tienanmen Square in 1989.

8 Eastern protests in 1989

How much of the new dramaturgy, if any, filtered through to the protests that contributed to the downfall of communism in East Germany and the reinforcement of hard-line brutality in Tienanmen Square? In the West the intervening years had seen a wide variety of developments, from the Greenham Common Peace Camp to the queer-rights demonstrations of Gay Pride. How might the events of 1989 relate to these developments, and did they add any new dimensions to the dramaturgy of protest?

I do not have space here to go into much detail, so I can only offer a few brief, incomplete, and perhaps provocative sketches to suggest that they did add a new range of synecdochic relevance to the forms of postwar protest.

First the Berlin Wall. Its fall was preceded by a series of mainly peaceful demonstrations in the chief cities of East Germany. These had begun in Leipzig in August and September 1989, following regular Monday evening ‘peace services’ in Saint Nikolai’s Church. Each week the crowds swelled in Karl-Marx Platz, but, according to a student organizer, they were always ‘wondering what to do or say’. A similar mood seems to have gripped other demonstrations, including one of the most significant in Plauen, on 7 October - when the fortieth anniversary of East Germany was marked by a visit of Gorbachev to East Berlin. Over 20,000 people gathered in Plauen’s central square, a quarter of the city’s population. For some time they simply stood around, ‘unsure why exactly they had come’, until a young man from a local school climbed on top of a small stone statue next to a theatre and held up a sign reading: ‘We want freedom!’ He was joined by another student who raised a black-red-gold West German flag. The crowd applauded and began to chant ‘Germany, Germany!’ Suddenly a man dressed in a trench coat forced his way through the crowd, ripped down the flag, and punched its carrier in the face. At this moment, according to one spectator, the crowd became unified.

Such accounts of the demonstrations hint at a dramaturgy that is especially context specific, and may be a reflection of the lack of direct contact with the West imposed by the East German regime. Their immediate source in the protestant churches may help to explain the form of ‘peaceful witness’ that they seemed to take. We may talk paradoxically about a drama of inaction, in
which the straightforward presence of huge congregations with no obviously expressed immediate goal or target bears witness to a deeper and vaguer unfulfilled need: so even the slightest signs of reaction — the single agent in the symbolic trench-coat — sparks off a process of extensive unification, a flood of yearning for an absent ideal. Maybe the dramaturgy here is rooted in the rites of Christian religion: the waiting for a sign through which a sudden conversion can be delivered?

What then was finally delivered was both stupendous in its symbolic charge and perhaps ironically trivial in its actual expression. The fall of the Berlin Wall marked the end of the Cold War; the crumbling bricks and mortar signalled a possibly permanent postponement of nuclear Armageddon. Yet the dramaturgy of the fall of the Wall was nothing if not vacuously undynamic. It was great to see people chipping the wall away with everyday hammers and chisels, but bulldozers and cranes with demolition balls would have more accurately reflected the magnitude of the political collapse. So what the demonstration of freedom actually amounted to was a scramble to get onto the wall. And maybe the most memorable collective image was a thin line of people who were holding hands and going nowhere (opposite).

So the fall of the Berlin Wall seems to have produced a dramaturgy in which there is an enormous gap between the real — the means of surmounting or demolishing it — and the imaginary — the freedoms which its collapse appeared to promise. And maybe this is reflected in the gestures with which West Berlin welcomed the newly freed East Germans: free cinema tickets, bottles of booze, and a hundred marks each to spend in the shops that were, for once, kept open all night. Such, perhaps, is the ironic outcome of a dramaturgy that quickly shifted from the structure of religious rite to the limited — and absurdist — free-for-all of the late-capitalist marketplace.

And what about Tiananmen Square? I hope it will not seem indelicate to attempt a short analysis of such a tragic protest, but its dramaturgical forms were often designed for quick reading, and so brief comments may be appropriate to its theatrical impulse. While the occupation lasted for over two months between April and June, many of its most potent political moments took the shape of short dramatic 'dialogues' which seem to have been designed to resonate by contrast with the lengthening duration of the occupation — theatricalized high points which give symbolic shape to the whole occupation through experimentation with direct political action and imagery.

Joseph Esherick and Jeffrey Wasserstrom, in a thoughtful and thorough essay on the theatrical qualities of the occupation, argue:

As essentially non-violent demonstrations that posed no direct economic or physical threat to China's rulers, the power of the protests derived entirely from their potency as protests which could symbolically undermine the regime's legitimacy and move members of larger and more economically vital classes to take sympathetic action.®

And they draw attention to three particular moments orchestrated by the students: the presentation of petitions, the dialogues which arose from the hunger strike, and the entrance into the Square of the Goddess of Democracy and Freedom — each of which drew on Chinese traditions of political public action. For example, the presentation of the petition which demanded an explanation of the resignation in 1987 of the pro-democracy General Secretary of the Communist Party emerged "out of traditions of remonstrance and petition stretching back for millennia". The image of three students kneeling on the steps of the Great Hall of the People would have a profound resonance for the Chinese people, and so,

the party leadership's failure to acknowledge in any way the petition... was a major violation of ritual, and it significantly increased public anger against official arrogance.®

Esherick and Wasserstrom also note how a later visit to the hospitalized hunger strikers by party leaders was a more adroitly performed 'ritually required act of compassion', but one which had already negatively been framed by the earlier televised dialogue between student leader Wuer Kaxi and Premier Li Peng:

The costuming was important. [Wuer Kaxi] appeared in his hospital pyjamas. So, too, was the timing: he upstaged the Premier by interrupting him at the start. And props: later in the session, he dramatically pulled out a tube inserted in his nose (for oxygen?) in order to make a point.®

The guerrilla-theatre style inventiveness in this scene was reinforced by the fact that hunger striking was a relatively recent addition to the repertoire of Chinese protest — an introduction which also signalled 'how internationalized models for dissent had become'. But whether dealing in ancient or recent forms, the students demonstrated the superior control of protest dramaturgies needed in a highly mediated world, both by ironically turning official Chinese political ritual back on itself and by extending the potential of direct action through globally televised agit-prop. Their grasp of these techniques indicates a tactical order in their strategic disorder which delivered a clear political advantage over the interests of the state.

In describing Tiananmen during the occupation Schechner adopts the language of the Chinese government to point out its links with carnival. He notes that the authorities labelled the occupation luan, or chaos, and he claims that 'meaningful theatrical luan is a potent weapon.' He then uses imagery associated with chaos theory to make a contrast between the occupation and official uses of the Square, which generally take the form of geometric parades — such as military march-bys — and similar displays.
Obviously there was some of this celebratory action in Tienanmen; the students were there a long time, and had devised ways to amuse themselves to release the tensions of the situation. But Schechner's account - like the swirling patterns he imagines - blurs the historical and ideological achievement of the protestors in their highly controlled and imaginative uses of the symbolic to pose a threat that was ultimately felt as all too real by the Chinese authorities.

The traditional and the international were stunningly combined in the most spectacular 'dialogue' of the occupation, with the appearance of the Goddess of Democracy and Freedom. Constructed by students from the Beijing Academy of Art, the Goddess for three weeks faced the giant picture of Mao, symbolically blocking his view of the Monument to the People's Heroes. As the Monument is a 'sacred symbol of the Communist regime' the positioning of the Goddess offered a direct questioning of the validity of the Chinese government's power and proposed a revision of the nature of Chinese democracy for the future.

Ideologically speaking, the thirty-foot high icon was appropriately multivocal: Esherick and Wasserstrom note its obvious allusion to the Statue of Liberty, which the western media and the Chinese government tended to stress to the exclusion of other meanings. But they also point out that the icon alludes to the rough-cut styles of socialist-realist sculptures of revolutionary heros of communist tradition, and may well have been reminiscent of the giant statues of Mao which were paraded through the Square in the sixties. In similar vein, the icon reminds Schechner of the Bread and Puppet Theatre effigies used in anti-Vietnam War demonstrations in the sixties. In fact, the Goddess is a potent pastiche of imported and native symbolism.

This makes the icon more complex than traditional agit-prop imagery: it imports into that tradition new ironic and satirical inflections that link it to the more celebratory and carnivalesque aspects of late twentieth century protest. But it also reflects a developing internationalization and globalization of such protest, in two linked ways. First, the discourse of the Goddess is international in its combination of signs drawn from both eastern and western cultures; second, it is globalized because it is clearly designed to speak cross-culturally through the media, and so becomes a focus for identifying the nature of the protest in relation to shifting global political formations.

This was a demonstration for democracy, but not for a democracy that would simply mimic western models: this was a demonstration for a Chinese form of democracy, which, as Esherick and Wasserstrom make clear, is much more wedded to notions of unity than those of the western liberal democracies, which tend to stress pluralism. For the Chinese, as perhaps for western feminists, the gendering of the statue would almost certainly carry that extra charge.

The statue was smashed up by the troops and tanks, and now, maybe, it hardly figures in the popular western imagination as a symbol of resistance: for the image that is already beginning to dominate representations of the Tienanmen protests in the West is resonant in quite different ways to the Goddess. This is an image of enormous individual bravery, as a solitary man, shopping bags in hand, blocks the awful progress of a line of tanks on their way to the Square.

The moment is a wonderfully powerful one for the dramaturgy of protest. This is partly because it echoes earlier western resistance to the colonizing tendencies of contemporary states in the Prague Spring of 1968, and so reinforces the globalization of protest. But also, as a mediated image, the 'meaning' of the Tienanmen Square occupation, it reflexively underlines the need for continual struggle for freedom and justice, as it is itself part of an international discourse through which the contending forms of democracy are shaped.

The contrasting images of the solitary man facing up to the tanks gives an indication of the ideological issues at stake in this discourse. The first image, which is the one most disseminated in the West, literally foregrounds the role of the individual in the drama of protest, heightening notions of heroism as an exceptional trait. The second image displays the awful context of the heroism, and shifts it towards different dramaturgical territory, raising questions about how the solitary man could possibly have gained the courage to confront a whole army (notice the helicopters in the background).

The panorama of latent violence forcefully implies many invisible antagonists, the 'other' of the protesting students in Tienanmen Square which the lonely protester represents. The image changes the ideological focus of the drama - and without diminishing individual heroism it gestures towards its source in the collective action of a mass movement. On the global stage created by mediatization, representations of protest become part of the struggle between different versions of the democratic process.

In this new global context, the Goddess of Democracy and Freedom and the lone man facing the tanks may together suggest that resistance and transgression can thrive across space and time, however differently they are inflicted by the circumstances of particular cultures - as male, female, or some other gender, as collective, individual, or some other formation. Through globalisation, protest may become a phenomenon which partly transcends cultural difference and strengthens resistance as a universal possibility.

Whilst we may gladly accept that there are no transcendent signs in the dramaturgy of protest, or any other discourse, it does not now necessarily follow that, where politics and ethics meet, relativism rules the world. The forms of freedom may be relative, but, just possibly, the need for freedom, like the need for food, may be absolute.
9 Conclusions

What, then, might an analysis of disruptive micro-events through a dramaturgical framework tell us about macro-changes in culture internationally in the past forty years or so? Does it tell us anything more than we could probably already have deduced from general trends in cultural history - for example, that anarchy and anti-structure were ideologically crucial to the counter-culture of the 'sixties, or that the globalizing thrust of international media networks in the 'eighties contributed to profound unrest in politically sclerotic regimes?

In answering these questions, we need to recognize that any response will be particularly susceptible to the ideological perspectives of the analysis brought to bear on such complex material. We also need to have constructed a kind of multi-focal methodology which will both take into account and also counter the simplifications implied by the micro/macro binary.

The problem with Schechner's approach is that it does neither: in mapping a schema onto diverse forms of street event he simultaneously elides their ideological macro-context and supresses reflexive awareness of the values shaping his interpretations. To be fair, the difficulties of such a project are prodigious, because the writing of a general account, and particularly a general history, always implies a meta-perspective which may invoke the spectre of meta-narratives. The main line of defence against that danger is a robust reflexivity, which fortunately can be reinforced by the cross-disciplinary tendencies of multi-focal methodologies.

Thus, in drawing on cultural studies and general social and political histories in my account of post-war protest, I have in part had to assume that their accounts have some valency. Hence, I chose not to challenge the usual associations made between the events of 1968-70 and growing generational differences, a supposed 'gap' between the value systems of the immediate post-war and earlier generations. Similarly, I mostly took as read the common explanation that the uprisings of 1989 were the result of a chasm between the people and the state, between desire for individual freedoms and the oppressions of totalitarian communist regimes.

However, my dramaturgical analysis has created a methodology and a theoretical perspective that differs from those generally informing interpretations of civil unrest both in cultural studies and in political histories, which seem often to rest on what we might call the 'volcanic view' of protest. This view (which is a close cousin of the theorizations about carnival) tends to assume that disruptive events are the irreplaceable blowout of a vast and usually invisible mass of turbulent socio-political material.

In this view, micro-events are still treated as synchondronic, as protest is seen as indicative of an instability in the structuration of society, but the implied function - as condensed into the image of the volcano - suggests that protest is somehow always within itself out of control. In this respect, at least,
societies in which cultural formations, which are much more ideologically porous than political interest groups or formations, increasingly become dominant "players" in the struggle for power. A more accurate way of putting this, which also relates performance theory to political theory, would be to say that the locus of protest has become increasingly centred in civil society, and generally in resistance to the politics of the state. One measure of this in the West is, perhaps, the growth of single-issue pressure groups and, on a wider basis, what have been called the new social movements.

I would also suggest that this notion of protest as an integral aspect of civil society gives resistance/transcendence a secure base than it is found in, say, Foucault or de Certeau, where resistance is conceived primarily in terms of response to the dominance of power. It also raises some difficult questions for the "visibility thesis" proposed by Peggy Phelan and other American performance theorists, because it relocates resistant power in a social arena that is not so easily recuperated by the dominant as the "marginal" identities that tend to be the subject of their analyses. Indeed, it may even problematize the influential notion in much critical discourse across a whole range of disciplines that the marginal is the chief repository of active organized subordination.

So I would claim that the dramaturgy of protest has this explanatory power: it enables a suggestive description of the links between the politics of state (power politics) and the ideologies circulating in civil society at particular moments in cultural history. Protests arise when these links become tenuous or are broken, when government policies do not sufficiently provide for the desires of the people, of civil society. When hegemony fragments, new formations of civil society may coalesce around more or less radical values.

Moreover, the processes of globalization, in opening up new views of difference and otherness, in enhancing pluralism (while at the same time trying to repress it), have the potential to disrupt hegemonies, and to stimulate new kinds of civil desire. Then the self-same processes of mediaization that in part reinforce globalization may be used reflexively by protest to appeal to widening publics in civil society.

The actions described by a dramaturgy of protest suggest the character of civil desire through their negotiation of tradition and innovation in the forms of resistance. So a dramaturgy of protest, as a focus for cross-cultural study, may provide a kind of historical relief map of changing civil desire internationally. The development of peace camps, occupations, vigils, rallies and other spectacles of resistance suggests, for example, that the traditions of marching or processing were seen as inadequate for the expression of new forms of resistance and radicalism. In accord with paradigm shifts towards postmodernity in the social sphere, and new critical theory in the discursive sphere, nonlinear forms supplanted and sometimes supplanted linear models. Similarly, the semiotics of protest tended towards greater polyphony and heteroglossia: multiple-referenced images were added to monologic slogans.

while the slogans themselves often became more parodic and punning. Satire and caricature were welded to images suggesting desired ideals and utopias.

All this signals that civil desire was becoming more sophisticated, complex, multi-faceted - and so more reflexive and flexibly organized. In general terms, it is this kind of deep cultural shift that has tended to render traditional forms of "political theatre" redundant, because civil desire has, as it were, re-shaped itself in postmodernity, shaking increasingly free of the meta-narrative which had given those forms their meaning and utility.

It would be too easy just to suggest, though, that the dramaturgy of protest in the late twentieth century simply participates synecdochically in a wider paradigm shift from modernity to postmodernity, because such a claim would paradoxically suggest theoretical closure in a discourse - a dramaturgy which is centrally about closure, both in terms of disrupting the spectacular of hegemony and in terms of opening up new forms of ideological exchange between civil society and the state, new social movements and institutional power. Whilst those exchanges are always to a greater or lesser degree prefigured by tradition, they are also more or less aimed at creating new spaces for radical discourse in its widest sense. That is to say, the drama of protest always aims for a radical liminality which draws authority into a new relation with the potential for change initiated beyond its domain.

This can be seen most clearly, perhaps, in extreme forms of protest such as "wilder" strikes, riots, and civil disobedience. The Los Angeles riots that followed the beating of Rodney King, the British Poll Tax Riots and refusals that were to lead to the downfall of Margaret Thatcher - such actions aim always to be metaphorically and literally "beyond the pale", outside the normative boundaries that the law and the state would enforce. It is that liminality which can give protest a potent ideological transcendence - beyond subversion, beyond resistance - because in liminality may be found the very figure of new notions of freedom.

That too is, I hope, a kind of protection against the potential for the dramaturgy of protest itself becoming a handmaiden to reified meta-narrative. And that, ultimately, is why the dramaturgy of protest may provide an especially useful key to an understanding of the kinds of major historical shifts which have, as they say, changed the political face of the world in the past fifty years.

Notes and references

1 Versions of this argument have been explored in Graham Holderness, ed., The Politics of Theatre and Drama (London: Macmillan, 1992); Sue-Ellen Case and Janelle Reinelt, eds., The Performance of Power: Theatrical Discourse and Politics (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1991).

See, for example, Philip Aamir, Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Performance in Contemporary American Performance (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992); for an account of Welfare State’s ‘Gall Up! see Kershaw, op. cit.

Raymond Williams, Culture (Glasgow: Fontana, 1981), especially Chapter 1.


In some ways my argument constitutes an ongoing conversation with Schechner’s ideas, and at times the tone gets more than a little immoderate it is because, paradoxically, I have much respect for the pioneering nature of his work.


See John Orr and Dragan Klacic, eds., Terrorism and Modern Drama (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990). I am grateful to Clive Barks for drawing my attention to this lively collection.

See, for example, Kenneth O. Morgan, The People’s Peace: British History 1945-1960 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 294 (though Morgan seems to confuse the relatively peaceful October 1968 demonstrations with the one in March).


See Jacques Derrida, ‘From Psycho - Invention of the Other’, in Arts of Literature, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1982), p. 340 (‘The very movement of this fabulous repetition [through the logic of supplementarity] can, through a merging of chance and necessity, produce the new of an event. Not only with the singular invention of a performative, since every performative presupposes conventions

and rules - but by bending these rules themselves in order to allow the other to come or to announce its coming in the opening of this disheveling. That is perhaps what we call deconstruction’).


The basic text is James Gleick, Chaos: Making a New Science (London: Sphere, 1988).


Schechner, op. cit.

Ibid., p. 65-7.

Lee Baxandall, Spectacles and Scenarios: a Dramaturgy of Radical Activity, in Radical Perspectives in the Arts (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), Note to Illus. 12. This essay was the main inspiration for the present argument.


Schechner, op. cit., p. 47.


Ibid., p. 34.

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Schechner, op. cit., p. 86.

See, for example, Michael Brake, Comparative Youth Culture: the Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subcultures in America, Britain, and Canada (London: Routledge, 1985); Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., Resistance Through...
"THERE MUST BE A LOT OF FISH IN THAT LAKE"

Toward an ecological theater

Una Chaudhuri

Like any cultural theorization today, that of a possible ecological theater will take place in the shadow of the approaching millennium. And of course, the reverse is also true: the millennium itself will be greeted—onstage and off—in an ecological idiom. Onstage, the countdown that had haunted the Western theatrical imagination since mid-century—the countdown to the big bang with the mushroom cloud—has now been replaced by something even more unnerving—the ticking time-bombs of ecological disaster. Certainly, the apocalyptic angels visiting the American stage with increasing frequency are closely linked to eco-catastrophe. In their paralyzing mixture of prophetic vision and belatedness, they recall Walter Benjamin’s "angel of history," who seems to anticipate the ever-dawning ecological consciousness of our century: the angel, says Benjamin, sees history not as a chain of events, but rather a single catastrophe, piling wreckage upon wreckage.” He "would like to ... make whole what has been smashed [but he cannot, because] a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.”

The angel of American history confronts something both less poetic and more deadly than the debris that accumulated at the feet of Benjamin’s "Angelus Novus": it is a mountain of garbage. The trashings of America (and the world), with its calamitous effects on the future, is the overarching truth—quite literally—of Jose Rivera’s recent angel play Marisol, which exemplifies one of the most common forms of ecological theater, namely, an underlying and dystopic ecological condition pervading the world of the
play. From the polluted streams of Dr. Stockmann's town to Beckett's ashes and beyond, a largely negative ecological vision permeates the theater of this century.

Pervasive though it is, the specifically ecological meaning—as opposed to the mere theatrical presence—of this imagery has remained occluded, unremarked, a fact that derives from the disastrous coincidence, in the second half of the 19th century, between the age of ecology and the birth of naturalism. Along with other discourses born of the age of industrialization, 19th-century humanism located its shaky foundations on the growing gap between the social and natural worlds, constructing a fragile edifice that could sustain itself only at the cost of actively ignoring the claims of the nonhuman. As Alan Read puts it in *Theater and Everyday Life*: "Nature is so problematic to cultural disciplines it has to be ignored for fear of its effects on the status quo between powerful and subservient fields of inquiry."

In the theater, naturalism (and then, more tendentiously, realism) hid its complicity with industrialization's animus against nature by proffering a wholly social account of human life. While asserting the deterministic force of environment, naturalism concealed the incompleteness of its definition of environment. By defining human existence as a seamless social web, naturalism was unwittingly acting out 19th-century humanism's historical hostility to ecological realities. Though its themes kept in touch with nature through images of cherry orchards, wild ducks, and polluted baths, the ideological discourse of realism thrust the nonhuman world into the shadows, from which it emerged in the ghostlike form of strangely menacing—yet innately—objects. The junk-strewn, garbage-choked stages of Pinter, Mamet, Shepard, and others, reveal naturalism's anxiety—long concealed—about the widening gap between the human and the nonhuman.

The unattended garbage that accumulates on the margins of the realist stage is one of the sites for a possible ecological theater. A new look at this hitherto neglected material—a view from the garbage-dump, as it were—would also reveal the extent to which the countertradition of modern drama (including Surrealism, Epic theater, Absurdism) makes its case against 19th-century humanism by setting its explorations of the human condition, be they psychological, political, or metaphysical, within a recognition of the inextricable claims of the natural world. However attenuated that world might appear (a contested valley here, a denuded tree there) it is nevertheless there, demanding that any social or philosophical systems we evolve recognize its presence, acknowledge its radical otherness.

Other prospects for ecological theater are offered by plays that—in opposition to realism's predominant tendencies—manage to bring ecological issues to center stage. A growing number of contemporary plays treat ecological issues explicitly, yielding what Lynn Jacobson has called "an eco-canons," beginning with that "grandaddy of environmental plays," *An Enemy of the"
highways on the sites of these ruined forests, if there were works and factories and schools, the peasants would be healthier, better off, more intelligent; but you see, there is nothing of the sort! There are still the same swamps and mosquitoites, the same lack of roads, and poverty, and typhus and diphtheria and fires in the district... The degeneration is due to inertia, ignorance, to the complete lack of understanding.” To Astrov, material and cultural progress justifies the destruction of nature. His ecology, ultimately, is what is now called “resourcism,” or shallow ecology, and supports the fiction—convenient to a consumerist economic system—that nature is an eco-machine, a virtual factory pouring out a stream of raw materials to be transformed into commodities.

The great debates raging today between the adherents of deep vs. shallow ecology, of conservation vs. preservation, may seem rather remote from the concerns of theater studies, but they are the appropriate framework for any attempted search for a useful ecological theater. Moreover, such an investigation is not merely desirable in terms of the theater’s own standards of social seriousness and political relevance; it is also crucial to the future of the ecological movement itself, and hence to the future as such. I recognize how grandiose this sounds, but I mean it only the following two simple points. First: we are well past the stage in ecological history when things could correct themselves by being left alone; ecological action is an urgent necessity, and the nature and course of that action—or continued inaction—will inevitably be deeply political and will strongly impact every aspect of our lives. Second: if one thing has become clear from a century of ecological thought and effort, it is that the earth cannot now be saved by half-measures, by tinkering and putting things together with rules and regulations and practices and customs; whether we like it or not, the ecological crisis is a crisis of values. Ecological victory will require a transvaluation so profound as to be nearly unimaginable at present. And in this the arts and humanities—including the theater—must play a role.

Obviously, simply calling for a responsible ecological theater does nothing (remember Hotspur’s retort to Glendower’s boast that he can “call spirits from the vasty deep”: “But will they come when you call for them?”). Better, I think, to recognize that a stubborn obstacle stands in the way of this urgent consciousness-raising program. An early formulation of this situation is offered, again, by Chekhov: The Seagull pictures the rupture between nature and culture precisely through the image of a stage, thus identifying the theater as the site of both ecological alienation and potential ecological consciousness. After young Treplev’s ghastly pseudo-symbolist playlet, staged on the grounds of the Sorin estate, Trigorin says to Nina:

I didn’t understand it at all. But I enjoyed watching. You acted so genuinely. And the scenery was beautiful. Pause. There must be a lot of fish in that lake.

We had come across a piece of information to the effect that if we think of the entire span of time as a calendar year... human beings as a species make their appearance in the last three or four seconds before midnight on the last night of the year... or some time... we toyed with the idea of presenting a show in which the actors sat quite still for 99 per cent of the time, while a voice described the Big Bang, the appearance of stars, of the Earth, the creation of micro-organisms, the death of dinosaurs, the arrival of reptiles, birds, mammals... and then for the last few seconds of the piece... when human consciousness is formed... the two actors would rush about the stage fighting, falling out, inventing weapons and generally creating the mayhem for which our species is responsible. We felt as a
form it held a certain truth...but might be somewhat undramatic for 99 percent of the time. We are a species that is most interested in ourselves...So the play is set just before midnight on the last night of the year, the end of the day and unless we do something about it...possibly the end of the world.

In learning the lesson that Treplew failed to learn—that passivity and non-intervention before the facts of natural life are not particularly dramatic—Lavery also arrives at a sense of how ecological realities might nevertheless be given dramatic form, if only through a metaphorical exploitation of the theater's own realities of space and time.

But if the theater can suggest metaphors for ecological concerns, ecology can also furnish metaphors for certain kinds of theater. This option is exemplified in some articles by Bonnie Marranca, who coined the expression "ecologies of theater" to designate a theatrical tradition, starting with Chekhov and continuing through "Gertrude Stein, Thornton Wilder, Sam Shepard, Maria Irene Fornes, Lee Breuer, Richard Foreman, Robert Wilson and Heiner Muller," which is marked by "its embrace of performance space, and rejection of setting." Marranca briefly develops this opposition according to avant-garde values, contrasting the "closure" of setting with the "dynamism" of space. However, the latter qualifies as "ecological" only in the abstract sense of suggesting global interconnectedness, and a wider framework for experiencing and evaluating human action than did setting. ("In its three-dimensionality it assumes the attitude that human behavior has global significance and reverberates beyond the single gesture.") Marranca's imaginative and often lyrical approaches to theater ecology show both the value and the limitations of metaphor in this context. There is no doubt that ecological concepts like interrelatedness, holism, and organismic provide powerful descriptive tools for dealing with innovative theater work like Wilson's. Indeed, as Max Oelschlaeger argues in his recent book _The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology_, the remarkable coincidence between patterns of postmodern thought in general (especially its elimination of mind-matter and subject-object dualisms) and emerging ecological models are conspiring to move us towards a new paradigm of knowledge. Oelschlaeger develops the philosopher Richard Rorty's idea of conversation as an epistemological model to argue provocatively that contemporary "wilderness philosophy and literature is the cutting edge by which nature's experiment in humanity is transforming itself from the modern to the post-modern era." George Sessions makes a similar claim in "Shallow and Deep Ecology: A Review of the Philosophical Literature," saying that "a new world-view and social paradigm is being born," created by eco-philosophers who "do not find it possible to engage in the luxury of holding that 'the proper study of man is man.'"

However, the metaphorical use of ecology can sometimes misrepresent the actual ecological issues at hand. In a more recent piece subtitled "Dramaturgy as an Ecology," Marranca interprets the dense intertextuality of Robert Wilson's Gilgamesh play _The Forest_ as an ecology, exploring "the double life of the book as nature and culture," treating the library of world literature as a forest. Wilson's dramaturgy is ecological, says Marranca, in that it "chooses all manner of species of texts and images from the world archive, then stages their fertility and adaptability in new environments." By contrast, Robert Pogue Harrison, in _Forests: The Shadow of Civilization_, reads Gilgamesh as the earliest commemoration of what Vico—on the threshold of the modern age—proposed as the fundamental hostility, religious in origin, between the institutions of humanity and the outlying forests. The traumatic relation between humankind and nature is staged, says Harrison, in and on the forests. From this perspective, treating forests as a metaphor for civilization's chief emblem—books—might seem to be the ultimate desecration. (It's a little like calling capitalism an ecology on the grounds that it believes in "growth.")

To use ecology as metaphor is to block the theater's approach to the deeply vexed problem of classification that lies at the heart of ecological philosophy: are we human beings—and our activities, such as theater—an integral part of nature, or are we somehow radically separate from it? The question underlies any effort to define an environmental ethics, to conceptualize our moral responsibility for the nonhuman. It is especially challenging to us as humanists, because its form puts into doubt the humanities' ability to transcend their inbuilt "human chauvinism" and rise to the ecological occasion. A central tenet of Western thought—the immortality of art—is a cornerstone of this phenomenon, exemplified in the epigram to Marranca's _Theatre Rewritings_: "Art works clearly are superior to all other things; since they stay longer in the world than anything else, they are the worldliness of all things" (Hannah Arendt). Just as we have forgotten the longevity of natural things, we have also forgotten the complexity. The ecological poetGary Snyder writes: "We are so impressed by our civilization and what it's done, with our machines, that we have a difficult time recognizing that the biological world is infinitely more complex." Lynn White's 1967 landmark essay "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis" began a process of increasingly "broad indictment of the central theological and philosophical traditions of the West"; Judaism and Christianity for their reinforcements of anthropocentrism; classical Greek philosophy for its failure to regard nature as an object of human responsibility; Renaissance scientific philosophy for the reduction of nature to a neutral substance for human manipulation.

The theater's complicity with the anti-ecological humanist tradition has to be of critical concern to us, but we should not overlook the same theater's own self-reflexive stagings of this complicity. The theater, that is to say, cannot escape the liabilities of its status as a cultural institution producing cultural artifacts; but it can avoid misrecognizing that status as something natural. Read's prescription for theater is precisely the one I am using here: "What is needed is not the ignorance of nature but more acute definition..."
between political, ethical and creative processes and living within nature, which inevitably is a transformation of nature.” By making space on its stage for ongoing acknowledgments of the rupture it participates in—the rupture between nature and culture, forests and books, sincere acting and real fish—the theater can become the site of a much-needed ecological consciousness.

The theoretical sources of an ecological theater may be found within theater history itself, and it is with one such source that I wish to conclude. The theatrical implications of the general eco-philosophical problem of classification—are we human beings a part of nature or not?—is staged with astonishing prescience in Ibsen’s play The Wild Duck, in the figure of the indoor wilderness. The theatrical implications of ecology, this curious space suggests, will involve renegotiating that tension between symbolism and literalism that is the hallmark of theatrical art.

Most readings of the indoor wilderness—by critics as well as by the play’s characters—tend to be symbolic, except for the one exemplified by old Ekdal, for whom the loft is, literally, the answer to a question that increasingly confronted all Europeans in the two centuries leading up to this one: “How can a man like you—such an outdoorsman—live in the middle of a stuffy city, cooped up in these four walls?” The loft is old Ekdal’s way of negotiating his enforced alienation from—his dispossession of—all those other things, the very roots of your soul—that cool, sweeping breeze, that free life of the moors and forests among the animals and birds. What is simply a “waste and wilderness” to his son Hjalmar is to old Ekdal a place of beauty, mastery, fulfillment. Ekdal takes nature seriously, literally. In response to the news that the woods of his childhood are being cut into, he says, “It’s a dangerous business, that. It catches up with you. The woods take revenge.”

Ibsen’s play shows what Harrison locates in Vico’s account of the origin of civilization, namely, the dissonant link, in the West’s cultural imagination, between the wilderness and human institutions. Vico’s “fabulous insight,” says Harrison, was that the “abomination of forests in Western history derives above all from the fact that, since Greek and Roman times at least, we have been a civilization of sky-worshippers, children of a celestial father.” The dark, enclosing forests were the antithetical spaces for this civilization: “the first human families had to clear the oak trees in order to plant another kind of tree: the genealogical tree. To burn out a clearing in the forest and to claim it as the sacred ground of the family—that, according to Vico, was the original deed of appropriation that first opened the space of civil society. It was the first decisive act, religiously motivated, which would lead to the founding of cities, nations, and empire.”

This first version of home, like its late parodic variant in the Ekdal household, is predicated on the destruction of the woods. In Ibsen’s play, set long after even genealogical trees have become endangered, Gregers’s ill-conceived attempts to reconstruct the family on a new basis is a battle of trees: the magical woods of Hoidal are to be replaced by Gregers’s “Call to the Ideal,”

his version of the biblical Tree of Knowledge. It is a battle of two religions, pitting the Christian faith (however secularized) in an abstract and ideal Other World against Old Ekdal’s pantheistic worship of forests. It is a contest between the symbolic and the literal.

The Ekdal loft may have been inspired, in part, by that peculiar 19th-century building, the glass house. As Georg Kohlmaier and Bara von Sartory write in Houses of Glass, their study of this phenomenon, the glass houses that were built at great expense and to enormous public delight constituted a kind of “theater of nature,” where “the scientific control of natural processes—the basis of the new industry—was realized with the use of glass, iron and steam in the cultivation of plants.” Partly expressions of the collective European anxiety about the colonial exploitation of the world, partly recognitions of industrialization’s transformation of nature into a commodity, these “museums” displayed the “masterpieces of nature” to a delighted and increasingly class-diverse audience, masking the “dismantling of nature [that] took place behind the scenes, [while] the longed-for paradise retreated to even greater distances.” Ancestors of the great World Fairs to come (the first of which took place in Joseph Paxton’s Crystal Palace in 1851) as well as of the huge organized amusements of later mass entertainment, the glass houses figured forth a new relation of the human and natural worlds, making the latter a privileged sign of the superiority of the former.

Preserving and tending nature in this spectacular way, Western man staged himself as lord of the imperiled green world. But the glass house, as space, did not fail to register the contradictions of this hypocractic fantasy; as Kohlmaier and von Sartory say, the “greenhouse was a place of retreat from the real world, but at the same time it was full of the politics of the day.” The economic tensions and class conflicts of a rapidly changing society played a role in the projects for “people’s palaces” and “strategic greenery” to offset the ever-worsening plight of the working class:

Man was, according to belief, a work force yet more than merely a work force; he was a thinking, feeling, physical creature who in the stony expanse of the city had become almost entirely hired labor and who had cut himself off from his true nature. The purpose of this utopia [the glass house] was to give this nature back to him. The way to that should not be a return to nature but a step towards a humanized industrialization in which agriculture, nature and society were to be provided for.

Thus the controlling power of an aggressive capitalism underlies the surface sentimentalism of the Ekdal loft as much as it did that of the charming winter palaces of the time. In both, capitalist exploitation—be it of forests or people—requires that nature be artificially reproduced, preserved, and displayed.
Theater ecology, I believe, will call for a turn towards the literal, a programmatic resistance to the use of nature as metaphor. To re-literalize the loft is to read it as a representation only—and precisely—of the wilderness. The loft is a reproduction, a copy, and this identity is reinforced by the fact that it is located directly behind a photography studio. The figure of photography, that quintessential representational medium of modern times, frames the loft as well as what the loft in turn frames: namely, the wilderness. Through this configuration, the question that is raised by Ibsen’s strange space is not “What does the indoor wilderness stand for?” but rather, “What does representation—the fact itself of mimesis, of mediation—do to the meaning of nature?” It is the other side of the question articulated by Benjamin: “ Earlier much futile thought had been devoted to the question of whether photography is an art. The primary question—whether the very invention of photography had not transformed the entire nature of art—was not raised.”

The Ekldal loft is not a symbolic but a symptomatic space, in which—as in the modern world itself—the categories of nature and artifice collide and distort each other. The exemplary product of this collision is a structure that has become rather familiar to us by now, a hundred years after Ibsen’s play: the artificial environment. Perhaps our experience of this phenomenon may shed some retrospective light on Ibsen’s prescient model of the paradox of a made-nature. The main feature of this paradox is that advances in mimetic technology (of which photography was only the beginning) produce fake worlds of irreducible strangeness. The simulated worlds of contemporary mass entertainment—the theme parks, world showcases, safari parks, tropical shopping plazas, and so on—become ever more unanny as they become more perfect. As the technologies of representation approximate ever more closely to techniques of reproduction, the world that is being recreated so precisely recedes ever more quickly from our grasp.

To recover it will require the same thing as to save the planet, a sort of conversion, a remapping of Manmore along lines sketched out dimly in Ibsen’s play. For, unlike the simueral artificial environments of our day, referring only to themselves, the loft reproduces an original that—thanks to Old Ekldal’s literarness—manages to assert its power. Ekldal’s perspective suggests an eco-friendly ideology similar to what Robinson Jeffers calls, provocatively, “inhumanism.” Neither anthropomorphic nor inhuman, this perspective starts from a conviction that the natural world is no more primarily a source of symbols and metaphors for the human condition than it is merely a source of raw materials for our consumption. It has an independent existence and an autonomous power that makes us its creatures and subjects. As we in this century have found out increasingly, and to our horror, when nature is violated, the woods do indeed take revenge. As Old Ekldal alone sees, in Ibsen’s play, nature holds enormously power over us. The theater, which has long supported humanism’s tendency to obscure that power, can also become the site of its revelation.

“THERE MUST BE A LOT OF FISH IN THAT LAKE.”

Many years after Trigorin mused on the possibility of those fish in and beyond the theater, the theater of ecological dystopia produced the following vision, in Pinter’s suggestively titled play The Caretaker.

DAVIES Looks a bit thick.
ASTON Overgrown.
DAVIES What’s that? A pond?
ASTON Yes.
DAVIES What you got, fish?
ASTON No. There isn’t anything in there. Pause.

As the millennium approaches and we join Pinter’s characters in their horror-stricken view of the natural world, we must pause to share Trigorin’s yearning: there must be a lot a fish in that lake.

References
This essay begins and ends with a short text on pointing.

In the 1930s, Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas, on their American lecture tour, were driving in the country in Western Massachusetts. Toklas pointed out a batch of clouds. Stein replied, “Fresh eggs.” Toklas insisted that Stein look at the clouds. Stein replied again, “Fresh eggs.” Then Toklas asked, “Are you making symbolical language?” “No,” Stein answered, “I’m reading the signs. I love to read the signs.”

(Stimpson 1986: 7)

One might devote an essay merely to unpacking this statement for its historical, discursive, and sexual resonances. Let me just say that Toklas’s irritation seems justified. She is pointing to clouds; they have an ontological, referential status as clouds, but Stein playfully crosses ontology with textuality, object with symbol, referent with sign. Acting the self-conscious spectator, Stein produces a reading and says that that is more pleasurable than any Massachusetts clouds. I am concerned with how we point to and read signs in the theatre, and by “we” I mean feminist critics and theorists and also students of Brecht’s theatre theory—an unlikely group, but then this is part of my argument. I would suggest that feminist theory and Brechtian theory need to be read intertextually, for among the effects of such a reading are a recovery of the radical potential of the Brechtian critique and a discovery, for feminist theory, of the specificity of theatre.

At the outset I should say that like Gertrude Stein’s clouds, feminist theory and Brechtian theory are moving, changing discourses, open to multiple
readings. The umbrella term “feminist theory” covers feminist film theory, feminist literary theory, psychoanalytic feminist theory, socialist feminist theory, black feminist theory, lesbian feminist theory, cross-cultural feminist theory—many of which combine different rubrics with different topoi, different political inflections. Yet perhaps all theories that call themselves “feminist” share a goal: the passionate analysis of gender in material social relations and in discursive and representational structures, especially theatre and film, which involve scopic pleasures and the body. Brecht’s theatre theory, written over a 30-year period, constantly reformulates its concepts but it, too, has certain concerns: attention to the dialectical and contradictory forces within social relations, principally the agon of class conflict in its changing historical forms; commitment to alienation techniques and non-minimalism in theatrical signification; “literarization” of the theatre space to produce a spectator/reader who is not interpolated into ideology but is passively and pleasurably engaged in observation and analysis.

Now feminists in film studies have been quick to appropriate elements of Brecht’s critique of the theatre apparatus. In Summer 1974, the British film journal Screen published a Brecht issue whose stated purpose was a consideration of Brecht’s theoretical texts and the possibility of a revolutionary cinema. In Autumn 1975, Laura Mulvey published her influential essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in which, employing psychoanalysis “as a political weapon,” she argues that Hollywood film conventions construct a specifically male viewing position by aligning or saturating the male’s gaze to that of the fictional hero, and by inviting him thereby both to identify narcissistically with that hero and to fetishize the female (turning her into an object of sexual stimulation) (1975: 6). In rejecting this dominant cinematic tradition, Mulvey powerfully invokes Brechtian concepts:

The first blow against the monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions [...] is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment.

(1975: 18)

Demystifying representation, showing how and when the object of pleasure is made, releasing the spectator from imaginary and illusory identifications—these are crucial elements in Brecht’s theoretical project. Yet we feminists in drama and theatre studies have attended more to the critique of the gaze than to the Brechtian intervention that signals a way of dismantling the gaze. Feminist film theorists, following with psychoanalysis and semiotics, have given us a lot to think about, but we, through Brechtian theory, have something to give them: a female body in representation that resists fetishization and a viable position for the female spectator.

In this essay, then, I have two purposes. One, an intertextual reading of key tropes of feminist theory: gender critique and sexual difference; questions of authority in women’s writing and women’s history; spectatorship and the body—with key tropoi in Brechtian theory. Verfremdungseffekt, the “not, but,” historicization, and Gestus. Two, emerging from this intertexting, a proposal for a theatre-specific feminist criticism. I call it “geste criticism” and close the essay with a brief example (my second text on pointing).

Some quick qualifications and clarifications: I realize that feminists in drama studies might greet this coupling with some bemusement. Brecht exhibits a typical Marxian blindness toward gender relations, and except for some interesting excursions into male erotic violence, he created conventionally gendered plays and to many saintly mothers (one is too many). Moreover, the postmodern critique of Brecht by Heiner Müllner should not be ignored, particularly the rejection of the Brechtian “fable” which Müller describes as a “closed form” that the audience accepts as a “package, a commodity” (Weber 1980: 121). This essay brackets both Brecht’s plays and their retrograde (and un-Brechtian) stagings in the German Democratic Republic and the West over the last three decades. My interest lies in the potentiality of Brecht’s theory for feminism, and, as I mentioned above, a possible re-radicalization of his theory through feminism. In current literary theory, especially from the English Left, Brecht’s concepts have become weapons in campaigns against mimetic linearity (see Dollimore 1984), bourgeois naturalism (see Barker 1984), and, in a fine reading by Terry Eagleton (1986), on the side of deconstructive rhetoric. Even Toril Moi (Oxford-based Norwegian), in her notorious Sexual Textual Politics, parses the feminisms by enlisting Brecht’s debate with Lukács on the question of socialist realism to challenge Anglo-American critics of Virginia Woolf (1985: 17). Strange bedfellows perhaps, but the point I wish to make is that these critics have understood that Brechtian theory in all its gaps and inconsistencies is not literary criticism, but rather a theorizing of the workings of an apparatus of representation with enormous formal and political resonance. I think we should be long past the point of accepting Martin Esslin’s view that Brecht’s theories “were merely rationalizations of intuition, taste, and imagination” (1971: 146), or Eric Bentley’s view that the theory is a didactic distraction from Brecht’s true art (1981 :46f). Herbert Blau has the best if not the last word on theory-versus-practice debates: “Theater is theory, or a shadow of it. [...] In the act of seeing, there is already theory (1982: 1).

Gender, Verfremdungseffekt

The cornerstone of Brecht’s theory is the Verfremdungseffekt, the technique of defamiliarizing a word, an idea, a gesture so as to enable the spectator to see or hear it afresh: “a representation that alienates is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar” (Brecht 1964: 192); “the A-effect consists of turning an object from something ordinary
and immediately accessible into something peculiar, striking, and unexpected" (1964: 143). In performance the actor "alienates" rather than impersonates her character; she "quotes" or demonstrates the character's behavior instead of identifying with it. Brecht theories that if the performer remains outside the character's feelings, the audience may also, thereby remaining free to analyze and form opinions about the play's "fable." Verfremdungseffekt also challenges the mimetic property of acting that semioticians call iconicity, the fact that the performer's body conventionally resembles the object (or character) to which it refers. This is why gender critique in the theatre can be so powerful.

Gender refers to the words, gestures, appearances, ideas, and behavior that dominant culture understands as indices of feminine or masculine identity. When spectators "see" gender they are seeing (and reproducing) the cultural signs of gender, and by implication, the gender ideology of a culture. Gender in fact provides a perfect illustration of ideology at work since "feminine" or "masculine" behavior usually appears to be a "natural"—and thus fixed and unalterable—extension of biological sex. Feminist practice that seeks to expose or mock the strictures of gender usually uses some version of the Brechtian A-effect. That is, by alienating (not simply rejecting) iconicity, by foregrounding the expectation of resemblance, the ideology of gender is exposed and thrown back to the spectator.1 In Caryl Churchill's play Cloud 9, cross-dressing, in which the male body can be seen in feminine clothes, provides A-effects for a gender critique of the familial and sexual roles in Victorian colonial society. In lesbian performances at New York's WOW Cafe—"I'm thinking of Holly Hughes's Lady Dick and Split Britches' Upwardly Mobile Home—and in the broadly satirical monologs of Italy's Franca Rame, gender is exposed as a sexual costume, a sign of a role, not evidence of identity. Recalling such performances should remind us of the rigorous self-consciousness that goes into even the most playful gender-bending. A-effects are not easy to produce, but the payoffs can be stunning. When gender is "alienated" or foregrounded, the spectator is enabled to see a sign system as a sign system—the appearance, words, gestures, ideas, attitudes, etc., that comprise the gender lexicon become so many illusionistic trappings to be put on or shed at will. Understanding gender as ideology—as a system of beliefs and behavior mapped across the bodies of females and males, which reinforces a social status quo—is to appreciate the continued timeliness of Verfremdungseffekt, the purpose of which is to denaturalize and defamiliarize what ideology makes seem normal, acceptable, inescapable.

Sexual difference, the "not, but"

Gender critique in artistic and discursive practices is often and wrongly confused with another topos in feminist theory: sexual difference. I would propose that "sexual difference" be understood not as a synonym for gender opposotions but as a possible reference to differences within sexuality. I take my cue here partly from the poststructuralist privileging of "difference" across all representational systems, particularly language. Derridean deconstruction posits the disturbance of the signifier within the linguistic sign or word; the seemingly stable word is inhabited by a signifier that bears the trace of another signifier and another, so that contained within the meaning of any given word is the trace of the word it is not. Thus the word is always different from itself, or, as Barbara Johnson patiently teases out its connotations, "difference" refers not to what distinguishes one identity from another—it is not a difference between [...] independent units [...] but a difference within" (1980: 4). Texts, she argues, are not different from other texts but different from themselves. Deconstruction thus wreaks havoc on identity, with its connotations of wholeness and coherence: if an identity is always different from itself it can no longer be an identity. Sexual difference, then, might be seen to destabilize the bipolar oppositions that constitute gender identity.

Psychoanalysis offers other cues. Despite the normative tone of his gender distinctions, Freud also makes clear that the drives and desires that constitute sexuality do not add up to a stable identity:

[We are accustomed to say that every human being displays both male and female instinctual impulses, needs and attributes; but though anatomy it is true, can point out the characteristic of maleness and femaleness, psychology cannot. For psychology the contrast between the sexes fades away into one between activity and passivity, in which we far too readily identify activity with maleness and passivity with femininity, a view which is by no means universally confirmed. (In Watney 1988: 16)]

In fact the Freudian account of the diverse identifications and effects of childhood sexuality undermine the idea of a stable-gendered subject. To paraphrase Gayle Rubin, women and men are certainly different, but gender coercively translates the nuanced differences within sexuality into a structure of opposition; male vs. female, masculine vs. feminine, etc. (see 1978: 179). In my reading of Rubin, the "sex-gender system," the trace of the difference of sexuality is kept alive within the sterile opposition of gender. I am suggesting that sexual difference is where we imagine, where we theorize; gender is where we live, our social address, although most of us, with an effort, are trying to leave home. Let me put it another way: no feminist can ignore the social and political battlefield of gender, but no feminist can ignore the fact that the language of the battlefield is a system based on difference whose traces contain our most powerful desires.

Keeping differences in view instead of conforming to stable representations of identity, and linking those differences to a practical politics are key to Brecht's theory of the "not, but," a feature of alienated acting that I read
intertextually with the sex-gender system. "When [an actor] appears on stage, besides what he actually is doing he will at all essential points discover, specify, imply what he is not doing; that is he will act in such a way that the alternative emerges as dearly as possible, that his acting allows the other possibilities to be inferred and only represents one of the possible variants. [...] Whatever he doesn’t do must be contained and conserved in what he does" (Brecht 1964: 137). Each action must contain the trace of the action it represses, thus the meaning of each action contains difference. The audience is invited to look beyond representation—beyond what is authoritative put in view—to the possibilities of as yet unarticulated actions or judgments. Brecht’s early plays, particularly In the Jungle of Cities, thematize the “not, but”: “I’m never anything more than half,” says Mary Gurga, who doesn’t have the pleasure of joining the men in what Brecht called “the idealist dialectic” of the play or “the pure joy of fighting.” Contemporary feminist plays by Micheline Wandor, Caryl Churchill, and Adrienne Kennedy also thematize the “not, but” in their sex-gender references, but it would be interesting to query sex-gender nuances in Measure for Measure, The Master Builder, and No Man’s Land to name only three.

The Brechtian “not, but” is the theatrical and theoretical analog to the subversiveness of sexual difference, because it allows us to imagine the deconstruction of gender—and all other—representations. Such deconstructions dramatize, at least at the level of theory, the infinite play of difference that Derrida calls écriture—the superfluity of signification that places meaning beyond capture within the covers of the play or the hours of performance. This is not to deny Brecht’s wish for an instructive, analytical theatre; on the contrary, it invites the participatory play of the spectator, and the possibility for which Brecht most devoutly wished, that significance (the production of meaning) continue beyond play’s end, coagulating into choice and action after the spectator leaves the theatre.

History, historicization

The sex-gender system requires contextualization. The understanding of women’s material conditions in history and the problematics of uncovering “women’s history” are topoi in feminist theory that Brecht’s theory of historicization greatly informs. Of course there must be limits to this discussion: Brecht was not writing history, but as a student devoted to the Marxist “classics” Brecht understood social relations, particularly class relations, as part of a moving dialectic. The crux of “historicization” is change: through A-effects spectators observe the potential movement in class relations, discover the limitations and strengths of their own perceptions, and begin to change their lives. There is a double movement in Brechtian historicization of preserving the “distinguishing marks” of the past and acknowledging, even foregrounding, the audience’s present perspective (Brecht 1964: 190). When

Brecht says that spectators should become historians, he refers both to the spectator’s detachment, her “critical” position, and to the fact that she is writing her own history even as she absorbs messages from the stage. Historicization is, then, a way of seeing and the enemy of recuperation and appropriation. One cannot historicize and colonize the Other or, as Luce Irigaray would have it, “reduce all others to the economy of the same” (1985: 76). Brecht considered bourgeois illusionism insidious because it is guilty of precisely that:

When our theatres perform plays of other periods they like to annihilate distance, fill in the gap, gloss over the differences. But what comes in our delight in comparisons, in distance, in dissimilarity— which is at the same time a delight in what is close and proper to ourselves?

(Brecht 1964: 276)

In historicized performance, gaps are not to be filled in, seams and contradictions show in all their roughness, and therein lies one aspect of spectatorial pleasure—when our differences from the past and within the present are palpable, graspable, applicable. Plays aspiring to realistically depict the present require the same historicization. Realism disgusted Brecht not only because it dissipates its conventions but because it is hegemonic: by copying the surface details of the world it offers the illusion of lived experience, even as it marks off only one version of that experience. This is perhaps why the most innovative women playwrights refuse the seamless narrative of conflicting egos in classic realism. Consider Adrienne Kennedy’s Funnyhouse of a Negro or The Owl Answers which lurch and reach through memory/fantasy staking the real in obsessional repetition and in fragmented characters who embrace and speak from their difference. Kennedy rejects the Brechtian fable—narrative progress is meaningless in her worlds—and instead dramatizes gaps and contradictions as, precisely, the black woman’s experience of history. Brechtian historicization challenges the presumed ideological neutrality of any historical reflection. Rather it assumes, and promotes, what historians are now claiming: that reader/spectators of “facts” and “events” will, like Gertrude Stein reading the clouds, translate what is inchoate into signs (and stories), a move that produces not “truth,” but mastery and pleasure.

Spectator, body, historicization

Historicization in fact puts on the table the issue of spectatorship and the performer’s body. According to Brecht, one way that the actor alienates or distances the audience from the character is to suggest the historicity of the character in contrast to the actor’s own present-time self-awareness on stage. The actor must not lose herself in the character but rather demonstrate the
character as a function of particular sociohistorical relations, a conduit of particular choices. As Timothy Wiles puts it, actor and audience, both in present time, "look back on" the historical character as she fumbles through choices and judgments (1980: 72). This does not, however, endow the actor with superiority, for as Wiles later points out this present-time actor is also fragmented: "Brecht separates the historical man who acts from the aesthetic function of the actor" (1980: 85). The historical subject plays an actor presumed to have superior knowledge in relation to an ignorant character from the past, but the subject herself remains as divided and uncertain as the spectators to whom the play is addressed. This performer–subject neither disappears into a representation of the character nor into a representation of the actor; each remains processual, historical, incomplete. And the spectator? Aware of three temporalities within a single stage figure the spectator cannot read one without the other; her/his gaze is constantly split; her/his "roulant–voir" (Pavis 1982: 88)—the wanting to see and know all without any obstacle—is deflected into the dialectic of which the divided performer is only a part. Moreover, in reading a complex everchanging text, spectators are "pulled out of [their] fixity" (Heath 1974: 112); they become part of—and indeed they produce—the dialectical comparisons and contributions that the text enacts.

The special characteristics of Brechtian reception emerge in relation to analogous processes in film theory. In psychoanalytic film theory, the film-text and the viewing-state are set in motion by unconscious fantasy. In the darkened room, in immobile seats, the spectator enters what Jean-Louis Baudry calls a "state of artificial regression" (1980: 56), the womblike effects of film viewing which confuse boundaries and send the subject back to earlier stages of psychic development, particularly the Lacanian mirror phase in which the infant, lacking controlled motor development, sees its image in a mirror or in its caretaker's eyes as a coherent whole. Misrecognizing himself (the male infant is specifically at issue here) as a complete, autonomous other, he spends the rest of his life unconsciously seeking an imaginary ideal—and discovers him, so the theory goes, at the movies.

Now the differences between the Brechtian spectator and the cinematic spectator are obvious. The last thing Brecht wants is a spectator in a "state of artificial regression," in thrall to his imaginary ideal. Brechtian theory formulates (and reformulates) a spectatorial state that breaks the suture of imaginary identifications and keeps the spectator independent. Much influenced by Brecht, Patrice Pavis's semiotics of the mise-en-scène rests almost entirely on the spectator: "[...] the mise-en-scène is not entirely an indication of the intentionality of the director, but a structuring by the spectator of materials presented [...] whose linking is dependent on the perceiving subject" (Pavis 1982: 138). In film theory the subject position is constructed ready-made for the spectator, only his capacity to regress is assumed. In Brechtian theory the subject's capacity to regress is suppressed. Film semiotics posits a spectator

who is given the illusion that he creates the film; theatre semiotics posits a spectator whose active reception constantly revises the spectacle's meanings.

But Pavis is too much of a postmodernist to theorize a spectator with total authority. He deconstructs the spectator's position by locating its difference within: "What we need," he says, "is a theory of 'reception desire'—a theory that, without positing a spectator in a state of artificial regression, accounts for the spectator's unconscious desire and thereby opens the door to plausable identification with stage figures (Pavis 1982: 158).

What does Brecht contribute to "reception desire"? Although he talks a lot about pleasure, it is the pleasure of cognition, of capturing meaning: Brecht does not apparently release the body, either on stage or in the audience. The actor's body is subsumed in the dialectical narrative of social relations; the spectator's body is given over to rational inquiry (unless there's pleasure to be had with the Brechtian cigar). And Brecht exhibits the blindness typical of all Marxist theorists regarding sex-gender configurations. Feminist theory, however, insists on the presence of the gendered body, on the sex-gender system, and on the problematic of desire.

It is at this point—at the point of conceptualizing an unfeathered female performer and a female spectator—that an intertextual reading of Brechtian and feminist theories works productively. If feminist theory sees the body as culturally mapped and gendered, Brechtian historicization insists that this body is not a fixed essence but a site of struggle and change. If feminist theory is concerned with the multiple and complex signs of a male's life: her color, her age, her desires, her politics—what I want to call her historicity—Brechtian theory gives us a way to put that historicity on view—in the theatre. In its conventional iconicity, theatre laminates body to character, but the body in historicization stands visibly and palpably separate from the "role" of the actor as well as the role of the character: it is always insufficient and open. I want to be clear about this important point: The body, particularly the female body, by virtue of entering the stage space, enters representation—it is not just there, a live, unmediated presence, but rather (1) a signifying element in a dramatic fiction; (2) a part of a theatrical sign system whose conventions of gesturing, voicing, and impersonating are referents for both performer and audience; and (3) a sign in a system governed by a particular apparatus, usually owned and operated by men for the pleasure of a viewing public whose major wage earners are male.

Yet with all these qualifications, Brechtian theory imagines a polyvalence to the body's representation, for the performer's body is also historicized, loaded with its own history and that of the character, and these histories ruffle the smooth edges of the image of representation. In my hybrid construction—based in feminist and Brechtian theory—the female performer, unlike her filmic counterpart, connotes not "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 1975: 11)—the perfect fetish—but rather "looking-at-being-looked-at-ness" or even just "looking-ness." This Brechtian-feminist body is paradoxically available for
both analysis and identification, paradoxically within representation while refusing its fixity.

Spectator, author, Gestus

The explosive (and elusive) synthesis of alienation, historicization, and the “not, but” is the Brechtian Gestus: a gesture, a word, an action, a tableau by which, separately or in series, the social attitudes encoded in the playtext become visible to the spectator. A gest becomes social when it “allows conclusions to be drawn about social circumstances” (Brecht 1964: 105). A famous social gest is Helene Weigel’s snapping shut her leather money bag after each selling transaction in Mother Courage, thereby underscoring the contradictions between profiteering and survival—for Brecht the social reality of war. This gest has become something of a reification, but Brecht always emphasized complexity:

[The] expressions of a gest are usually highly complicated and contradictory, so that they cannot be rendered by any single word and the actor must take care that in giving his image the necessary emphasis he does not lose anything, but emphasizes the entire complex.

(1964: 198)

The gestic moment in a sense explains the play, but it also exceeds the play, opening it to the social and discursive ideologies that inform its production. Brecht writes that the scene of the social gest “should be played as a piece of history” (1964: 86) and Pavis elaborates: Gestus makes visible (alienates) “the class behind the individual, the critique behind the naïve object, the commentary behind the affirmation. [...]” (Pavis 1982: 42). If we read feminist concerns back into this discussion, the social gest signifies a moment of theoretical insight into sex-gender complexities, not only in the play’s “fable,” but in the culture which the play, at the moment of reception, is dialogically reflecting and shaping.

But this moment of visibility or insight is the very moment that complicates the viewing process. Because the Gestus is effected by a historical actor/subject, what the spectator sees is not a mere mirage of social relationship, but a reading of it, an interpretation by a historical subject who supplements (rather than disappears into) the production of meaning. As noted earlier, the historical subject playing an actor, playing a character, splits the gaze of the spectator, who, as a reader of a complex sign system, cannot consume or reduce the object of her vision to a monolithic projection of the self. In fact, Gestus undermines the stability of the spectator’s “self,” for in the act of looking the spectator engages with her own temporality. She, too, becomes historicized-in motion and at risk, but also free to compare the actor/character’s signs to “what is close and proper to herself”—her material conditions, her politics, her skin, her desires. Sitting not in the dark, but in the Brechtian semi-lit smoker’s theatre, the spectator still has the possibility of pleasurable identification. This is effected not through imaginary projection onto an ideal but through a triangular structure of actor/subject-character-spectator. Looking at the character, the spectator is constantly intercepted by the actor/subject, and the latter, heeding no fourth wall, is theoretically free to look back. The difference, then, between this triangle and the familiar oedipal one is that no one side signifies authority, knowledge, or the law. Brechtian theatre depends on a structure of representation, on exposing and making visible, but what appears even in the Gestus can only be provisional, indeterminate, nonauthoritative.

This feminist rereading of Gestus makes room, at least theoretically, for a viewing position for the female spectator. Because the semiosis of Gestus involves the gendered bodies of spectator, actor/subject, and character, all working together but never harmoniously, there can be no fetishization and no end to signification. In this Brechtian-feminist paradigm, the spectator’s look is freed into “dialectics, passionate detachment” (Mulvey 1975: 18). She might borrow Gertrude Stein’s line, and give equal emphasis to each word: “I love to read the signs.”

If Gestus invites us to think about the performer and the spectator in their historical and sexual specificity, it also asks us to consider the author’s inscription. “The author’s attitude to the public, that of the era represented and of the time in which the play is performed, the collective style of acting of the characters, etc., are a few of the parameters of the basic Gestus” (Pavis 1982: 42). In the case of women writers and particularly of women dramatists, the erasure from history has been so nearly complete that the feminist critic feels compelled to make some attempt at recovery—and here Brechtian theory, fellow-traveling with feminist theory, suggests a critical practice—gestic feminist criticism—that would contextualize and reclaim the author.

A gestic feminist criticism would “alienate” or foreground those moments in a playtext in which social attitudes about gender could be made visible. It would highlight sex-gender configurations as they conceal or disrupt a coercive or patriarchal ideology. It would refuse to appropriate and naturalize male or female dramatists, but rather focus on historical material constraints in the production of images. It would attempt to engage dialectically with, rather than master, the playtext. And in generating meanings, it would recover (specifically gestic) moments in which the historical actor, the character, the spectator, and the author enter representation, however provisionally.

Gestic feminist criticism, Apha Behn

In the brief space remaining, it is impossible to flesh out this critical schema, but I want to draw attention to a gestic moment that Apha Behn has provided—in the prolog of her first play, produced in 1670. A middle-class
woman with prestigious connections but no supporting family, a former spy and recent inmate of debtor's prison. Behn had her first play produced for the Duke's company, originally patented to William Davenant, and very much committed to the Davenant style of movable scenes, machines, spectacular tableaux, songs, and dances. The Restoration theatre was fully "lyric" in its desire to lure and entertain the public exclusively for private profit. It was also, from the giver of the royal patent to the patentees and playwrights, upper class and male.

The audience, historians are finally telling us, was more varied—and contradictory—than was previously believed. Professional men and respectable women and their maids went regularly to the theatre, as did noisy attached rakes, prostitutes, and members of royal entourage. There had been women writers—the Duchess of Newcastle, Katherine Phillipps, and Frances Boothby each had a play produced. But when Behn's The Forced Marriage, or The Jealous Bridegroom opened in December 1670, it was a novelty and no one knew whether she would have staying power. The female performer, having arrived on the professional stage only ten years earlier, though she was paid a lower salary than her male colleagues, had already proved her staying power; in décolletage, in breeches, in "undress," the actress represented an important financial lure and provocation, especially to male spectators.

Conventionally, the Restoration prolog describes the state of early production, complaining about the lowly status of poetry, berates the audience for its stupidity, disparages the whores, condemns the fictions of noisy fops, refers to any current political turmoil, introduces and/or playfully positions the author, and, in a vague way, describes the play.

In the prolog to her first play, Behn takes note of the factors in the audience and genders them. She writes lines for a performer (gender unclear, but I would guess male) who enjoins the males in the audience to be leery of "spies"—by implication whores whom the author has planted "to hold you in wanton Compliment / That so you may not censure what she's writ: Which done, they face you down 'twas full of Wit" (Behn 1915: 286).

I come now, at last, to my second short text on pointing.

Within moments the stage directions read "Enter an Actress," who "pointing to the ladies" asks, "Can any see that glorious Sight and say / A Woman shall not Victor prove today?" In that pointing gesture, the actress sets up a triangular structure—between historical performer, the role she is destined to play, and the female spectators in the audience. She also mentions "A Woman," a potential victor, and that seems to have a referent: the writer Aphra Behn (although it could be one of the females in the play). In that shared look, actor-subject, character, spectator, and author are momentarily joined, and perhaps the first time on the English stage all four positions are filled by women. But not for long. In casting a closer eye at the female spectators, the actress soon differentiates, and in specifically sexual terms. Insisting, ironically perhaps, that "There's not a Wizard in our whole Cabal" she condemns the lower-class whores, the Pickeroons, "that scour for prey," but ends by promising total female "sacrifice" to "please you" (Behn 1915: 286).

Whom that "you" now designates has become fully undecidable. In the sexual slang of the day, actress meant whore, auhoress was soon to mean whore, and both were commodities in a pleasure market whose major consumers were male. Still, before conventional representation resurges, the signifying space is dominated by the interlocking look of women. I would call the actress's pointing, and the entire prolog, a Gestus, a moment when the sex-gender system, theatre politics, and social history catch and become visible. For the feminist critic and theorist this Gestus marks a first step toward recovering a woman playwright in her sexual, historical, and theatrical specificity. It also marks a site, in the text, of indeterminacy, of multiple meanings—a pleasurable moment for reading the clouds.

Notes

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the American Theater in Higher Education (ATHE) Conference in Chicago, August 1987.

2 I am grateful to Barton Byg, whose excellent paper, "Brecht on the Margins: Film and Feminist Theory" provided many useful insights.

3 Without discussing gender per se, Brecht refers briefly to this phenomenon in the "Short Organum," no. 59: "[ . . . ] it is also good for the actors when they see their characters copied or portrayed in another form. If the part is played by somebody of the opposite sex the sex of the character will be more clearly brought out [ . . . ]" (Brecht 1964: 197).

4 Brecht elaborates in various ways on this point: "The individual whose interest is thus driven into the open arena of course comes to stand for Man with a capital M. Everyone (including the spectator) is then carried away by the momentum of the events portrayed, so that in a performance of Oedipus one has for all practical purposes an auditorium full of little Oedipuses, an auditorium full of Emperor Jones for a performance of The Emperor Jones" (in "On the Use of Music in an Epic Theatre," Brecht 1964: 87). Also: "The bourgeois theatre emphasized the timelessness of its objects. Its representation of people is bound by the alleged 'eternal human.' Its story is arranged in such a way as to create 'universal' situations that allow Man with a capital M to express himself: man of every period and every colour" (in "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," Brecht 1964: 97).

5 I was very much helped by the extensive summary/analysis of psychoanalytic film theory in Sandy Flitterman-Lewis's "Psychoanalysis in Film and Television" (1987) which I read in manuscript form.

6 I use "historicism" not "history" as the latter term suggests a narrative form which feminists have sought to problematize. In film studies see de Lauretis 1984; in fiction see Brewer 1984; in drama and theatre see Diamond 1985.

7 This is fully played out in Brecht's attitude toward textual authority. As is well known, he revised constantly and curiously little about definitive or authoritative versions of his plays.

8 One of Behn's biographers, Maureen Duffy, provides this context: "Of the fifteen living dramatists who had had two or more plays produced since the theatres reopened in 1660, two were each, one a duke, one was to be a titular baron, four
were knights... In 1671 [most of the new writers] were of the gentry or nobility, and almost all had university or Inn of Court educations. Compared with such a company, Aphra Behn's pretensions must have seemed even more extravagant” (1977: 103-104).

References


toward a notion of the interactive exchange between the art object and the viewer. While such exchanges are often recorded as the stated goals of museums and galleries, the institutional effect of the gallery often seems to put the masterpiece under house arrest, controlling all conflicting and unprofessional commentary about it. The speech act of memory and description (Austin’s constative utterance) becomes a performative expression when Calle places these commentaries within the representation of the museum. The descriptions fill in, and thus supplement (add to, defer, and place) the stolen paintings. The fact that these descriptions vary considerably — even at times wildly — only lends credence to the fact that the interaction between the art object and the spectator is, essentially, performative — and therefore resistant to the claims of validity and accuracy endemic to the discourse of reproduction. While the art historian of painting must ask if the reproduction is accurate and clear, Calle asks where seeing and memory forget the object itself and enter the subject’s own set of personal meanings and associations. Further, her work suggests that the forgetting (or stealing) of the object is a fundamental energy of its descriptive recovering. The description itself does not reproduce the object; it rather helps us to make and restate the effort to remember and therefore to what is lost. The descriptions remind us how loss acquires meaning and generates recovery — not only of and for the object, but for the one who remembers. The disappearance of the object is fundamental to performance; it rehearses and repeats the disappearance of the subject who longs always to be remembered.

For her contribution to the Dislocations show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1991, Calle used the same idea but this time she asked curators, guards, and restorers to describe paintings that were on loan from the permanent collection. She also asked them to draw small pictures of their memories of the paintings. She then arranged the texts and pictures according to the exact dimensions of the circulating paintings and placed them on the wall where the actual paintings usually hang. Calle calls her piece Ghosts, and as the visitor discovers Calle’s work spread throughout the museum, it is as if Calle’s own eye is following and tracking the viewer as she makes her way through the museum. Moreover, Calle’s work seems to disappear because it is dispersed throughout the “permanent collection” — a collection which circulates despite its “permanence.” Calle’s artistic contribution is a kind of self-concealment in which she offers the words of others about other works of art under her own artistic signature. By making visible her attempt to offer what she does not have, what cannot be seen, Calle subverts the goal of museum display. She exposes what the museum does not have and cannot offer and uses that absence to generate her own work. By placing memories in the place of paintings, Calle asks that the ghosts of memory be seen as equivalent to “the permanent collection” of “great works.” One senses that if she asked the same people over and over about the same paintings, each time they would describe a slightly different painting. In this sense, Calle demonstrates the performativity of all seeing.
Performance in a strict ontological sense is nonreproductive. It is this quality which makes performance the runt of the litter of contemporary art. Performance cloaks the smooth machinery of reproductive representation necessary to the circulation of capital. Perhaps nowhere was the affinity between the ideology of capitalism and art made more manifest than in the debates about the funding policies for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Targeting both photography and performance art, conservative politicians sought to prevent endorsing the “real” bodies implicated and made visible by these art forms.

Performance implicates the real through the presence of living bodies. In performance art spectatorship there is an element of consumption: there are no left-overs, the gazing spectator must try to take everything in. Without a copy, live performance plunges into visibility – in a manically charged present – and disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control. Performance resists the balanced circulations of finance. It saves nothing; it only spends. While photography is vulnerable to charges of counterfeiting and copying, performance art is vulnerable to charges of valuelessness and emptiness. Performance indicates the possibility of revaluing that emptiness; this potential revaluation gives performance art its distinctive oppositional edge.

To attempt to write about the undocumented event of performance is to invoke the rules of the written document and thereby alter the event itself. Just as quantum physics discovered that macro-instruments cannot measure microscopic particles without transforming those particles, so too must performance critics realize that the labor to write about performance (and thus to “preserve” it) is also a labor that fundamentally alters the event. It does no good, however, to simply refuse to write about performance because of this inescapable transformation. The challenge raised by the ontological claims of performance for writing is to re-mark again the performative possibilities of writing itself. The act of writing toward disappearance, rather than the act of writing toward preservation, must remember that the after-effect of disappearance is the experience of subjectivity itself.

This is the project of Roland Barthes in both Camera Lucida and Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes. It is also his project in Empire of Signs, but in this book he takes the memory of a city in which he no longer is, a city from which he disappears, as the motivation for the search for a disappearing performative writing. The trace left by that script is the meeting-point of a mutual disappearance; shared subjectivity is possible for Barthes because two people can recognize the same Impossible. To live for a love whose goal is to share the Impossible is both a humbling project and an exceedingly ambitious one, for it seeks to find connection only in that which is no longer there. Memory. Sight. Love. It must involve a full seeing of the Other’s absence (the ambitious
HISTORY, POLITICS, POLITICAL ECONOMY.

THE ONTOLOGY OF PERFORMANCE

luxury of making linguistic promises within phallogocentrism, since all too often she is what is promised. Commenting on Shoshana Felman's account of the "scandal of the speaking body," a scandal Felman elucidates through a reading of Molière's Don Juan, Modleski argues that the scandal has different affects and effects for women than for men. "The real, historical scandal to which feminism addresses itself is surely not to be equated with the writer at the center of discourse, but the woman who remains outside of it, not with the 'speaking body,' but with the 'mute body'" (ibid.: 19). Feminist critical writing, Modleski argues, "works toward a time when the traditionally mute body, 'the mother,' will be given the same access to 'the names' = language and speech = that men have enjoyed" (ibid.: 15).

If Modleski is accurate in suggesting that the opposition for feminists who write is between the "speaking bodies" of men and the "mute bodies" of women, for performance the opposition is between "the body in pleasure" and, to invoke the title of Elaine Scarry's book, "the body in pain." In moving from the grammar of words to the grammar of the body, one moves from the realm of metaphor to the realm of metonymy. For performance art itself however, the referent is always the agonizingly relevant body of the performer. Metonymy works to secure a vertical hierarchy of value and is reproductive; it works by erasing dissimilarity and negating difference; it turns two into one. Metonymy is additive and associative; it works to secure a horizontal axis of contingency and displacement. "The kettle is boiling" is a sentence which assumes that water is contiguous with the kettle. The point is not that the kettle is like water (as in the metaphorical love is like a rose), but rather the kettle is boiling because the water inside the kettle is. In performance, the body is metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of "presence." But in the plenitude of its apparent visibility and availability, the performer actually disappears and represents something else — dance, movement, sound, character, "art." As we discovered in relation to Cindy Sherman's self-portraits, the very effort to make the female body appear involves the addition of something other than "the body." That "addition" becomes the object of the spectator's gaze, in much the way the supplement functions to secure and displace the fixed meaning of the (floating) signifier. Just as her body remains unseen as "in itself it really is," she too does the sign fail to reproduce the referent. Performance uses the performer's body to pose a question about the inability to secure the relation between subjectivity and the body per se; performance uses the body to frame the lack of being promised by and through the body — that which cannot appear without a supplement.

In employing the body metonymically, performance is capable of resisting the reproduction of metaphor, and the metaphor I'm most keenly interested in resisting is the metaphor of gender, a metaphor which upholds the vertical hierarchy of value through systematic marking of the positive and the negative. In order to enact this marking, the metaphor of gender presupposes unified bodies which are biologically different. More specifically, these unified bodies are different in "one" aspect of the body, that is to say, difference is located in the genitals.

As MacCannell points out about Lacan's story of the "laws of urinary segregation" (Ecrits: 151), same sex bathrooms are social institutions which further the metaphorical work of hiding gender/genital difference. The genitals themselves are forever hidden within metaphor, and metaphor, as a "cultural worker," continually converts difference into the same. The joined task of metaphor and culture is to reproduce itself: it accomplishes this by turning two (or more) into one. By valuing one gender and marking it (with the phallus) culture reproduces one sex and one gender, the homo-sexual.

If this is true then women should simply disappear — but they don't. Or do they? If women are not reproduced within metaphor or culture, how do they survive? If it is a question of survival, why would white women (apparently visible cultural workers) participate in the reproduction of their own negation? What aspects of the bodies and languages of women remain outside metaphor and inside the historical real? Or to put it somewhat differently, how do women reproduce and represent themselves within the figures and metaphors of homo-sexual representation and culture? Are they perhaps surviving in another (auto)reproductive system?

"What founds our gender economy (division of the sexes and their mutual evaluation) is the exclusion of the mother, more specifically her body, more precisely yet, her genitals. These cannot, must not be seen" (original emphasis; MacCannell, Figuring Lacan: 106). The discursive and iconic "nothingness" of the Mother's genitals is what culture and metaphor cannot face. They must be effaced in order to allow the phallus to operate as that which always marks, values, and wonds. Castration is a response to this blindness to the mother's genitals. In "The Uncanny" Freud suggests that the fear of blindness is a displacement of the deeper fear of castration but surely it works the other way as well, or maybe even more strongly. Averting the eyes from the "nothing" of the mother's genitals is the blindness which fuels castration. This is the blindness of Oedipus. Is blindness necessary to the anti-Oedipus? To Ectea? Does metonymy need blindness as keenly as metaphor does?

Cultural orders rely on the renunciation of conscious desire and pleasure and promise a reward for this renunciation. MacCannell refers to this as "the positive promise of castration" and locates it in the idea of "value" itself — the desire to be valued by the Other. (For Lacan, value is recognition by the Other.) The hope of becoming valued prompts the subject to make sacrifices, and especially to forgo conscious pleasure. This willingness to renounce pleasure implies that the Symbolic Order is moral and that the subject obeys an (inner) Law which affords the subject a veil of dignity. Why only the veil of dignity as against dignity itself? Because the fundamental Other (the one who governs "the other scene" which ghosts the conscious scene) is the Symbolic Mother. She is the Ideal Other for whom the subject wants to be dignified; but she cannot appear within the phallic representational economy which
is predicated on the disappearance of her Being. 10 The psychic subject performs for a phantom who allows the subject veils and curtains – rather than satisfaction.

Performance approaches the Real through resisting the metaphorical reduction of the two into the one. But in moving from the aims of metaphor, reproduction, and pleasure to those of metonymy, displacement, and pain, performance marks the body itself as loss. Performance is the attempt to value that which is nonreproductive, nonmetaphorical. This is enacted through the staging of the drama of misrecognition (twins, actors within characters enacting other characters, doubles, crimes, secrets, etc.) which sometimes produces the recognition of the desire to be seen by (and within) the other. Thus for the spectator the performance spectacle is itself a projection of the scenario in which her own desire takes place.

More specifically, a genre of performance art called “hardship art” or “ordeal art” attempts to invoke a distinction between presence and representation by using the singular body as a metonymy for the apparently nonreciprocal experience of pain. This performance calls witnesses to the singularity of the individual’s death and asks the spectator to do the impossible – to share that death by rehearsing for it. (It is for this reason that performance shares a fundamental bond with ritual. The Catholic Mass, for example, is the ritualized performative promise to remember and to rehearse for the Other’s death.) The promise evoked by this performance then is to learn to value what is lost, to learn not the meaning but the value of what cannot be reproduced or seen (again). It begins with the knowledge of its own failure, that it cannot be achieved.

II

Angelika Festa creates performance pieces in which she appears in order to disappear. Her appearance is always extraordinary: she suspends herself from poles; she sits fully dressed in well-excavated graves attended by a fish; she stands on a crowded corner of downtown New York (5th and Broadway) in a red rabbit suit holding two loaves of bread; wearing a mirror mask, a black, vaguely antiquarian dress, with hands and feet painted white, she holds a white bowl of fruit and stands on the side of a country road. The more dramatic the appearance, the more disturbing the disappearance. As performances which are contingent upon disappearance, Festa’s work traces the passing of the woman’s body from visibility to invisibility, and back again. What becomes apparent in these performances is the labor and pain of this endless and liminal passing.

In her 1987 performance called — appropriately — Untitled Dance (with fish and others), at The Experimental Intermedia Foundation in New York, Festa literally hung suspended from a pole for twenty-four hours.11 The performance took place between noon on Saturday May 30 and noon on Sunday 31.
The third image undercuts the first two. The projected images of Festa’s feet seem to be an half-ironic, half-devout allusion to the history of representations of the bloody feet of the crucified Christ. On the one hand, (one foot?) the projections are like photographic “details” of Mannerist paintings and on the other, they seem to “ground” the performance; because of their size they demand more of the spectator’s attention. The spatial arrangement of the room—with Festa in the middle, the feet-screen behind her and to the left, the fish-tape in front of her also on the left, and the time-elapsing mini-monitor directly in front of her and raised, forces the spectator constantly to look away from Festa’s suspended body. In order to look at the projected feet, one has to look “beyond” Festa; in order to look at the fish-embryo tape or the video monitor recording the performance itself, one has to turn one’s back to her. That these projected images seem to be consumable while the center image is, as it were, a “blind” image, suggests that it is only through the second-order of representation that we “see” anything. Festa’s body (and particularly her eyes) is averted from the spectator’s ability to comprehend, to see and to seize.

The failure to see the eye/locates Festa’s suspended body for the spectator. The spectator’s inability to meet the eye defines the other’s body as lost; the pain of this loss is underlined by the corollary recognition that the represented body is so manifestly and painfully there, for both Festa and the spectator. Festa cannot see her body because her eyes are taped shut; the spectator cannot see Festa and must gaze instead at the wrapped shell of a lost eyeless body. As with Wallace Stevens: “The body is no body to be seen/But an eye that studies its black lid”—and its back lid—the Nietzschean hinterfrage (Stevens, “Stars at Tallapoosa”).

What is the back question for women? Back against the wall. Back off. Back out. About face. Lorna Simpson’s photography has recently raised the question of the relation between the above face and the black face. In Guarded Conditions, for example, Simpson reassembles the polaroid fragmented images of a black woman’s body. Her back faces the viewer; because the images are segmented in three sections vertically and repeated serially in six horizontal panels, the effort to see her without effacing her is made impossible. While Simpson’s work is overtly about the documentary tradition of photography, a tradition which has strong ties to the discourse and techniques of criminality, in Guarded Conditions she also poses a deeper psychoanalytic response to the violence of perception itself. At the bottom of the image march these words: “Sex Attacks/Skin Attacks/Skin Attacks.” Racial and sexual violence are an integral part of seeing the African-American woman. Her response to a perception which seeks her disappearance or her containment within the discursive frames of criminality or pathology, is to turn her back.

In the middle of her back, the woman clenches her fists and repeats the pose of Mapplethorpe’s male model in Letland Richard (1980), discussed in chapter 2. Whereas for Mapplethorpe the model’s clenched fist is a gesture toward self-imaging (his fist is like Mapplethorpe’s holding the time-release shutter), in Simpson’s work, the fist is a response to the sexual and racial attacks indexed as the very ground upon which her image rests. As in the work of Festa, the effort to read the image of the represented woman’s body in Simpson’s photography requires a bilingual approach to word and image, to what can and cannot be seen. The back registers the effacement of the subject within a linguistic and visual field which requires her to be either the Same or the containable, ever fixed. Other. To attack that, Simpson suggests, we need to see and to read other/wise.

Sight is both an image and a word: the gaze is possible both because of the enumerations of articulate eyes and because the subject finds a position to see within the optics and grammar of language. In denying this position to the spectator Festa and Simpson also stop the usual enunciative claims of the critic. While the gaze fosters what Lacan calls “the belong to me aspect so reminiscent of property” (Four Fundamental Concepts: 81) and leads the looker to desire mastery of the image, the pain inscribed in Festa’s performance makes the viewer feel masterless. In Simpson’s work, the “belong to me aspect” of the documentary tradition—and the narrative of mastery integral to it—is far too close to the “belong to me aspect” of slavery, domestic work, and the history of sexual labor to be greeted with anything other than a fist, a turned back, and an awareness of her own “guarded condition” within visual representation.12

Unmoored from the traditional position of authority guaranteed by the conventions of address operative in the documentary tradition of the photograph, a tradition which functions to assure that the given to be seen belongs to the field of knowledge of the one who looks, Simpson’s photographs call for a form of reading based on fragments, serialization, and the acknowledgment that what is shown is not what one wants to see. In this loss of security, the spectator feels an inner splitting between the spectacle of pain she witnesses but cannot locate and the inner pain she cannot express. But she also feels relief to recognize the historical Real which is not displayed but is nonetheless conveyed within Simpson’s work.

In Festa’s work, a similar splitting occurs. Untitled is an elaborate pun on the notion of women’s strength. The “labor” of the performance alludes to the labor of the delivery room—and the white sheets and red headdress are puns on the colors of the birthing process—the white light in the center of pain and the red blood which tears open that light.13 The projected feet wriggle raise the issue of the fetishized female body—the part (erotically) substituted for the whole—which the performance as a whole seeks to confront. As one tries to find a way to read this suspended and yet completely controlled and confined body, images of other women tied up flood one’s eyes. Images as absurdly comic as the damsel Nell tied to the railroad ties waiting for Dudley Doright to beat the clock and save her, and as harrowing as the traditional burning of martyrs and witches, coexist with more common images of women
tied to white hospital beds in the name of “curing hysteria,” force-feeding anorexics, or whatever medical malaise by which women have been painfully dominated and by which we continue to be perversely enthralled.

The austere minimalism of this piece (complete silence, one performer, no overt action), actually incites the spectator toward list-making of this type. The lists become dizzyingly similar until one finds it almost impossible to distinguish between Nell screaming on the railroad tracks and the hysterical screaming in the hospital. The riddle is as much about figuring out how they became separate as about how Festa puts them back together.

The anorexic who is obsessed by the image of a slender self, Nell who is the epitome of cross-cutting neck-wrenching cartoon drama, the martyr and witch whose public hanging/burning is dramatized as a lesson in moral certitude — either on the part of the victim-martyr or on the part of the witch’s executioner — are each defined in terms of what they are not — healthy, heroic, or legitimately powerful. That these terms are themselves slippery, radically subjective, and historically malleable emphasizes the importance of the maintenance of a fluid and relative perceptual power. These images re-enact the subjective and inventive perception which defines The Fall more profoundly than the fertile ground which the story usually insists is the significant loss.

The image of the woman is without property; she is groundless. But since she is “not all,” that is not all there is to the story. Emphasizing the importance of perceptual transformation which accompanied the loss of prime real estate in the Garden, Festa’s work implicitly underlines this clause — “The eyes of both of them were opened” (Genesis 3, 7) — as the most compelling consequence detailed in this narrative of origin.

The belief that perception can be made endlessly new is one of the fundamental drives of all visual arts. But in most theatre, the opposition between watching and doing is broken down; the distinction is often made to seem ethically immaterial. 14 Festa, whose eyes are covered with tape throughout the performance, questions the traditional complicity of this visual exchange. Her eyes are completely averted and the more one tries to see “her” the more one realizes that “seeing her” requires that one be seen. In all of these images there is a peculiar sense in which their drama hinges absolutely on the sense of seeing oneself and of being seen as Other. Unlike Rainer’s film The Man Who Enrived Women in which the female protagonist cannot be seen, here the female protagonist cannot see. In the absence of that customary visual exchange, the spectator can see only her own desire to be seen. The satisfaction of desire in this spectacle is thwarted perpetually because Festa is so busy conferring with some region of her own embryology that she cannot participate in half of the exchange; the spectator has to play both parts — she has to become the spectator of her own performance because Festa will not fulfill the invitation her performance issues. In this sense, Festa’s work operates on the other side of the same continuum as Rainer’s. Whereas in the film Trisha becomes a kind of spectator, here the spectator becomes a kind of performer.

But while Festa successfully eliminates the ethical complicity between watching and doing associated with most theatre, she does not create an ethically neutral performance. Festa’s body is displayed in a completely private (in the sense of enclosed) manner in a public spectacle. She becomes a kind of sacrificial object completely vulnerable to the spectator’s gaze. As I watch Festa’s exhaustion and pain, I feel cannibalistic, awful, guilty, “sick.” But after a while another more complicated response emerges. There is something almost obscenely arrogant in Festa’s invitation to this display. It is manifest in the “imitative” aspect of her allusions to Christ’s resurrection and his bloody feet, and latent present in the endurance she demands of both her spectator and herself. This arrogance, which she freely acknowledges and makes blatantly obvious, in some senses, “cancels” my cannibalism. While all this addition and subtraction is going on in my accountent-eyes, I begin to realize that this too is superficial. The performance resides somewhere else — somewhere in the reckoning itself and not at all in the sums and differences of our difficult relationship to it. But this thought does not allow me to completely or easily inhabit a land of equality or democracy, although I believe that is part of what is intended. I feel instead the terribly oppressive physical, psychic, and visual cost of this exchange. If Festa’s work can be seen as a hypothesis about the possibility of human communication, it is an uncompromising one. There is no meeting-place here in which one can escape the imposing shadow of those (bloody) feet: if History is figured in the tape loop as a repetitive birth cycle, the Future is figured as an unrelenting cycle of death. Where e. e. cummings writes: “we can never be born enough,” Festa counters: “we can never die sufficiently enough.” This sense of the ubiquitousness of death and dying is not completely oppressive, however (although at times it comes close to that) — because the performance also insists on the possibility of resurrection. By making death multiple and repetitious, Festa also makes it less absolute — and implicitly, less sacred — not so much the exclusive province of the gods.

My hesitation about this aspect of Festa’s work stems not from the latent romance of death (that’s common enough), but rather from her apparent belief (or perhaps “faith” is a better word) that this suspension/surrender of her own ego can be accomplished in a performance. It is this belief/faitth which makes Festa’s work so extravagantly literal. Festa’s piece is contingent upon the possibility of creating a narrative which reverses the narrative direction of The Fall; beginning with the post-lapsarian second-order of Representation, Festa’s Untitled attempts to give birth — through an intense process of physical and mental labor — to a direct and unmediated Presentation-of-Presence. That this Presence is registered through the body of a woman in pain is the one concession Festa makes to the pervasiveness (and the persuasiveness) of post-lapsarian perception and Being. Enormously and stunningly ambitious, Festa’s performances leave both the spectator and the performer so exhausted that one cannot help but wonder if the
pleasure of presence and plenitude is worth having if this is the only way to achieve it.

In the spectacle of endurance, discipline, and semi-madness that this work evokes, an inversion of the characteristic paradigms of performative exchange occurs. In the spectacle of fatigue, endurance, and depletion, Festa asks the spectator to undergo first a parallel movement and then an opposite one. The spectator’s second “performance” is a movement of accretion, excess, and the recognition of the plenitude of one’s physical freedom in contrast to the confinement and pain of the performer’s displayed body.

III

In The History of Sexuality Foucault argues that “the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the one who knows and answers, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know” (Sexuality: 64). He is describing the power-knowledge fulcrum which sustains the Roman Catholic confession, but as with most of Foucault’s work, it resonates in other areas as well.

As a description of the power relationships operative in many forms of performance Foucault’s observation suggests the degree to which the silent spectator dominates and controls the exchange. (As Dustin Hoffman made so clear in Tootsie, the performer is always in the female position in relation to power.) Women and performers, more often than not, are “scripted” to “sell” or “confess” something to someone who is in the position to buy or forgive.

Much Western theatre evokes desire based upon and stimulated by the inequality between performer and spectator — and by the (potential) domination of the silent spectator. That this model of desire is apparently so compatible with (traditional accounts of) “male” desire is no accident. More centrally this account of desire between speaker/performer and listener/spectator reveals how dependent these positions are upon visibility and a coherent point of view. A visible and easily located point of view provides the spectator with a stable point upon which to turn on the machinery of projection, identification, and (inevitable) objectification. Performers and their critics must begin to redesign this stable set of assumptions about the positions of the theatrical exchange.

The question raised by Festa’s work is the extent to which interest in visual or psychic aversion signals an interest in refusing to participate in a representational economy at all. By virtue of having spectators she accepts at least the initial dualism necessary to all exchange. But Festa’s performances are so profoundly “solo” pieces that this work is obviously not “a solution” to the problem of women’s representation.

Festa addresses the female spectator: her work does not speak about men, but rather about the loss and grief attendant upon the recognition of the chasm between presence and re-presentation. By taking the notion that women are not visible within the dominant narratives of history and the contemporary customs of performance literally, Festa prompts new considerations about the central “absence” integral to the representation of women in patriarchy. Part of the function of women’s absence is to perpetuate and maintain the presence of male desire as desire — as unsatisfied quest. Since the female body and the female character cannot be “staged” or “seen” within representational mediums without challenging the hegemony of male desire, it can be effective politically and aesthetically to deny representing the female body (imaginatively, psychologically). The belief, the leap of faith, is that this denial will bring about a new form of representation itself (I’m thinking only half jokingly of the sex strike in Lysistrata: no sex till the war ends). Festa’s performance work underlines the suspension of the female body between the polarities of presence and absence, and insists that “the woman” can exist only between these categories of analysis.

Redesigning the relationship between self and other, subject and object, sound and image, man and woman, spectator and performer, is enormously difficult. More difficult still is withdrawing from representation altogether. I am not advocating that kind of retreat or hoping for that kind of silence (since that is the position assigned to women in language with such ease). The task, in other words, is to make counterfeit the currency of our representational economy — not by refusing to participate in it at all, but rather by making work in which the costs of women’s perpetual aversion are clearly measured. Such forms of accounting might begin to interfere with the structure of homo-sexual desire which informs most forms of representation.

IV

Behind the fact of homo-sexual desire and representation the question of the link between representation and reproduction remains. This question can be re-posed by returning to Austin’s contention that a performative utterance cannot be reproduced or represented.

For Lacan, the inauguration of language is simultaneous with the inauguration of desire, a desire which is always painful because it cannot be satisfied. The potential mitigation of this pain is also dependent upon language; one must seek a cure from the wound of words in other words — in the words of the other, in the promise of what Stevens calls “the completely answering voice” (“The Sail of Ulysses,” “The Palm at the End”). But this mitigation of pain is always deferred by the promise of relief (Austin’s performative), as against relief itself, because the other’s words substitute for other words in an endless mise-en-abyme of metaphorical exchange. Thus the linguistic economy, like the financial economy, is a ledger of substitutions, in which addition and subtraction (the plus and the minus) accord value to the “right” words at the right time. One is always offering what one does not have
because what one wants is what one does not have—and for Lacan, “feelings are always reciprocal,” if never “equal.” Exchanging what one does not have for what one desires (and therefore does not have) puts us in the realm of the negative and the possibility of what Felman calls “radical negativity” (The Literary Speech Act: 143).

While feminist theorists have been repeatedly cautioned about becoming stuck in what Sue-Ellen Case describes as “the negative status of what cannot be seen,” I think radical negativity is valuable, in part because it resists reproduction.21 Felman remarks: “radical negativity is what constitutes in fact the analytic or performative dimension of thought: at once what makes it an act” (original emphasis; ibid.: 143). As an act, the performance of negativity does not make a claim to truth or accuracy. Performance seeks a kind of psychic and political efficacy, which is to say, performance makes a claim about the Real-impossible. As such, the performative utterances of negativity cannot be absorbed by history because their affects/effects, like the constative utterances about stolen paintings which Sophie Calle turns into performative by framing them in the gallery, are always changing, varied and resolutely unstatic objects. “What history cannot assimilate.” Felman argues, “is thus the implicitly analytical dimension of all radically or feanul thoughts of all new theories; the ‘force’ of their ‘performance’ (always somewhat subversive) and their ‘residual smile’ (always somewhere self-subversive)” (original emphasis; ibid.).

The residual smile is the place of play within performance and within theory. Within play the failure to meet, the impossibility of understanding, is comic rather than tragic. The stakes are lower, as the saying goes. Within the relatively determined limits of theory, the stakes are low indeed.

Or are they?

The performance of theory, the act of moving the “as if” into the indicative “is,” like the act of moving descriptions of paintings into the frames of the stolen or lent canvases, is to repleat: the relation between perceiver and object, between self and other. In substituting the subject’s memory of the object for the object itself, Calle begins to redesign the order of the museum and the representational field. Institutions whose only function is to preserve and honor objects—traditional museums, archives, banks, and in some degree, universities—are intimately involved in the reproduction of the sterilizing binaries of self/other, possession/dispossession, men/women which are increasingly inadequate formulas for representation. These binaries and their institutional upholders fail to account for that which cannot appear between these tight “equations” but which nonetheless inform them.

These institutions must invent an economy not based on preservation but one which is answerable to the consequences of disappearance. The savings and loan institutions in the US have lost the customer’s belief in the promise of security. Museums whose collections include objects taken/purchased/obtained from cultures who are now asking (and expecting) their return must confront the legacy of their appropriative history in a much more nuanced way than currently prevails. Finally, universities whose domain is the reproduction of knowledge must re-view the theoretical enterprise by which the object surveyed is reproduced as property with (theoretical) value.

Notes

1. This notion of following and tracking was a fundamental aspect of Calle’s earlier performance pieces. See Jean Baudrillard Suite Ventienne/Sophie Calle, Please Follow Me, for documentation of Calle’s surveillance of a stranger.

2. See my essays “Money Talks” and “Money Talks, Again” for a full elaboration.

3. Of course not all performance art has an oppositional edge. The ontological claims of performance art are what I am addressing here, and not the politics of ambition.


5. J. L. Austin, How To Do Things With Words, 2nd edn. Derrida’s rereading of Austin also comes from an interest in the performative element within language.


7. See Felman, The Literary Speech Act, for a dazzling reading of Austin.

8. See my essay, “Reclaiming the Citation of Others” for a full discussion of Modleski’s essay and performance.


10. The disappearance of the Mother’s Being also accounts for the (relative) success of the visibility of the anti-abortion groups. The smooth displacement of the image of the Mother to the hyper-visible image of the hitherto unseen fetus, is accomplished precisely because the Being of the Mother is what is always already excluded within representational economies. See Chapter 6 in this volume for further elaboration of this point.


12. For an excellent discussion of these guarded conditions in television, fiction, and critical theory for the African American woman see Michele Wallace’s Invisibility Black.

13. Festa began actually the Untitled performance wearing a white rabbit headress, which is lighter and cooler than the red; she has on other occasions worn the red one and the themes of “red” and “white” are constant preoccupations of her work. The heat during Untitled (in the nineties) was intense enough that she was eventually persuaded to abandon the white headress.

14. This is one of the reasons “shock” is such a limited aesthetic for theatre. It is hard to be shocked by one’s own behavior/design, although easy to be by someone else’s.

15. In fact it may account for the intense male homoeroticism of so much of theatrical history.


PRAXIS AND PERFORMATIVITY

Andrew Parker


Praxis and performativity? How and why, should we imagine such a linkage today? Does this conjunction suggest—or (why not?) perform—an idea whose time has come?

In preparing my response to these questions, which seemed to me essential to discuss on this panel, I began wondering what it is that we on the left have been asking from performativity, what it is we are doing in appealing to the performative—a gesture that would be performative through and through. For it, on the one hand, an appeal to the performative offers Marxist theory the possibility of a timely new direction, a renewal demonstrating that the theory is indeed still living, still present, on the other hand this appeal repeats what has become a predictably familiar gesture—déjà vu all over again. Every generation or so, western Marxists have sought to refurbish the notion of praxis by aligning it with newer and seemingly sexier developments from other-than-Marxist domains. In “structure” and “language” and, before that, in “techné” and “existence,” Marxist theorists projected new ways of modeling praxis such that the various challenges posed by Heideggerian and structuralist thought could be assimilated and overcome. These strategies have had the advantage of suggesting that everything’s up to date with Marxism, that nothing in fact is deficient or passe, that the newer and potentially competitive thought had already been implied and fulfilled in the older: “Oh, we then conclude without recognizing the citation, “while engaging in [fill in this blank with the latest theoretical buzzword], we actually were doing praxis all along!” It’s certainly a testimony to performativity’s current political and theoretical status—to its appeal, as it were—that Marxists now would want, in turn, to get in on the act—an appropriation that acknowledges, incorporates, and defines the performative’s power.

If I sound skeptical of this latest effort to make praxis au courant, this is because performativity in some ways is the least plausible candidate for such assimilative redefinition. Though both terms are signally about “doing,” about

the nature of embodied action, and even about the inability of consciousness to superintend such action, what counts for each as the nature of this deed, its implied agent, and even its temporal status as an event are so profoundly at odds with one another that the prospect of their reconciliation may be unlikely. I stress may be since there are ways, I can only suggest briefly in conclusion, that Marx’s thought is profoundly imbricated in, even enabled by, the effects of performativity. But to reach that point in my argument some conceptual reviewing first will be necessary.

As reflected, for example, by the ample space Gajo Petrović devoted to its entry in A Dictionary of Marxist Thought, praxis already possessed a lengthy philosophical history (running from Plato and Aristotle through Kant and Hegel) when Marx turns to it in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, The German Ideology, and the Theses on Feuerbach, where praxis comes to designate “the free, universal, creative and self-creative activity through which man [a term always unremarked in this discourse] creates [makes, produces] and changes (shapes) his historical, human world and himself; an activity specific to man, through which he is basically differentiated from all other beings. In this sense man can be regarded as a being of praxis, ‘praxis’ as the central concept of Marxism, and Marxism as the ‘philosophy’ (or better, ‘thinking’) of ‘praxis’” (Petrović 1983: 384, 386–387). The stakes, it should be clear, are rather high here as praxis is defined as a uniquely human transformative relation through which man makes himself in making things in a process that is irreducibly social: “All social life is essentially practical,” the 8th Feuerbach thesis insists. If such self-activity is understood to be nonalienated in its originary essence, under capitalism it undergoes transformation into its commodified opposite: labor.

What Petrović’s entry neglects, however, are the other oppositions that, for Marx, make praxis praxis. Above all, praxis constitutes a prediscursive or pre-symbolic realm whose determined other is ideology (they form, indeed, a mutually constitutive pair). At the level of argument, Marx’s early writings on the nature of praxis are structured systematically in terms of a rigorous opposition between what comes first and what comes second—between being and representation, original and copy, “life” and “consciousness”: “We do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. . . . Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life” (Marx and Engels 1970, 47). By “life,” as Michel Henry recalls, Marx describes the process by which nature is transformed for the satisfaction of human needs—a process Marx will also designate as praxis, production, the labor-process, the real (Henry 1983, 224). Where “life” by definition is wholly self-identical and present to itself—it “experiences itself immediately without being able to separate itself from itself, to take the slightest distance with
“consciousness” is characterized anti-
ethically as the experience of mediation as such, as an abstract realm of secondary and derivative representations devoid of all self-sufficiency: “Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process” (at 147). Consciousness, in other words, can secure its own identity only by referring to something other than and logically prior to itself, to something entirely non-conscious—to a dynamic and self-present “life-process” which, exempt from any such need to refer outside of itself, consigns all instances of representation to the irreality of ideology: “Ideology is the whole of the representations of human consciousness in the sense of mere representations. . . . The place of ideology is the ontological dimension of irreality to which every mere representation belongs” (Henry 1983, 160–161). What counts as “ideological” for Marx is thus the structure of representation as such, the very process by which these sterile signs and images of consciousness can substitute themselves for the living reality of praxis. Where ideology would displace this indivisible presence with the abstractions of representation, Marx’s critique of ideology reverses this mystifying reversal, thereby restoring praxis to its originally integral and self-present ground.

This ideological supervision of representations upon the real is not, however, simply an avoidable aberration, a category mistake (as the Young Hegelians had claimed), for Marx contended further that the images produced in consciousness are neither arbitrary nor autonomous but generated by the very reality that serves as their antithesis: “The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimes of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence” (at 47). Ideology, in other words, not only differs ontologically from life but is grounded in it as well—in a praxis that produces phantoms akin to its own self-identical nature (see Geras 1971). The very possibility of a critical theory will be staked on this claim that representations are both distinct from and secondary to the praxis that nonetheless forms their origin. For ideology’s illusory “autonomy” can be dispelled only by tracing these deceptive representations to their unacknowledged source in production. Such a theory necessarily proceeds on an empirical basis (“Where speculation ends—in real life—there real, positive science begins” [at 48]); to do otherwise is to mistake the philosophical analysis of representation for the empirical analysis of praxis, would be to condemn the work of theory to the sterile practice of onanism: “Philosophy and the study of the actual world have the same relation to one another as masturbation and sexual love” (at 103).

If Marx felt capable of discerning this latter difference, no such confidence abounds in contemporary theories of performativity, for which the possibility of masturbation can never be simply derived. First elaborated in J. L. Austin’s How To Do Things With Words (1975) and reframed in the work of (among others) Jacques Derrida (1988), Shoresha Feldman (1983), Judith Butler (1990, 1993), and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993; Parker and Sedgwick, 1995), performativity concerns the set of conditions in which saying is itself a kind of doing. Austin’s intuition that speech, under particular circumstances, is less a report on an action than an action per se is what obviously enables in the first place any comparison between praxis and performativity, and the two terms do seem to share a number of common features—each, for example, would form the cornerstone for a more general theory of action. Like praxis, moreover, performativity (at least in principle) does not take consciousness as an originating ground. In focusing on illocutionary and perlocutionary effects, Austin sought to circumvent notions of communication in which thought-contents are transferred from one consciousness to another; indeed, by replacing the truefalse with the happy/unhappy distinction, Austin argued that the performative force of an utterance does not itself depend on the conscious intention of its speaker. The performative should not be understood “as [merely] the outward and visible sign . . . of an inward and spiritual act” but on the model, instead, of ritual (Austin 1975, 9); if I’ve said the right words under the right set of circumstances, I’ve married you no matter what may have been thinking. And finally, the performative, like praxis, breaks neither exteriority nor anteriority, admits no spatial or temporal distance from its own discursive operations: “The performative does not have its referent (but here that word is certainly no longer appropriate, and this is precisely the interest of the discovery) outside of itself or, in any event, before or in front of itself. It does not describe something that exists outside of language and prior to it. It produces or transforms a situation, it effects” (Derrida [1977] 1995, 13).

If praxis can recognize itself in these performative effects, this is because a central strand of Marxist thought has always dreamed of the possibility of such a language without an outside—what Marx referred to as “the language of real life” (at 47). Consider, for example, this understudied passage from Roland Barthes’s Mythologies:

If I am a woodcutter and am led to name the tree which I am felling, whatever form of my sentence, I “speak the tree,” I do not merely speak about it. This means that my language is operational, transitively linked to its object; between the tree and myself, there is nothing but my labour, that is to say, an action. This is a political language: it represents nature for me only inasmuch as I am going to transform it, it is a language thanks to which I “act the object”; the tree is not an image for me, it is simply the meaning of my action. But if I am not a woodcutter, I can no longer “speak the tree,” I can only speak about it, on it. My language is no longer the instrument of an “acted-upon tree,” it is the “tree-celebrated” which becomes the
what Austin excluded—theatrical speech, citation, signatures—phenomena that are structured by an originary and generalizable iterability. It is this that Derrida takes to be irreducible since the performative can function only by separating itself from itself, only by citing the possibility of its past and future instances and, in so doing, fracturing the punctuality of any grounding self-presence. As Butler explains, performativity must here "be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (1993, 2). We are far here, certainly, from a notion of praxis that places language downstream from an originally integral source. Indeed, with performativity we do not set out from "real active men"—we never, as it were, simply set out—and the very imagination of a pre-discursive origin can now be viewed as a performative effect: "The speculative origin," Butler writes, "is always speculated about from a retrospective position, from which it assumes the character of an ideal" (1990, 78).

Have we arrived, then, at an unresolvable impasse between praxis and performativity? Maybe not, as I hinted at the beginning, but I can do little more in the time allotted than to suggest elliptically that the relationship between praxis and performativity might itself be reframed as a relationship internal to and constitutive of praxis—which may help to explain why it is that praxis can generate representations presumably alien to its own integral nature. This would be, for example, the burden of Derrida's extraordinary pages in Speeters of Marx on the performativity already lodged within use-value, the iterability that "permits one to identify [a use-value] as the same throughout possible repetitions": "Since any use-value is marked by this possibility of being used by the other or being used another time, this alterity or iterability projects it a priori onto the market of equivalences" that Marx had reserved for exchange-value alone (Derrida 1994; 160, 162). This imagination of performativity as an enabling condition rather than a fall into secondariness also informs, in a variety of different ways, Judith Butler's recasting of constructionism as materiality, Gayatri Spivak's elaboration of a value theory of labor (1987, 1993), and Etienne Balibar's (1994) and Jacques Rancière's (1994) recent writings on the proletariat and the theory of ideology. To pose the relationship between praxis and performativity in these terms would neither constitute a timely new direction for Marxist thought, nor would it mean déjà vu all over again. But it might allow us to reconceive Marxism's current appeal to performativity otherwise than as an idea whose time has come.

Notes

1 This article is the text of a talk presented at the 1994 MLA Convention in San Diego on a panel entitled 'Praxis and Performativity' organized by Amitava Kumar and Jose Munoz for the Marxist Literary Group. My thanks especially to them and to George Yúdice for their various invitations. Several paragraphs here are lifted verbatim from my forthcoming Re-Mark.
2. It bears recalling that, not too long ago, production (a sometime-synonym for praxis) enjoyed the status now held by performativity: “To produce, that is the big verb today. And production is the all-purpose concept, just indeterminate enough around the edges to move in everywhere where other notions have been disqualified: notions like ‘creation,’ ‘causality,’ ‘genesis,’ ‘constitution,’ ‘formation,’ ‘information’ (of a material or a content), ‘fabrication,’ ‘composition,’ and many more still.” (Derrida [1977] 1995, 37).

3. Cf. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Supplementing Marxism.” “The strongest humanist support of Marxism is the critique of the reification of labor. . . . In its vaguest yet most robust articulation it asserts that labor itself must not be commodified and is grounded in a binary opposition between labor and commodity” (1995, 110).

4. All further references to The German Ideology will be abbreviated GI and cited parenthetically by page number in the text.

References


THE FUTURE THAT WORKED

Joseph Roach


One of the ultimate aims of the Revolution is to overcome completely the separation of intellectual work, including art, from physical work.

— Leon Trotsky, Literature and Revolution (1924)

When Vsevolod Meyerhold prefaced his biomechanical études for the edification of his students, he spoke in a voice uncannily like that of a Victorian sage. More cannily, he echoed Leon Trotsky. Predicting a utopian future for all kinds of work under the Soviet regime, he exhorted the actor to prepare for a new job, actually a new vocation: “For he will be working in a society where labour is no longer regarded as a curse but as a joyful, vital necessity. In the conditions of ideal labour art clearly requires a new foundation” (Braun, 172-3). In these resonant phrases, the Russian theater artist evoked the terms of the 19th century aestheticians of labor. They had wanted to reimage work as a creative activity, and had exalted the beauty of all those processes, however humble, that produce the lovingly manufactured artifact: “Art,” said William Morris, paraphrasing John Ruskin, “is the expression of man’s pleasure in labour” (385). Meyerhold shared something like their visionary faith in the artist as the role model of nonalienated labor, but he fortified their prophesies by developing the practical working method called biomechanics.

In his utopian move beyond the Gothic revivalists and arts-and-crafts dreamers, Meyerhold reexamined the role of artists in a society transformed by mass production. He promoted the actor as an agent and exemplar — one might say an engineer — of this transformation. The reason for the actor’s efficacy in this role is clear; because actors (along with dancers) work on their own persons, their performances naturally trouble the traditional distinctions between mental and manual labor, as well as those between work and play: in the repetitions of rehearsal and performance, actors and dancers combine creation and recreation.

Celebrating these historic facts of theatrical labor, Meyerhold drew freely on the ideas of the followers of Frederick Winslow Taylor, the American proponent of the scientific management of industry, and the reflexologists, experimental psychophysiologists who studied the human body as a reflex machine. From these materialist programs and his own rich repertoire of theatrical practices, Meyerhold fashioned biomechanics, which sought to humanize Taylorism by introducing an aesthetic element into the performance of efficient movement, awakening the actor—worker’s awareness of the beauty — and the fun — of a job well done. “In the future,” Meyerhold told his acting students at the first biomechanical workshop in 1922, “the actor must go even further in relating his technique to industrial situations” (Braun, 172). To lead the way for the workers who would come to see themselves as artists, actors must learn to see themselves as workers. Meyerhold saw the future, and it worked — and played.

Today’s retrospective view looks somewhat different (see Law and Gordon). Post-Soviet historians and theater artists alike, their mouths filled with the bitter ashes of a failed revolution, have been quick to point out the desolate ironies that mock the Russian director’s prophyse. They have been slower to grasp the prescience of his more modest but more cogent prediction: by developing biomechanics as a system of training and performance, Meyerhold positioned his theater within a broad Soviet program that foresaw the rise of ergonomics in negotiating workplaces in which “labour is no longer regarded as a curse.” Ergonomics is the scientific study of work as a bodily performance. That emphasis includes enlightened concern for the most efficient interactions with the work environment and the objects in it, giving particular consideration to those activities that most seriously challenge the human body in its encounters with machines. For its part, biomechanics offers an ergonomics of acting, including creative mastery of repetitious motions “aimed at achieving balance, elasticity, rhythm, and physical awareness” (Bae, 48). Through his work with actors on biomechanics, Meyerhold participated with other Soviet artists and ergonomists in a broad effort to create “Taylorism with a human face” (Misler, 157). They brought to the problem of the division of mental and physical labor a consciousness of its aesthetic dimensions.

The key word is performance. To perform in this context means to expend the appropriate quantity of energy to attain high-quality results. In the 1920s, the Central Institute for the Scientific Organization of Labor and the Mechanization of Man (tssr) dedicated itself to the study of kinesthetics — gestures performed and energies expended by the human body in motion. The artist Ilia Shlepianov, one of Meyerhold’s acting students, worked as a notator for tssr in the Studio of Movement Registration (see figure below). Shlepianov’s development of an “alphabet” of working movements was supervised by
Alexei Gastev, director of JETI. They sought to analyze bodies under actual performance conditions in order to identify and eliminate superfluous or harmful movements. In a different but related studio, the Choreological Laboratory of the Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences (RAKhN), followers of Isadora Duncan studied the "art of movement — not only dance, play, acrobatics, rhythmic gymnastics, creative gymnastics, and 'plastic' or artistic movement, but also the movements of labor, physical education, calisthenics, and sports" (Misher, 158). What these Soviet theorists and practitioners anticipated was the eventual success of policies based on the insight that workers whose performance depends on their bodies also have minds; and further, that their creative potentials can be released by engaging them with the material and conceptual processes that underlie the beauty of their work.

In Principles of Scientific Management (1911), Taylor had set forth a theory of time-and-motion efficiency that emphasized standardization of work processes "instilled by coercion or by habit" (Wollen, 43). Taylor's formative influence on the engineering department of the Ford Motor Company, which notoriously turned its workers into cogs in the larger machine of the assembly line, provoked satirists like Aldous Huxley to peopulate their dystopias with Taylorized zombies. Critics of Scientific Management however, often miss the point that Taylor's error was not in his premise that ergonomic efficiency is both attainable and desirable, but in his classist insistence that managers are the only ones who know what constitutes efficiency. He correctly identified the importance of "working cycles" in the pulse of man-machine interactions, but it remained for others to argue for the inclusion of the creative and critical views of the workers themselves in the analysis of these cycles. Meyerhold, who developed a Taylorist conception of "acting cycles," was an early contributor to this trend. In "The Actor of the Future and Biomechanics" (1922), he insisted that "the entire creative act should be a conscious process" (Meyerhold, 1928). Consciousness of the process makes the actor a creator and a collaborator, joining an ensemble devoted to the quality of the physical production. Embedded in such a goal is an idea that industrial theorists can learn from the arts: the creation of a high-quality product increases (not decreases) productivity — "costs decrease because of less rework, fewer mistakes, fewer delays, snags; better use of machine time" (Derning, 3). The more the actors' or workers' minds and bodies share in the attainment of physical mastery, the more effective their productions and the more productive their work.

In this paradigm, mind and body must perform as one. As I argued in The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting (1985), the search for a better understanding of the physical basis of the "conscious process" of performance drew Meyerhold's attention to reflexology. Beginning with Ivan Sechenov's Reflexes of the Brain (1863), Russian reflexology developed a strong research tradition based on the physiological study of reflex action and reflex inhibition (the neural communication that tells which muscles not to move). Sechenov's pioneering work was further developed by Vladimir Bekhterev (Foundations of Knowledge about the Functions of the Brain, 1903–7) and Ivan Pavlov (Conditioned Reflexes, 1927). Broadly speaking, the reflexologists believed that all actions and emotions had a physiological basis. They saw organisms as reflex machines responding automatically to stimuli and subject to conditioning into habit. They analyzed complex biological behaviors, including work among several nonhuman species, as isolated reflex arcs organized into "chains" or sequences of interdependent reflexes. About nest-building among birds, Pavlov wrote: "To look upon this as reflex we must assume that one reflex initiates the next following — or, in other words, we must regard it as a chain reflex" (9—10). By studying photo sequences, Pavlov observed the process of a cat righting itself as it falls from a height; first the head turns independently, sending a ripple effect of reflex action corkscrewing along the length of its body — a chain of reflexes, one firing off the next. Similarly, Bekhterev studied what he called sequences of "associated motor reflexes" in such animal behaviors as mimeticism (Roach, 201).
Meyerhold'snotes outlining a "Program of biomechanics" in 1922 reveal his awareness of the key issues in the science of reflexology:

- The human organism as an automative mechanism
- Mimeticism and its biological significance (Bekhterev)
- Complex of movements of the whole organism or chain of movements
- Acts of inhibition (not doing)
- Study of mechanism of reaction in the nervous system
- Psychic reactions as the object of scientific study
- Psychic phenomena, simple physico-chemical reactions . . . purely physiological reflexes
- Reflex instinct
- Reflexes, their connection, sequence, mutual dependence
- Mechanization, subconsciously habitual acts (Hoover, 312)

The implications of this research for acting and working are various. First, there is the idea that the behaviors of the laboring or playing body are connected by reflex chains.

In Meyerhold's biomechanical exercise called "Shooting a Bow," for instance, as the arm moves to lead the bow, balance is shifted to the front foot. Then, as the bow is drawn, balance is shifted to the back foot: a "connection, sequence, [and] mutual dependence" of reflexes set in, self-completing motion spontaneously. Second, there is the importance of "subconsciously habitual acts." As Diderot long ago discovered, the paradox of the actor resides in "dual consciousness"—the subordination by means of rehearsal of most performative activity into habit. Habitualization of corporeal motions enables the actor to gain conscious control of the entire process and all its effects. Paradoxically, the feeling of spontaneity is achieved by the rigorous transformation of action and gesture into unconscious automatisms. The key here is the active retention of the alert consciousness—the administrative ghost in the reflex machine—as the sovereign creative executor. Biomechanics encourages this retention by consciously structuring tripartite sequences as "acting cycles" or "acting chains": "First there was to be a moment of preparation (intention) for the action, then the physical performance of the action itself (realization), and finally the moment of reaction in which the sensation caused by the action in turn caused a new moment of preparation (intention)" (Roach, 201). Third, reflexology suggested the perfection over time of the man-machine interface, a perfection in which machines and human bodies would adjust to the presence of the other to serve human ends. Those ends include the extraction of the maximum amount of freedom from the realm of necessity. They also include the creation of a sense of pride and satisfaction in the quality of the work being performed, individually and collectively.

In the revolutionary exhilaration of the early Soviet period, advocates of ergonomics based in reflexology believed that they were preparing the way for a future that truly worked. I concur. At the same time, I must concede that the world that they envisioned in their theaters of utopian possibility is not the world they got. Ironically, the development of labor theory and practice under capitalism since the 1950s, which performance theorist Jon McKenzie calls "high performance," attests to the widespread adoption of the Soviet neo-Taylorist and post-Taylorist ergonomicists' basic principles, especially the empowerment of workers by rethinking (and redoing) the distinction between mental and manual labor. In his influential treatise on modern management, Out of the Crisis, W. Edwards Deming explains the success of the high performance paradigm in the "Japanese economic miracle" since World War II:

The whole world is familiar with the miracle of Japan, and knows that the miracle started off with a concussion in 1950. Before that time, the quality of Japanese consumer goods had earned around the world a reputation for being shoddy and cheap. Yet anyone in our Navy will testify that the Japanese knew what quality is. They simply had not yet bent their efforts toward quality in international trade [that is, in mass-produced consumer goods of the highest quality]. Suddenly, Japanese quality and dependability turned upward in 1950 and in 1954 had captured markets the world over. The new economic age had begun. What happened? The answer is that top management became convinced that quality was vital for export, and that they could accomplish the switch. They learned, in conference after
conference, something about their responsibilities for the achievement of this aim, and that they must take the lead in this aim. Management and factory workers put their forces together for quality and jobs.

(486, emphasis added)

By establishing Quality Control Circles in manufacturing plants and assembly lines, Japanese industry drew on the expertise and appealed to the pride—part of an aesthetic pride—of workers, foremen, engineers, and executives. Together they worked through problems of production, the human-machine interface, and design ergonomics, eventually incorporating advanced robotics into the production process in harmonious interaction with a highly educated, motivated, and quality-conscious work force. As Meyerhold predicted, high performance, like biomechanical acting, needed to become a "conscious process," engaging the creativity as well as the muscular memory of the worker. Today TV ads touting Saturn automobiles, helpfully defining the word ergonomics for the viewers of ABC's Monday Night Football, emphasize the return of Taylorism with a human face, although not under that name, to American manufacturing. "Happy workers build better cars," runs the jingle.

Is the future finally working? High performance is supposed to replace the extreme rationality and coercive top-down managerial style of Taylorism with on-the-job creativity, collaboration, and decentralized decision making. But as Jon McKenzie notes in Perform or Else, the development of a performance-based cybernetic "white-collar society," even in the scenes of its most opulent success, does not simply replace the "stratum of discipline" with the "stratum of performance." "Though performance displaces discipline, it has not entirely replaced it; the performance stratum is under construction, and discipline, though in decline, remains operational." (17). In a global labor marketplace ruthlessly exploitative of its most vulnerable workers—to the poultry processor or sweatshop wage slave, even Huxley's parody of Taylorism must look good—the future seems poised, as the Victorian sages of previous century saw themselves and their contemporaries poised, "between two worlds—one dead, the other powerless to be born."

At this crucial juncture, what the reawakened study of Meyerholdian biomechanics might offer is a resurgent theater of utopian possibility. In Theater's "Utopia and Theater" issue, Erika Munk and Tom Sellar posed the question: "Is a powerful aesthetic experience itself a foreshadowing of utopia?" (6). Perhaps the question might also be put the other way around. Meyerhold's program of 1922 posited a powerful aesthetic experience emerging from the efficient rhythms of unalienated labor—from the interacting bodies and machines of utopian imagination. Biomechanics accordingly promised to ready the actor to construct a role as a skilled worker constructs a product—quickly, accurately, and completely. Diehard defenders of Stanislavsky-based actor-training methods imagine the creation of a role in a rehearsal process as unhurried as the master's own. In the age of high performance productivity, they luxuriate over the one-of-a-kind artifact ponderously fabricated by trial and error. But when every rehearsal adds to the overall cost of production—in this the unsubsidized American and Russian theaters find themselves in similar binds—might biomechanics emerge as an alternative method of training for rehearsal and performance? Is a system of standardized training for actors that lowers the per-unit costs of live performance entirely utopian?

If it is not, then actors and dancers, as exemplars of the aesthetics of work, might return to the vanguard into which Meyerhold wanted to rush them 75 years ago. Inspired by their example, high performance under capitalism might be ready to reach the goal that Trotsky set for the Bolshevik Revolution: the erasure of the distinction between mental work, including the arts, and manual work. In this future, as the sages foretold, art would be the name that human beings give to the beauty of their labor.

I am indebted to Jon McKenzie and Joe Bizup for stimulating conversations and shared materials in thinking through this essay.

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RHYTHM AND THE PERFORMANCE OF ORGANIZATION

Richard A. Rogers


Rhythm is a form of discourse central to social organization. This essay weaves together a variety of anecdotes, ethnographic analyses, labor histories, and critical theories around the central theme of rhythm in order to hear the relationships between organization, epistemology, consciousness, and body without positing one of these elements as foundational. This approach expands and complicates the understanding of what constitutes "organization" and calls for a greater accounting in communication theory of the role of physiological structures in human social life.

Charlie is a factory worker at the Electro Steel Corporation. He tightens two nuts on square pieces of metal that pass by him on a moving belt, a task for which he is equipped with two wrenches, one in each hand. Charlie has difficulty keeping up with the pace, itching, sneezing, and a bee distract and put him behind. When the foreman yells at him to keep up, Charlie appears to want to protest but he cannot—the line doesn't stop and he would only get further behind. When the lunch whistle sounds, the line slows and then stops but Charlie cannot. His body jerks out of his control, synchronized with the now-absent rhythm of the moving line. Charlie's body has been subordinated to the rhythm of the machine.

In the afternoon, the president of the company orders the line's speed increased to its maximum setting. Charlie eventually goes crazy from the pace of the work. In his insanity, he jumps onto the line and enters the interior of the machine. As he goes through the machine's interior gears he continues to
tightly any nuts and bolts within his reach. His fellow workers reverse the line and get him out. Extracted from the machine (at least literally), Charlie continues to try tightening anything resembling a nut—the noses of those around him, the breasts of a coworker, the buttons on the president’s secretary’s dress.

Still “out of control,” Charlie begins turning knobs, pulling levers and spinning wheels at the control station, creating explosions and generally wreaking havoc in the factory. The other workers turn off the line in order to chase him, but he keeps turning it back on so they have to return to their tasks. Charlie dances, leers at and chases after women, evades his coworkers and supervisors, and appears to take great joy in his disruption of the factory’s operation. Eventually Charlie is caught and taken to the hospital to be cured of a “nervous breakdown.”

Charlie, the “little tramp” in Chaplin’s 1936 film *Modern Times*, works in an organization that operates in and through a particular kind of rhythmic order: machinic, absolutely uniform, imposed on its workers from the top by means of the seemingly supra-human force of the automated assembly line. In this organization, by means of this form of order, Charlie’s body is instrumentalized as an extension of the machine. He is made the object of a rationalized system of production by means of a certain kind of scientific knowledge and the imposition of a particular kind of rhythm. While the company’s interests primarily focus on his body—his labor, the material transformations it enacts—his consciousness is unavoidably affected. The “stress” of the speed and unrelenting nature of the line’s rhythm drive Charlie “crazy,” ending his (body’s) usefulness as a docile instrument of production (Foucault, *Discipline*).

Charlie’s predicament can be analyzed in terms of false consciousness, the appropriation of his labor, the inhumane ethic of his employer, the excessive repression of his sexual drives, the panoptic surveillance system in the factory, or as “A story of industry, of individual enterprise—humanity crusading in pursuit of happiness” (the ironic suggestion of the film’s subtitle). Alternatively, I examine Charlie’s situation and others like it by hearing rhythm as a central component in organization.

This exploratory essay uses rhythm as a way to hear the relationships between forms of organization, epistemological assumptions, modes of consciousness, and bodies. I hear “organization” as the enactment—the performance—in Victor Turner’s sense of “bringing to completion” or “accomplishing”—of order in human social life. If organization enacts epistemology, the underlying assumptions that legitimize that order. This “order” is a culture’s means of identifying, differentiating, and relating objects, sensations, events, and processes in the world—whether “artificial” or “natural,” material or ideational, secular or spiritual. I explore the ways these orders penetrate and influence not only culture and society, but consciousness, experience, and physiology. One form of order is rhythm, in the broad sense of patterns through time, particularly aural patterns. I hear rhythm as one

means of performing organization. What are the implications of hearing rhythm as central to organization? What happens if we hear rhythm as a kind of discourse, knowledge, and power?

Discursive formations, as described by Michel Foucault, provide a set of rules to distinguish truth from falsity. Rhythmic sensibilities, similarly, distinguish order from chaos: rhythm is one of the basic dividing lines between music and noise. I argue that rhythm is a discourse, that its performance is constitutive of an “order” and, therefore, rhythm and the forms of music licensed by a particular rhythmic sensibility are no less important to the maintenance of a social formation than “truth.” Rhythm is a kind of knowledge, and knowledge is a kind of power. Just as “subjugated knowledges” operate against and outside any particular discursive formation, there is more than one kind of rhythm—rhythms that discipline, control, reproduce an order, and rhythms that subvert, resist, enact a different order. My task here is to begin to hear the ways “scientific” (rational, capitalist, totalizing, modernist) power/knowledge formations use and enact rhythm to specify the affiliations between those formations and a particular rhythmic sensibility. Making these connections audible not only adds to a critical understanding of the mechanisms underlying certain forms of domination, but extends awareness of the transformative potential of nondominant and resistant rhythmic sensibilities beyond the sphere of the “merely” aesthetic.

Music, order, and entrainment

Jacques Attali defines music as the imposition of order onto noise, “as noise given form according to a code” (25). The kind of order—and hence what will count as “music”—varies from one social formation to another. For Attali, the order present in music is intimately related to the larger social order and its organizations, such that the connection between music and power is an everpresent theme. Music both represents and enacts the imposition of order, the channeling of human energies and drives, and is therefore a tool for maintaining a social formation. Attali writes:

> Listening to music is listening to all noise, realizing that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power, that it is essentially political. . . . With noise is born disorder and its opposite: the world. With music is born power and its opposite: subversion. . . . All music, any organization of sound is then a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community, of a totality.

The basic message of music, according to Attali, is that order and harmony exist, while any particular music either affirms the status quo or subverts it through the production of “noise.”
The connections between rhythm (as one component of a musical order) and power are made evident in a variety of examples. Jane Goodall recalls the chimpanzee who began banging two empty kerosene cans together and within two weeks became the tribe's dominant male (Hart). Siegfried Kracauer analyzes how the popularity of chorus lines in the 1920s functioned to make the homologous and repetitive nature of factory work tolerable by transforming it into an aesthetic. During the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, numerous studies were undertaken to understand the effects of music on factory production and other tasks such as typing (e.g., Kerr). More recently, the producers of musique have used "applied science" to increase productivity and consumption and otherwise control people's moods (Yellen, Jones, and Schumacher). While other qualities (tone, harmony, instruments) are crucial to these uses of "functional music," most analysts and critics hear rhythm as a central component.

An important phenomenon occurring in and around rhythmic patterns is entrainment. Christian Huygens formulated the law of entrainment from his observation that two rhythmic patterns or devices (such as two pendulums) placed in close proximity quickly lock-up within a very short time their rhythms become "entrained." The mensural cycles of women living in close proximity, for example, often become synchronized. The members of Kodo, a Japanese folk arts performing company best known for their drumming, use long-distance playing not only to synchronize the rhythms of the individual (breathing, heartbeat, hands and feet) but to entrain the group into a common rhythm. The proper performance of their highly complex drum compositions requires that the drummers breathe as one.

The power of entrainment to channel and coordinate human energies is demonstrated in the close link between rhythmic music and work. One of Kodo's compositions, for example, is developed from a traditional Japanese fishing song, used to synchronize the fishermen's efforts as they pull at oars and haul in their nets. In the Caribbean, groups of African men digging ditches use songs to coordinate the swinging of their hoes, both to avoid injury and to maximize their productivity. On the Hebrides Islands off Scotland, the women of a community manually massage newly-woven wool cloth in order to soften it. Sitting at a table with an unwound bolt of cloth, they "waulk," the wool, simultaneously massaging and circulating it around the table, synchronizing their collective activity by singing.

A central part of socialization processes is the entrainment of bodies, daily routines, and aesthetic sensibilities with the rhythms of culture. These rhythms may be intimately linked to the rising and setting sun or to mechanical representations of time (the 9 to 5 grind). They may be linked to the seasons (planting, harvesting, gathering), the moon and tides (fishing, sailing), the rhythm of work (school year, work week), and the cycle of economic change (energy costs, tax deadlines, and annual shopping). They are linked

to the rhythms of speech and the process by which people become habituated to producing those rhythmic patterns physiologically. And they are linked, of course, to the musical sensibilities of particular cultures.

Entrainment as Power

Mickey Hart, percussionist for the Grateful Dead and philosopher of rhythm, tells two stories about children, entrainment, and power. The first took place at a summer camp for underprivileged children from the Oakland ghetto. He brought a truckload of percussion instruments to the camp, set them up, and invited anyone who wished to join him. About twenty-five kids showed up.

It's interesting how long it takes people to entrain. These kids locked up after about twenty minutes. They found the groove, and they all knew it. You could see it in their faces as they began playing louder and harder, the groove drawing them in and hardening. It lasted about an hour. These things have life cycles—they begin, build, maintain, and then dissipate and dissolve. When it was all over everyone started laughing and clapping. They were celebrating themselves and they were also celebrating the groove. Although they had no words for it, they knew that they had created something that was alive, that had a force of its own, out of nothing but their own shared energy.

The second, similar story involves a group of mentally-handicapped children as a part of a program to build self-esteem.

I'd fill different tables with different instruments, rattles on one table, concussion sticks on another, then demonstrated the sounds of each and let the kids choose the one that most appealed to them. At first they were tentative, almost fearful. But the sight of me, acting crazier than any of them, beating on my hoop drum and making animal yells and obviously having a hell of a good time, overcame their resistance. Within five minutes we were a percussion orchestra; within fifteen minutes we'd entrained. Just a brief linking up, but they all felt it, because they all stopped and looked around bewildered. It was amazing to watch. They went from noisy ecstasy back to their old condition in seconds. They no longer trusted the instruments.

(Hart 236)

In the context of Attali's argument about music, order, and power, these responses take on additional significance. They each represent a partial awareness of the flip-sides of rhythm, entrainment, and "organization" in general.
One side is communal action, group identification, collective strength. The other is Attali's sense of music as power, a top-down form of control, Taylorism, Foucault's "discipline":

What the ordinance of 1776 defines is not a time-table—the general framework for an activity; it is rather a collective and obligatory rhythm, imposed from the outside; it is a "programme"; it assures the elaboration of the act itself; it controls its development and its stages from the inside. We have passed from a form of injunction that measured or punctuated gestures to a web that constrains them or sustains them through their entire succession. A sort of anatomico-chronological schema of behavior is defined. The act is broken down into its elements: the position of the body, limbs, articulations is defined; to each movement are assigned a direction, an aptitude, a duration; their order of succession is prescribed. Time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power.

(Foucault, Discipline 152; emphasis added)

Time is not simply set up as a structure, as in a time-table. In discipline, as with Charlie, time invests the body through rhythm and entrainment. What remains to be elaborated is what sense of time, what kind of rhythm.

Taylorism and Fordism: rhythm and the control of production

In his historical analysis of the changing sense of time required by industrial capitalism, E. P. Thompson distinguishes "task orientation" from "timed labor." Under task orientation, typical in many pre-industrial contexts, the rhythms of work appear to be "natural," motivated by observed necessities: twice-daily milking, ploughing, harvesting, and so on. However, when someone is employed to do these same tasks the attitude toward labor under the task orientation appears wasteful. With wage labor, time becomes money: having purchased the labor power of a worker, the employer becomes interested in transforming labor power into actual labor.

Moved into the context of industrial capitalism, this interest in transforming purchased labor power into labor becomes intensified. Richard Edwards identifies this interest as the primary motivation behind capitalist moves to control the workplace, transforming it into a "contested terrain." Henry Ford nicely summarized the position of the capitalist: "The idea is that a man must not be hurried in his work—he must have every second necessary but not a single unnecessary second" (82). As Foucault puts it, "Time measured and paid must also be a time without impurities or defects... Precision and application, are, with regularity, the fundamental virtues of disciplinary time" (Discipline 151). Labor needs to be squeezed of all its potential and fit into the rhythms of industrial production—rhythms relatively divorced from the seasons, weather, traditional holidays, drinking patterns, blood sugar levels—rhythms "without impurities or defects."

Bernard Doray, in his study of Taylorism and Fordism in France, traces the disciplinary technologies utilized to achieve this efficiency and regularity. Initially, upon gathering workers together in manufactories to appropriate their labor, the attempts to regulate work rhythms were of the order of Foucault's "time-tables," external programs arbitrarily imposed upon the workday and enforced with fines or other punishments. These programs took the form of establishing the length of the workday, the times work would begin and end, and fines to be levied for particular violations.

The table system represents an important leap in the disciplinary technologies related to the control of work rhythms. Previously, the production process had remained fairly compact or unified—in other words, a worker could generally carry through with most if not all the steps in production and hence still be connected with the results of their labor. The table system was the first step in fragmenting production. The production process is divided among, for example, 10 workers sitting along a table. Each worker completes one or a small series of operations and passes the materials to the next person until the product is complete. The work could now be synchronized: the differentiation of tasks allows for the equivalence (non-differentiation) of time. This enhances the ability of foremen to multitask problems in the workforce, in that a person who worked too slowly could easily be identified and the output of two or more "tables" could be directly compared. However, the table system shares with the previous "time-table" approach the means of enforcement: penalties by the employer or their agents. The enforcement of the rhythms of work is still personalized and therefore readily perceived as arbitrary in its judgments and exercise.

As with the table system, Taylorism instrumentalizes the worker and fragments the production process. The core of Taylorism is not the infamous time and motion studies per se, but the divorce of knowledge from practice. Throughout The Principles of Scientific Management, Taylor bemoans the fact that most tasks were done according to "rules of thumb" passed down from one generation of workers to another and further developed through the individual worker's experience. "Practically in no instance have they been codified or systematically analyzed or described" (Taylor 32). Two assumptions enable the substitution of this "rule of thumb" knowledge with "scientific" knowledge. First, "there is always one method and one implement which is quicker and better than any of the rest" (Taylor 25)—Foucault's pure use of time. Second, no matter what the task—from handling pig iron to working with complex metalcutting machines—the worker best suited to carry out the task in practice is incapable of understanding the science behind the task. The purpose of time and motion studies is to make absolutely uniform the specifics of what is to be done, how the task is to be carried out, and how long each movement should take. Such uniformity would prevent
the ability of workers to get away with the intentional slowing of work—the “soldiering” which so incensed Taylor.

According to Edwards, however, Taylorism failed to accomplish the fundamental goal of the capitalist: the transformation of purchased labor power into labor. Workers continued to “soldier” and, quite simply, “fought [Taylorism] to a standstill” (103). Taylorism did, however, introduce the advantages of keeping knowledge about the production process out of the province of the workers, resulting in the continuation if not an increase in the fragmentation of labor processes under Fordism. As Ford himself put it, “The man who places the part does not fasten it... The man who puts in a bolt does not put on the nut; the man who puts on the nut does not tighten it” (83). The vast majority of work became unskilled and the complete alienation of the laborer from their labor was achieved.

Fordism advanced from the groundwork laid by Taylorism in several ways. For my purposes, however, a simple but accurate description is that Fordism is Taylorism with an assembly line (for more detailed accounts, see Doray, and Edwards). Taylorism rationalized the labor process and instrumentalized the worker’s body but failed to solve the control problem. The assembly line was needed to accomplish that. Doray explains that the table system imposed a uniform discipline on workers yet remained “an expression of living labor”: work originated from the workers, and them alone, albeit under the constraints of punitive discipline.

With the mechanized assembly line, matters are very different. Its pace is set in advance, and it is external to the workers: it is an expression of a machine-system. From this point of view, the line is far from being an automated handling device; it is part of a homogeneous system, and a means of incorporating the activity of men into that of machines.

An assembly line “gears” living labor to its own rhythms and those rhythms are uniform. Workers must not only work as fast as the line; restrictions on their workspace and movements means that they must also work as slow as the line—only one pace is allowed.

Power and control are thus transferred from the supervisor to the line itself. Social violence is displaced into the technological field:

The line established a technological presumption in favor of the line’s work pace. Struggle between workers and bosses over the transformation of labor power into labor was no longer a simple and direct personal confrontation; now the conflict was mediated by the production technology itself. Workers had to oppose the pace of the line, not the (direct) tyranny of their bosses.

(Edwards 118)

RHYTHM AND THE PERFORMANCE OF ORGANIZATION

The means of control is no longer personal but structural, technical. The rhythmic control of production has been ratified by its materialization in the machine. Time-tables are obsolete, redundant because “power was made invisible in the structure of the work” (Edwards 110). The worker—at least the part of the body involved in production—is objectified. The machine “infiltrates the space-time of living labour, refits it, and incorporates it into its own system” (Doray 82). With the assembly line, the cyborg as a productive entity is born. Machinic, rhythmic uniformity has been achieved. The worker either operates within the rhythm of the line or is replaced.

Attali argues that musical forms will correspond with the larger social order and, in particular, the dominant mode of production. The parallel between the rise of capitalism and the movement of music out of the community and religious ritual and into concerts, in which music became both a commodity to be purchased and a spectacle to be observed by a passive audience, was no historical accident. Similarly, practically simultaneous with the first use of the assembly line were the beginnings of the mass distribution of recorded (i.e., uniform, commodified) music and the initial experiments with “functional music” to increase factory production.

If rhythm can be used to create collective, coordinated action, it can be used to impose such coordination, as with Taylorism and Fordism. However, if specific rhythms can be used to impose order onto bodies, to discipline them, alternative rhythms can be anti-disciplinary. Music and rhythm can disrupt, propose an alternative order. In the 1920s, during the heyday of Fordism and the early years of functional music, jazz was being attacked as an evil influence, a cause of crime, suicide, nervousness, and “canibalistic rhythmic orgies.” It was African, barbaric, animalistic, even the result of a communist plot to undermine Christian civilization. “It tends to unseat reason and set passion free” (Anon., qtd. in Merriam 243). A different rhythm—that is, a rhythm from a different rhythmic sensibility, a different form of order and social organization—has a profound effect on the body. Hence, the attacks on jazz (and, later, rock and roll) as “jungle music,” as too overtly sexual. In short, they were too rhythmic—that is, they had the wrong kind of rhythm, they performed the wrong kind of bodily organization.

Jazz and rock originated, at least partially, from antagonistic elements within a highly stratified and heterogeneous social formation (L. Jones). Because they arose from the experiences of Africans forcibly brought to North America and contained traces of African music and spirituality, the music and dance of jazz and rock were embodiments of “theories of the flesh” (Madison) alien to mainstream Euro-Americans. However, having developed within an American context and drawn from European musical traditions, jazz and rock were not simply “alien” expressions, but manifestations and enactments of a struggle over the forms of organization by which the energies of bodies would be channeled. Rhythm and music, therefore, became primary sites of social struggle. For example, Euro-Americans appropriated
African-American forms of dance, such as the (fluid, horizontal, sensual) Lindy Hop, and disciplined them, resulting in a dance like the (jerky, vertical, rigid) Jitterbug. These rhythmic forms were performances of conflictual organizations in North American industrial society (Cleaver). Music and dance were sites for a dialogue, both antagonistic and cooperative, between Euro-American and African-American theories of the flesh: that is, between different epistemologies, rhythmic sensibilities, forms of order and organization.

Order and rhythmic sensibilities: West African polyrhythms

One culture’s rhythm is another’s noise. A culture’s rhythms—which are not limited to “music” in the narrow sense—are both representations and performances (enactments, completions) of that culture’s means of organization. Think of the dominant western conceptions and valuations of rhythm. Rhythm is composed of equally divided, discrete units of time. It must be counted evenly and the stress placed on the main beat. Audience members at, for example, a symphony performance must be very quiet, physically passive. The conductor, standing in front, directs the musicians, keeps the beat that everyone must “get with.” The percussion section is generally hidden in the rear and can spend much of the time quietly counting, flipping through pages and pages of pauses in anticipation of the ringing of the triangle, the clashing of the cymbals, the roll of the tympani. Harmony, after all, is far more important than rhythm. “It is the progression of sounds through a series of chords or tones that we recognize as beautiful” (Cernuff 42). Rhythm is merely a necessity, allowing the coordination needed for the “real” music to occur.

Confronted with the polyrhythms of West African music, many Europeans resort to phrases such as “completely incomprehensible,” “I would become lost and disoriented,” “syncopated past comprehension,” and “the music is so monotonously repetitive that it just dulls the senses.” John Cernuff’s analysis of African Rhythm and African Sensibility demonstrates the immense variability, not just in the speed and time-cycle of rhythms (e.g., 12/8 as opposed to 3/4 or 4/4), but of fundamentally different senses of rhythm and how they affect what it is possible to conceive of as “order.”

West African polyrhythmic music focuses on the complex interweaving of contrasting rhythmic patterns. These patterns often sound incomprehensible to western listeners who cannot identify what the rhythm is. There seems to be no main beat, which is confusing for a western sense of rhythm as a single, unifying force. African rhythms are not only multiple but incomplete, Cernuff argues. If it sounds like there is something missing it is because there is—the listener (usually a dancer) must maintain the missing rhythm that completes the polyrhythmic “tapestry.” The listener must be actively engaged in making sense of the music. You don’t keep the time, you complete it.

These African rhythms are not separate, discrete, independent entities; each rhythm defines the others. As a consequence, it is extremely difficult for any one musician to play their part unless the whole ensemble is playing. In this form of organization, rhythm is something to be responded to, not something “to get with.” In this sensibility, “time” is not a single, objective phenomenon as in western music and culture. “The establishment of multiple cross-rhythms as a background in almost all African music is what permits a stable base to seem fluid” (Cernuff 52). The listener in African music must become a participant (most commonly through dance), must be able to actively mediate the rhythms. “The music is perhaps best considered as an arrangement of gaps where one may add a rhythm, rather than as a dense pattern of sound. In the conflict of the rhythms, it is the space between the notes from which the dynamic tension comes” (113–114).

Cernuff also argues that this rhythmic sensibility is an enactment of a communal sensibility:

In the model of community presented in an African musical event, integrity is ideally a combination of diverse rhythms which must remain distinct, and the power of the music comes from the conflicts and conversations of the rhythms, from vivid contrasts and complementary movements. The music is judged in terms of the success of each performance, that is, by how well the formally established relationships of the rhythms are continually open to fresh and vital participation.

For example, according to Cernuff the best improvisations by “master drummers” in this tradition are designed to draw attention to other parts of the ensemble more than they seek to emphasize their own rhythmic lines. Style is a matter of communal integration as much as a highlighting of the individual. Whether Cernuff’s seemingly utopian model is an accurate description is of less concern (to me) than its ability to help in conceiving alternative ways of performing organization through different rhythmic sensibilities. If we can begin to imagine different types and functions of rhythm, perhaps we can imagine a different sense and/or valuation of order and different types of social organization.

These different rhythmic sensibilities, forms of organization, and senses of what constitutes order are inseparable from epistemological systems. To uncover the connections between the western rhythmic sensibility discussed above, the form of organization epitomized by Fordism, and the sense of order embodied in western epistemology, I turn to Nietzsche. Nietzsche distinguishes between the will to truth, which characterizes the dominant western epistemology since Plato, and the will to power.

The will to truth relies upon certain presuppositions; most importantly, it casts the world, objects and truths as both singular and stable—as self-identical beings. Aristotle’s principles form the basis for science and logic: A
Rhythm and consciousness

More than epistemology is involved here—mind and consciousness are implicated as well. Ethnomusicologists and others have long been interested in the connection between rhythm and consciousness. In many cultures (some claim all), rhythm, often produced with drums, is utilized as a tool to visit the spirit world, to journey, to trance, to heal—in short, to enter "non-ordinary" states of awareness. From the Dionysian rites to the healing ceremonies of the Kung, rhythm is used to alter consciousness.

At a physiological level, drumming can be heard as an "auditory driver." The ear is a direct receptor for the brain. Drums scatter sound across a wide range of frequencies, causing the sound to decay rather quickly. These short, sharp pulses spread across the spectrum of sound our ears pick up in a sense "overloading" the hearing mechanism and inducing trance by altering normal brainwave patterns: quite literally, brain wave patterns entwine with the external rhythms, altering the physiological foundation for conscious awareness (Neher).

These physiological approaches would seem to indicate that certain rhythms have an intrinsic ability to alter human consciousness in certain ways. However, Gilbert Rouget's cross-cultural study of Music and Trance, as well as the position on order I have been developing through Attali and Foucault, would indicate that the effects of certain rhythms would be culturally relative. This does not have to deny the role of physiology; however, biogenetic structuralism (Laughlin et al.) provides a framework for theorizing a close, interactive relationship between physiology, consciousness, and social forces (e.g., language and rhythm).

Biogenetic structuralism and neurophenomenology can be used to understand how the brain can be "cultural all the way down" (though not only cultural). Leonard Haves reviews these scientific understandings of the brain to demonstrate how cultural patterns are, literally, inscribed in our neural pathways. Early in the developmental process, the neurons in the brain are undifferentiated. Through cognitive development, some neural pathways are grooved and reinforced—canalized—through activity while others atrophy from lack of use. Hence, to take one example, language patterns (involving ventral neural patterns) become inscribed at the neurostructural level. Not coincidentally, biogenetic structuralism uses the term "entainment" to describe the process by which neurons link and combine into complex networks in response to environmental influences (Laughlin et al.).

Following this model, our bodies are entrained at the level of biology and consciousness into a particular set of orderings through the performance of organization, e.g., rhythmic patterns. Exposure to radically different performances of order and rhythm would seem to require alterations at the levels of both biology and consciousness. These alien orders would go against the grain, as it were, of the existing patterns of canalized synaptic pathways that form the neurological foundation for consciousness, perception, and experience. Laughlin et al. argue that a "model" (their term for a particular neurogenetic structure) can—within the constraints of the "genetic envelope" (hard-wired genetic limitations)—be reentrained, adapted to changing environmental conditions to become isomorphic with external stimuli. Hence, various levels of organization—from the cellular to the synaptic to the organismic to the social, from the biological to the phenomenological to the cultural—can be entrained, exhibiting varying degrees of isomorphism.

The parallels between descriptions of the neural system as "grooved," "hardened," "canalized" and Hart's description of "the groove drawing them in and hardening" can be attributed to coincidence, common cultural metaphors, or an interchange of metaphors between different discourses (e.g., science and music). Or they can be heard as isomorphic structural relationships between a social ritual of rhythmic entrainment and the entrainment of neural structures. Neurons become involved in hierarchy after hierarchy of neural networks and "these networks function as living organisms" (Laughlin et al. 52). These networks provide the foundations for human
subjects who, in turn, organize themselves socially. These organizations, to complete the bio-social dialectic, create stimuli that entrain, disenchant, and reentrain neural networks.

Rituals and other organized social activities can be used to alter consciousness through "autonomic driving"—a conditioning (entraining) and activation of "non-ordinary" neurological structures that provide the neurochemical basis for non-ordinary states of consciousness (Laughlin et al.). In African and Carribean possession cults, such as those found in Haiti, rhythm—produced by drums, bells, rattles, clapping and dancing—brings on the possession of the dancers by orishas, divine beings. The celebrants dance and as the possession begins, they begin to stumble. This period of uncoordination is understood as the transition phase between the human and divine states. In the terms of biogenetic structuralism, the neural pathways are being disentrained from their "ordinary" state and reentrained into their "non-ordinary" (i.e., divine) state. Both behavior and consciousness are thereby altered. The neurological model of "possession" is learned and remains dormant until activated through environmental stimuli—in this case, specific ritualistic rhythms. (Perhaps Chaplin intuited a similar process when he had the monopoly and increasing speed of the line drive Charlie "crazy.")

Similarly, Rodney Needham notes that percussion accompanies various transition events (rites of passage) in every known culture: birth, death, initiation, marriage, sacrifice, declaration of war, accession to office, harvest, etc. He hypothesized a connection between percussion and transition but had no explanation for the link. Biogenetic structuralism provides one such explanation: rhythm as a powerful tool for entrainment, transformation, reorganization. Rhythm inscribes itself onto our neural pathways. Cultural patterns are, often literally, drummed into our heads.

Knowledge, experience, consciousness, and identity are products of a dialectical interplay, in this case between neurological structures and various social and physical environments. At any point, a dialectic exists between existing models (neurological structures, the product of previous models and environmental factors) and the environment. This perspective recognizes the absolute importance of enculturation while also hearing the body as an active player in the process. The mind is not a blank slate passively inscribed with cultural patterns; and hard-wired, a priori biogenetic structures are not deterministic.

Implications

Rhythm is one important factor underlying or influencing, as well as connecting, social organization, epistemology, consciousness, and physiology. The socio-economic structures of a given social formation are embodied in and performed through various organizations—the family, the workplace, religion, ritual, entertainment, and so on. These organizations provide, impose, and produce order, one form of which is rhythmic (patterns through time). These rhythms become encoded in the pathways of the brain and nervous system. Neural pathways provide the biological basis for consciousness; the harnessing and repression (canalization) of the body’s drives constitutes the subject.

The dominant forces within any social formation will be imperfect in their entrainment of subjects for at least three reasons. First, they must contend not only with the limitations of the plasticity of human organisms but, if the body-society relationship is understood dialectically instead of as a simple determination, they must also engage in a constant struggle against the body and its drives as an active force. Second, in our complex—that is, multicultural, fragmented, stratified—society, subject-positions are over-determined, creating the possibility for gaps and contradictions in subjectivity. Subjects are entrained into a variety of rhythms which may not exist harmoniously, creating conflict, chaos or simply cancelling one another out like two offset wave patterns. Third, rhythm can be used as a counterhegemonic force, creating alternative pleasures, neurognostic structures, modes of consciousness and subjectivities.

Think, for example, of what may happen to a subject immersed in the rhythms of another culture. Mickey Hart recounts the effect of West African rhythms on European bodies in this way:

Just before enlisting I had discovered the music of Babatunde Olatunji, the Nigerian drummer who lives in New York. . . . Whenever I played this music at one of Raphael’s parties, the room would transform. It was as though the rhythm of the drum was calling something up from these sleek cosmopolitan bodies that had been asleep.

The performance of a different order produces a different subject and state of awareness. Energies, previously repressed or channeled toward certain ends, can be released and redirected. Hence the attacks on jazz and rock by the ideological allies of Fordism.

Consciousness is not only influenced by "non-ordinary" rhythms, such as those used in shamanic rituals for spiritual journeying, but by "everyday" (common sense) rhythms that are performed in any form of social organization (language, ritual, work, music, etc.). Why would the rhythms and breathing patterns of Western European choral music, the speech patterns of middle-class American English, or the 60 hertz cycle of overhead power lines affect consciousness any less than the African rhythms of Babatunde Olatunji affected Hart’s western friends? How can we not be cyborg-subjects (body-machine complexes) amidst ubiquitous mechanized and computerized environments?

Hearing rhythm as a form of discourse and an enactment of social organization carries with it a number of implications, most of which have not been
explored by the field of communication in general and performance and organizational studies in particular. First, opening our ears to rhythm challenges common understandings of what constitutes "organization," pointing to a wide range of divergent cultural forms, from machinery to conversation to music to the workplace, which utilize rhythm to produce a kind of order. Second, rhythm complicates and enhances our sense of the connections between organization and other elements of human life. In particular, the body must be accounted for as an active force and the mind/body distinction problematized on other than a purely philosophical level. Finally, rhythm holds potential for those interested in developing alternative forms of organization as well as making interventions in existing organizations.

Notes

1 As this definition of "organization" implies, and as will become evident in the range of examples in this essay, I use the term to encompass more than "formal" organizations such as the modern workplace.

2 My use of epistemology here builds off of its traditional sense as the study of knowledge. I am following Nietzsche's suggestion that an epistemology is not a description of how things are or of how we do things in fact but, "an imperative concerning what should count as true" (279).

3 I am trying to encompass many different ways of "ordering" the world, since a recognition of the fundamentally different senses of what constitutes "order" is at the heart of this essay. I recognize that these categories and oppositions are themselves products of my culture's sense of order, its epistemologies, and its means of organization.

4 Plato, for example, wrote in the Republic that "to change to a new kind of music is a thing we must beware of as risking the whole. For the methods of music cannot be stirred up without great upheavals of social custom and law" (222). As Rouget points out, Plato's "music" (musica) is a broader category than the word denotes for us. Its meanings can include art, science, song, or persuasive words, depending on the context. However, "music" in the narrower sense is certainly included in his use of the term in this passage, as indicated by the subsequent discussions of acceptable and unacceptable rhythms, instruments, etc. This can be heard as further support for rhythm's status as a form of discourse.

5 For a more comprehensive and contextualized analysis of this performative event, see Speer.

6 Taylor's repeated use of "rule of thumb" is interesting given one of the possible historical origins and ideological affiliations of the phrase. In 1866 the legal right of a husband to beat his wife was restricted, giving him the right to beat her "with a stick as large as his finger but not larger than his thumb" (Browne 167). While Taylor disparaged "rule-of-thumb methods" in the workplace, the lack of any irony in his use of the term is astounding given the historical proximity of its literal usage.

7 Chernoff recounts a legend about some African stevedores who used songs to accompany their work of loading and unloading ships. Upon encountering a machine used by westerners to assist in a similar task, they assumed the machine was the white man's music. Their perception was not the result of a primitive misunderstanding, a lack of awareness of western technology, but of their possession of a different awareness about the role and importance of rhythm in organization.

8 Tagg provides a specific example of this type of polyrhythm: a metric unit of 24 sub-beats "being consistently used to produce a complex of simultaneous metres like 3/8, 3/4, 3/4, 6/8, 4/4, 2/2, 2/2, 2/2 (and possible additive asymmetric subdivisions of these) on top of each other" (289). Keating provides a basic overview of African music that demonstrates how many compositions can and must be given a single meter, such as 12/8, while such an identification also disrupts an understanding of any individual rhythmic line. Keating, drawing on the work of Kwabena Nketia, argues for a single, basic rhythm in much African drumming, and thereby contradicts Chernoff's interpretation.

9 Interestingly, the English word "rhythm" can be traced directly to the Greek rhythmos, derived from rhein, meaning "to flow." This sense, however, has been overshadowed by notions of discrete units of time, regular variations between stressed and unstressed beats, etc.

10 Joni Jones's work on African theatre provides a useful complement to the rhythmic sensibility I am working with here. Her discussion of the importance of improvisation and the narrowing of the gap between (active) performers and (passive) observers not only parallels the model of community described by Chernoff, but serves as an illustration of how the enactment of such a sensibility might manifest itself. In the terms I use here, she works to enact an alternative form of organization, one which is closer to a community than it is to a singular and imposed totality. For example, her discussion of the implications of improvisational theatre for the notion of a single-authored, scripted text is a nice analog to the roles of the original score, conductor, and monorhythmic base in mainstream western music. A consequence of improvisation, as with polyrhythmic music, is the always open, incomplete, and participatory nature of both performance and community. Finally, Jones not only compares the two different models of theatre, but works through the difficulties and transformative possibilities involved in enacting an African form of organization in a North American context.

11 Chernoff's arguments are certainly open to challenge. Waterman, for example, in his study of contemporary musical forms among the Yoruba, makes clear that the hierarchical nature of Yoruba society is legitimated in their music—that multiple rhythms are a performance of communal inequality.

12 "Biogenetic structuralism" and "neurophenomenology" are names for an approach that integrates anthropology and phenomenology with the advances in the neurosciences in order to theorize the relationship between brain and culture. They emphasize that all experience is the product of cognitive processes and structures which are both physiological and cultural. These physiological and cultural structures do not simply interact, but actively form one another. In
particular, many of the proponents of these views have focused on the relationship between ritual and consciousness. I should note that Laughlin et al., while maintaining such a dialectical view, give much greater weight than I to hard-wired cognitive structures.

References


force in itself). In expanding the definition of production I mean to displace the opposition between the economic and the social, production and signification, exploitation and domination in order to emphasize that the relation between these processes is one of complicity rather than analogy. Specifically, I want to articulate a relationship between processes of capital accumulation and the various “new social movements,” often euphemistically referred to as “communities,” that have been understood to be responses to domination on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, or nation. I hope to account for the construction of communal formations that are simultaneously enactments of existing discourses and important movements for social change.

While Marx's texts can be used—I will use them—to stave off both economic and linguistic determinism, poststructuralism and Marxism have frequently arrayed themselves against each other to the detriment of each. According to Georg Lukács, and more recently Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, orthodox Marxist social analysis has been plagued by a tendency toward economic reductivism, determinism, one-dimensionality; in eschewing the play of signification, Marxism is simply unable to address the complexity of contemporary social formations. In its appreciation of signification, poststructuralism is very good at accounting for the complexity of cultural processes but tends not to give production its due as arguably the most powerful generator of signification and thus social organization. Anybody can make a meaning, but not anybody can give that meaning efficacy in the world. By articulating a performative theory of social relations with an analysis of the specific practices of production and consumption, expanding the notion of exploitation as I expand the notion of production, I gain the ability to analyze such systems of power difference while maintaining a vision of social and cultural complexity.

I posit Marx as a social constructionist—as offering a theory of the way people make themselves and their relations with each other. My reading of and modifications to Marx's theory intend to enable it to account for the social formations I care about—“new social movements” or “communities”—and not only for a binary class division. Therefore, I include as acts of making, as production, activities that go on outside the factory, the production of all sorts of things beyond traditional material objects, and even beyond the commodity—which has become, in any case, less and less material. I recoup the notion, present in Marx's early texts, of labor as all human doing and not just contributions to the gross national product. I use feminist arguments—for the productive value of reproduction, specifically, and for the recognition of values other than monetary exchange as the measure of productivity, more generally—as a basis for including supposedly unproductive acts such as nonprocreative sex, especially but not only the anonymous public sex which was so central in producing the urban gay male community in the 1970s and early 1980s. Likewise, I include in production

Introduction: production and performativity

The core of this essay offers a reading of several of Marx's central arguments, showing the continuity of production with signification and performativity. I bring the insights of poststructuralism with regard to the performativity, constructedness, and discursivity of identity together with a modified but nonetheless substantially Marxist view that social organization is implicit in the organization of production, broadly construed. The argument moves in two directions, showing the performative of production and the productivity of performance. On the one hand, I expand the definition of production to include a range of activities not normally considered production; on the other hand, I am concerned with the central role of corporate production and of products that flow through the marketplace in producing identity and community. At the conclusion of the essay, I shift focus from Marx's texts to a set of texts that argue an opposing view, that try to distinguish performativity from production. These antiproductivist theories see production as only reproductive, not dialectical or dynamic, and locate freedom and liberation (from production) in an exterior space, a representational excess frequently named performance. Through a critique of these texts I mean to point to what I hope will be a more useful emancipatory strategy, a strategy of participation.

My goal in expanding the definition of production, while attending to the broad effectiveness of production more narrowly construed, is to address the relationship between exploitation and domination, between the economic (narrowly conceived) and the social (which in a broader conception of the economic, such as that proposed by Marx, must be read as a productive
the voluntary as well as paid participation in nonprofit corporations that absorbs the bulk of political and cultural activism in the United States. Having recognized the diversity of production, I recognize the diversity of subjects produced therein. I emphasize that production produces not only workers but Americans, loyal and proud General Motors employees, women, and gays and lesbians.

In my reading, Marx's dialectical theory is a theory of a necessarily non-totalized society in which multiple articulations of the society contradict each other and yield new arrangements. The new in this story comes not from some external rationalized realm of emergent truth and freedom but from the constraints of the present. Reading Marx in this way allows me to construct a version of production that very nearly aligns with performativity as Judith Butler has elaborated it.

Butler invokes the speech act definition of "a performativity [as] that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names; performance does not enact preexisting meanings but rather constitutes meanings through action." She also employs the dramatic connotations of performance as "a stylized repetition of acts" witnessed and believed by an audience, a "reiterative and citational practice." Unlike speech act theory, which, as Butler and Mary Louise Pratt have both argued, tends to assume the existence of a "choosing and constituting subject," Butler uses the theatrical, witnessed aspect of performativity to shift focus and see "the social agent as an object rather than the subject of constitutive acts."

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler regularly defines performativity by emphasizing that it is "production" and not "consumerism." (By using the term *consumption* she invokes connotations of the liberal, individual, willing, choosing subject, whereas the term *consumption*, as I use it, is meant to suggest a subject constructed by that consumption.) Performance is exemplified not in the whimsical wearing of one drag, one set of clothes, one day and another drag the next, but rather in the punitively circumscribed enactment of gender roles. According to Butler, "the account of agency conditioned by those very regimes of discourse/power cannot be conflated with voluntarism or individualism, much less with consumerism." Kath Weston argues that understanding gender as a performance, as drag, focuses too much on the display of consumer goods such as clothing and not enough on gendered roles in relation to production, employment opportunities, and so on. But I would argue that, in Butler's theory, restricted and differentiated participation in production would be accounted for as one of the central performances that produces gendered subjects.

It is in the productive enactment of norms that the possibility or even the necessity of the production of innovation occurs—a potentially, though not by any means necessary, subversive change. Butler locates (oppositional) "agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power." The subject who would resist such [regulatory, constraining] norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Rather than thinking of production as a mechanical or rule-bound system of reproduction of sameness, what Butler calls *norms* might usefully be understood in Pierre Bourdieu's terms as "habitus, the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations," which are subject to an "art of performance" in order to be successively reproduced. The habitus may tend to reproduce itself, to produce "practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of the [habitus] itself, but there is plenty of room here for things to go other ways as well." The multidimensionality of the habitus, or the multiple articulations determining any given situation, creates contexts in which conflict, innovation, and change are frequently features of the production of social relations.

In taking up Marx's analysis of production, in expanding production to apply to a wide range of practices, and in interpreting production as a performatory practice, I hope, with Butler, to emphasize the opportunities for liberatory social change made available within production even while offering a critique of the constraints—often oppressive innovations rather than reservations—imposed by the mode of production.

### The relationship between production and social relations: discourse, materiality, and practice

In *The German Ideology* Marx argues that in general subjecthood and social relations are implicit in the production of the means of subsistence and in the needs that each new product brings into existence, which in turn generate new production. By emphasizing the production of new needs Marx makes it clear that he is not talking about some sort of biologically necessary material subsistence production but rather the production of whatever has come to seem necessary in a given society.

Marx's argument against the primacy of consciousness in producing society is not now cogently an argument about the immateriality of consciousness but rather an argument against claims for its independence or a priori status vis-à-vis the social. He insists on placing materiality in the determining role and makes consciousness its by-product specifically to tie consciousness to society, to the actions and practices that people engage in (and not to make a moral point about the importance of material survival over and above the life of the mind, nor a logical point reaffirming the mind-body split).

From the start the "spirit" is afflicted with the curse of being "burdened" with matter, which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, of language. Language is practical consciousness, that exists also for other men, and for
that reason alone it really exists for me personally as well... Con-
sciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product.15

Marx does not wield materiality against the claims of social construction but
rather in his arguments for it; materiality equates with human practice. Con-
sciousness, culture, religion, language, and politics are all social (in his sense
material) products. products of people making their world together through
their actions and interactions. Using materiality in this way to mean practice.
Marx makes it clear than materiality is inseparable from discourse. In the
passage quoted here, Marx argues that discourse is always already material.
Later, in discussing the commodity, I will show that Marx also argues that
materiality is always already discursive.

Marx argues that individual subjects are the simultaneous products of the
production of objects:

Production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of
the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form... of expressing their life. As individuals express their life so
they are.16

Not only is the individual's identity formed/expressed in production but the
collectivity, social relations, are also determined through the mode of pro-
duction.17 "There exists a materialistic connection of men with one another
which is determined by their needs and their mode of production." Division(s)
of labor are immediately social divisions as well as technical divisions, which
differentiate the interests of individuals from one another and create "cleavage
between the particular and the common interest."18

The implicitness of subjection and social relations in production might
seem to suggest an essentialist notion of identity and collectivity, in other
words, that identity and collectivity have one necessary (economic) deter-
nination; but that is true only if the objects being produced have a stable
essence, can be reduced to some singular identity or effectivity in relation to
which only one subjectivity redounds to the producer. While it is possible,
even typical, to read Marx in this manner—the teleological narrative in which
the theory is embedded certainly suggests that Marx read himself in that
way19—I think that that reading is reductive and specifically flatly outs the
dialectical analysis of social processes Marx offers.

Marx's theory of the simultaneity of material and social production (or
the multivalence of every productive act) can more interestingly be taken as a
phenomenological theory not unlike that of Butler, for whom you are what
you do, which is to say how you appear, through your actions in the world. In
this view, it is the potentially diverse performativity of productive activity
and of products that matters.
quantity of labor, because that quantity is dependent on the level to which productive forces have been developed in a given society (i.e., on how the thing was made), value also, in a sense, expresses the quality of labor involved. (It is, then, not only possible to show how use value is dependent on exchange value but, conversely, how exchange value folds back into material specificity as well.) The development of productive forces is based not only on some naturally increasing human ability but on the historically contingent need to control labor and labor’s resistance. Marx saw the production process itself as recast through the reinterpretation of it as a battle between classes, as opposed to, for instance, a competition among workers. So while abstract value is determined by concrete productive forces, those productive forces are again not some essential origin of meaning but rather a product of social practices and struggles.

Exchange value (as opposed to value, which is abstract labor in its abstract state) is the form of appearance of value in the particular language, the particular coin, of a particular society or at least of a specific transaction; an exchange value is so many dollars or yen or coats. It is therefore precisely a discursive articulation, a culturally and historically specific manifestation of value.

In examining all aspects of the commodity Marx makes it clear that what is being produced are meanings, that is, social values, things that perform in the context of social practices, for example, a consumption or an exchange. But how many practices or potential meanings did Marx take into consideration? While use value is potentially a wide-open category, Marx shows relatively little interest in its potential diversity; he is primarily interested in the use to which labor power in particular is put, how its use value produces surplus values. Marx’s discussion of surplus value—especially when that value appears in the form of profit or money and is used for private consumption rather than as capital—points to an array of social meanings and value distinct from a narrowly defined economic sphere but not independent or autonomous of it. In the 1844 Manuscripts, for instance, Marx describes the ability of monetary wealth to act as the equivalent of beauty, intelligence, physical capability, talent, morality, and so on.

Marx, however, doesn’t theorize these other values adequately; as many feminists have pointed out, by focusing, especially in Capital, on the use value of labor power and exchange value, Marx limits his analysis to a very narrowly drawn economic realm. He does this for a particular reason: to provide a basis for the revelation of exploitation through wage labor, which he sees as the primary form of oppression under capitalism. Exploitation depends on the interplay of use value and exchange value. (The use value of one day’s labor minus the exchange value of one day’s labor equals a quantity of surplus value.) But as has become widely apparent, exploitation has not displaced other forms of oppression; capitalism has in fact incorporated all sorts of other social hierarchies into its operations.

In order to account for the diversity of oppressions inhabiting capitalism, it is necessary to look beyond direct commodity production and beyond a dualistic analysis of value. (Marx’s work is not a letter here but merely underdeveloped.) In undertaking this task, feminists have analyzed the productive labor that goes outside the factory and monetary market contexts. Theorists of “consumer” society have analyzed the many other kinds of value besides use and exchange that travel with the commodity in its production, distribution, and consumption circuit; these theorists also recognize labor outside the factory which is done in great part by women though in fact must be done by everyone—the labor of consumption.

Feminists such as Christine Delphy and Marilyn Waring have observed that neither Marxist nor neoclassical economics manages to value (as products of socially necessary labor) or account for (in national economic statistics) large categories of goods and services that are central to the lives of people and, for that matter, to the functioning of capitalism: these categories include human reproduction, housework, subsistence farming, the environment, and volunteer work (generally for nonprofit organizations). They note that not only are these goods and services not recognized as values, but the producers, frequently women, are not recognized as valuable either. Government policies do not respond to the needs of these producers, who live in subordinate positions within families whose monetary market participants are its ranking members and public face.

The point of these feminist arguments is to suggest that gender oppression has a determining role in relation to the economy. Delphy, for instance, describes women in French peasant households who produce goods that cannot be distinguished from commodities—they may be brought to market or used at home—and who produce these goods not for a wage but in a sense for free, or for subsistence only. Delphy claims that these women can be considered slave labor, while husbands or fathers are petty bourgeois, trading goods in the marketplace. The distinctions here do not depend on the nature of the product/production but primarily on gender.

Rather than mark determination in one direction or another, I am interested in noticing that gendering occurs through productive practices, through the performance—the enactment, witnessed and inscribed monetarily or not—of production, understood to include these nonmonetarized activities. What is important in this analysis for me is the fact that the goods and services and the producers of those goods and services share an evaluation that articulates neither use in any narrow sense, nor labor time, nor exchange value, but rather discourses of gender, of public and private, of the monetary and nonmonetary. The marking of gender depends on one’s role in relation to production and even specifically to capitalism. Social divisions and gendered individual and collective subjectivities do not have some independent preexisting life but are fully immanent in (produced by and productive of) this productive activity.
The feminist arguments that nonmarket activities, such as reproduction, are production open the possibility (with which these feminists were not particularly concerned) for a huge range of private, social activities to be considered production. If child socialization or heterosexual sexual activity (inscribed as monetarily valuable productive practices only in the demimondes of paid child care and prostitution) can be recognized by these feminist arguments as valuable labor, then gay sex is also certainly analyzable as a valuable, productive act: productive of relationships, identities, communities, and social spaces. The anonymity and randomness of gay male sexual activity at certain points in gay history seem to me techniques that produce an imaginary expanse of identification, not unlike the newspaper in Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities. This sexual activity has defined and claimed a variety of public places—certain streets, blocks, and parks, as well as bars and bathhouses—as gay communal space.

This social production feeds almost immediately back into production in the narrower sense of monetary surplus value production. Donna Haraway has said that "the body is an accumulation strategy," a point that David Harvey has elaborated in his recent work, exploring the construction of the body as variable capital through the sites of production, exchange, and consumption. However, the strategic production of specific but diverse bodies as capital requires the complicacy of discourses not normally named production. As Janet Jakobsen puts it, with reference to Weber's "Protestant ethic," the realm of values (i.e., religion, culture, and domination in the form of "family values") enters—at the site of the body—the supposedly value-free realm of value, the economic. I would simply add here that not only are individual bodies an accumulation strategy and thus the site of this values-laden production process, but social bodies, social formations, families, and communities are also accumulation strategies.

But one needn't look outside commodity production for the production of values other than use and exchange and thus of subjects other than wage-laborer and capitalist. The importance of social production for economic production is evident in the elaborate efforts made by capitalists to influence identity and community structures. While some feminists argue that Marxism has failed to give adequate attention to something going on simultaneously with, but external to, direct commodity production (i.e., reproduction), theorists of consumer culture make a more historical argument, suggesting that capitalism itself has changed, that the nature of the products being produced has changed, and that what is significant about the products has changed.

Jean Baudrillard and others have described a shift to a stage of capitalism in which profit depends not on the production process, or the exploitation of labor, but rather on the control of consumer desire through advertising, through control of "the code," the entire symbolic order. Frederic Jameson argues that the production of culture "has become integrated into commodity production generally" because it has such a significant role to play in the production of innovative commodities, so that "cultural production has become an arena of fierce social conflict" and there is a "new role for aesthetic definitions and interventions." But as I see it, the issue here is not so much the commodification of discourse, of media, art, and information, but the discursiveness of the commodity.

Baudrillard notes that the status or identity-conferring quality of the commodity is not manufactured in the factory but rather in the consumption process. Thus it is control over consumptive rather than productive labor (through advertising or, less overtly, through cultural products like television programs rather than through time clocks and shop floor managers) that is important to the production of surplus value. The labor of the consumer contributes the greater share of surplus value, an unlimited share since it is based on signification and not on human labor capacity within the twenty-four-hour day.

The status-, identity-, and community-conferring aspects of a commodity might be seen as part of its use value, or in another view as part of its exchange value, in the sense that the commodity is traded in a marketplace of status, identity, or community (a market that is not merely metaphorically related to the commodity market but is crucially enabling to it). To view it in either of these ways raises questions about the distinction between use value and exchange value. Exchange looks like just another possible use for a commodity or all uses look like exchanges in the sense that a commodity (an expression of value) is being invested (used for exchange) to produce a given result, which result will then be turned around and invested again to turn another profit of some sort. The problem with this conflation of use and exchange value is that, while it conforms to Marx's definition of exchange value as a socially determined value abstracted from the particulars of the object, it doesn't conform to his definition of exchange value as an abstraction of labor, unless labor is redefined to include sign production. This redefinition of labor puts the appropriating consumer on a theoretical par with the factory worker, the so-called producer. Marx recognized this consumptive labor in the Grundrisse:

The product only obtains its "last finish" in consumption. A railway on which no trains run, hence which is not used up, not consumed, is a railway only [potentially], and not in reality... Consumption produces production... because a product becomes a real product only by being consumed... the product, unlike a mere natural object, proves itself to be, becomes, a product only through consumption... only as object for the active subject.

Marx, however, also recognized that the identity of production and consumption that one could arrive at theoretically was merely theoretical identity,
based on seeing a society as a singular subject. Once seen as the activity of many individuals, production and consumption are clearly separated by distribution; "the producer's relation to the product, once the latter is finished, is an external one, and its return to the subject depends on his relation to other individuals." So while the expansion of production to include consumption is crucial, it is also important to note that production is a differentiated process.

"Consumptive" labor is productive, but it is organized very differently than "productive" labor: it is not organized, procured, or exploited as wage labor. In expanding production to include women's work, private activity, and signification or performance, the definition of the technology of oppression, what Marx called exploitation, also must be expanded.

First of all, exploitation must be distinguished from appropriation, a term that has been used to accuse dominant groups of taking and profiting from cultural forms that belong to some subordinate group. As Amy Robinson argues, the logic of appropriation reinvokes and relies on a discourse of private property, which is precisely the discourse that functions to separate subordinate groups from social goods. According to Marx, exploitation is not appropriation; it is not the taking of property that properly belongs to someone else. One should be able to enjoy seeing someone else make good use of the product of one's labor, and in Marx's view, one would if one did not see that someone as Other, if one recognized one's communal relation to that Other. The wage labor system is technically fair: the full exchange value of the labor is paid to the laborer. As Marx argues in "The Critique of the Gotha Program," its exploitativeness would not be cured by increasing the portion of goods distributed to the direct producer; the direct producer would still be exploited because he would still not have control of the means of production. He would still be controlled by the capitalist Other; he would still be in competition with other workers and would still be subject to a division of labor that divided his particular interest from the general interest. The key to exploitation, then, is that it is a practice participated in by both the dominant and subordinate parties for the apparently voluntary (and thus value-free, unjudgable) transfer of power to the dominant party.

How does this work when applied to consumption? Consumptive labor is procured and exploited through active subjection in the expression of needs, desires, self, identity, and community; as producers seem to freely sell their labor, consumers freely choose and purchase their commodities. The exploitation occurs insofar as by freely choosing, consumers contribute to the accumulation of capital—and thus to the power of the owners of the means of production—and enact the cultural and social formations in which their choices are embedded but which they do not control. The consumer's free choice is constrained and productive of further constraints. Status, for example, as Bourdieu recognizes, is not only a consequence of specific economic factors, factors that limit or enable a variety of social performances such as the purchase of status-conferring commodities, but is a moment in a trajectory. Status itself opens or shuts off economic opportunity, jobs, education, and social access.

As conditions of productive labor are the site of struggle between worker and capitalist, so the conditions and implications of consumptive labor have been the site of struggle. A body of work in the field of cultural studies has attended to the deployment of mass products in particular or innovative ways in the elaboration of the subcultural community identity. But the redeployment of such commnal images by the corporate producers of the commodities has also been notable.

The problem with the Gapification of gay culture, or with the incorporation of hip hop into sneaker ads, is not that someone has stolen a cultural form that properly belongs to one group but that corporate appropriation of the given form or style makes it at least in part alien to and against those who generated it. Queer Nation, for instance, felt that it had to "out" the Gap for its use of gay celebrities and styles. As Lauren Berland and Elizabeth Freeman explain,

The New York Gap series changes the final P in the logo of stylish ads featuring gay, bisexual and suspiciously polymorphous celebrities to a Y... the reconstructed billboards... address the company's policy of using gay style to sell clothes without acknowledging debts to gay street style.

In speaking of "debts," Berland and Freeman suggest that Queer Nation is objecting to appropriation, as if gays had property in the styles they developed by deploying mass culture products such as blue jeans and white T-shirts. But if the question of exploitation is more a question of control than one of acknowledgment or debt, then the issue here is what social relations are advanced when gays and lesbians purchase their jeans, white T-shirts, and leather jackets in the first place. And in analyzing the reappropriation of the style by Gap, one wonders whether gay people are empowered, their articulation of society promoted along with the particular clothing items, or whether the existence of gays and lesbians is erased or cloistered.

And, while hijacking the corporate means of production of the discursive value of commodities can be a powerful intervention, participation in discursive production can also be "conciliatory, [in the] mode of, for instance, [Marshall] Kirk and [Hunter] Madsen's plan to market 'positive' (read 'tolerable') gay images to straight culture." In either case, the very differentiation that communities may seek to enact with their consumptive production may not be external to or oppositional to capitalist production but may very well be the elaboration of its own necessarily increasingly dense articulations of difference, of niches, and of communities of consumers and producers.
Capitalism produces multidimensional social relations

Out of the multivalence of the commodity Marx draws a dynamic and multidimensional social space. He describes a historical evolution of social relations toward individuation and universalization, a dialectical relation between simultaneous and contradictory articulations of social relations, and a discursive process through which social movements, a class conscious of itself, may be constituted.

The evolving relation of capitalism to community

In both The German Ideology and Capital Marx writes at length on the process of the progressive reformation of society under capitalism, which breaks down existing communities and communal forms, freeing (and obliging) individuals to sell their labor and to be refunctioned as necessary for the capitalist development of productive forces. He notes that

big industry . . . destroy[ed] the former natural exclusiveness of separate nations . . . and resolved all natural relations into money relations. In the place of naturally grown towns it created the modern, large industrial cities which have sprung up overnight. 41

Ultimately, this turns out to be a good thing: the conditions have been created so that under communism individuals are free to act according to their desires in relation to a “universal,” “world-historical” human association, unimpeded by locality or relations of hierarchy, dependence, or dominance.

Only then will the separate individuals be liberated from the various national and local barriers, be brought into practical connection with the material and intellectual production of the whole world and be put in a position to acquire the capacity to enjoy this all-sided production of the whole earth (the creation of man). 42

Unlike many late-twentieth-century leftists, Marx is not nostalgic for older communal forms; describing the extraordinarily destructive effects of the introduction of industrial technology and capitalist logic by the British in India, he writes,

We must not forget that these idyllic village communities . . . restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. . . . these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man to be the sovereign of circumstances. 43

Likewise, after discussing the fact that the English Parliament had finally decided to regulate the economic exploitation of children by their parents and thus destroy the traditional rights of parents over their children, Marx argues:

However terrible and disgusting the dissolution, under the capitalist system, of the old family ties might appear, nevertheless, modern industry, by assigning as it does an important part in the process of production, outside the domestic sphere, to women, to young persons, to children of both sexes, creates a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of relations between the sexes. 44

The positive opportunities provided by the disintegrative effects of the development of capitalism have been noted by feminist and gay historians, who have shown how industrialization freed women from parental authority and allowed gay people to congregate in urban centers outside the reach of the patriarchal and communal situations from which they had come. This research does not suggest that capitalism, in dissolving communities, left people “alienated” but rather that it enabled them to create communities on new (and in their accounts more voluntary) grounds. 45 However, as I began to argue earlier, these new communities also serve an evolving capitalism in particular ways.

The dissolution of local and idiosyncratic communities coincided with the process of corporation building, culminating in Fordism, 46 which involved the rationalization and massification both of production processes (the Taylorization of work processes, the introduction of assembly lines) and of consumption (the family wage and the eight-hour day were meant to encourage workers to consume the products they made). As Alan Trachtenberg argues, this massing of capital and of labor also tended to articulate a relatively obvious and simple division between workers and capitalists. 47 This simplicity was factually complicated by the vast class of managers, professionals, and so on necessary to make these corporations run. And, as Harvey points out, Fordism created a class of relatively privileged white male (if often immigrant) workers and underclasses of African Americans, Asians, and women. 48 Nonetheless, I would guess that Trachtenberg is correct to the extent that the ideology of work was likely dominated by factory production. However, corporations have for a long time been sites of complex subject construction, a complexity that cuts against such simple binary oppositions. This corporate subject construction has become more obvious in the recent
shift away from Fordist mass production and toward what has been called post-Fordism or flexible accumulation. Harvey dates from approximately 1973 the breakup of “Fordist-Keynesian” configurations of political-economic power and a shift to “new systems of production and marketing, characterized by more flexible labour processes and markets . . . geographical mobility and rapid shifts in consumption practices.” He argues that, starting in the 1970s,

technological change, automation, the search for new product lines and market niches, geographical dispersal to zones of easier labor control, mergers and steps to accelerate the turnover time of their capital surged to the fore of corporate strategies for survival.59

According to Harvey, the merging of massive multinational corporations has come to depend on diverse communally structured production and consumption. The proliferation of corporate strategies to promote rather than suppress diversity, ranging from affirmative action to diverse representation on television, operates to stabilize, not disrupt, the system.60

Niche marketing and the shift from durable goods to services and media have been the popularly recognized aspects of flexible accumulation. So there has been, for instance, a proliferation of long-distance telephone services that operate under the sign of some particular community, in some cases claiming to contribute some part of their income to organizations promoting the interests of that community. I am aware, for instance, of services claiming identification with progressive causes in general, women, Latinos, gays/lesbians, and Christian conservatives. Over the last few years, the American Family Association has sent out several direct mailings promoting the “Lifeline” long-distance service. One such mailing read in part,

Dear Friend,

It is not my intent to make you feel guilty, but I thought you would want to know: If you are a customer of AT&T, MCI or Sprint, you are helping promote the immoral, anti-family causes that the American Family Association has been fighting for 17 years . . .

The good news is that there is a way to fight back—and help AFA at the same time . . . Lifeline is deeply committed to helping Christian ministries like AFA.

In 1994, AT&T tried to fight back by target-marketing gays and lesbians with a direct mail campaign. The packet they sent out included a lavender and rainbow-colored brochure—colors widely used to signify gay culture and “gay pride”—featuring pictures of gay couples, and gay people with, or talking on the phone to, their parents. These images were accompanied by the slogans “Let Your True Voice Be Heard” and “It’s Time for a Change.” This packet also included a fact sheet on the history of AT&T’s gay employees association. What is being sold is not so much phone service as participation in a given community.

But post-Fordist flexible accumulation dramatically shifts the structures of production as well as consumption. One of the principal trends of corporate capitalist activity has been the relocation of hard-core industrial production away from more "developed" regions and into formerly less industrialized areas where labor is cheaper and regulations are fewer.61 This trend creates a new relationship between labor and capital in developed areas such as the United States. Workers are articulated as being in competition with workers elsewhere in the world, both those employed by the same company and those employed by other companies. The corporation can claim that the other companies will use cheaper foreign labor to put this company out of business, which will be bad for these workers too. (And in fact such competition has even been fomented between workers in different regions of the United States.)62 Corporations use this situation to elicit a cooperative approach to collective bargaining (that is, to gain concessions), to encourage a sense of investment on the part of the workers in the profitability of the company, which the company backs up with more or less token profit sharing and management sharing. Both nationalist and corporate-identifier discourses can be and tend to be articulated in this process.63

Interestingly, these efforts to articulate worker and company interests as coincident come precisely at the moment in which worker loyalty is profoundly threatened by the increasingly evident lack of loyalty on the part of the corporation toward its employees. Not only are corporations willing to move plants overseas; they are also busy down-sizing and outsourcing, replacing full-time, benefited workers with part-time, temporary labor. Jobs that once seemed to carry lifetime tenure are now vulnerable to the latest economic news. Michael Moore’s documentary film Roger and Me (1990) bemoans precisely this loss of a sense of company loyalty, as well as the loss of actual jobs, among General Motors (GM) workers in Flint, Michigan, who were subject to a seemingly endless series of plant closures in the 1980s. In its own public relations efforts, a series of full-page ads in the New York Times (probably not the paper most frequently read by GM workers), GM displaces responsibility for loyalty onto the worker. Workers are articulated as participants rather than merely wage laborers in that corporation; and as participants, they are shown identifying with the corporation. This vision of a unified corporation, within which workers have a home, runs counter to the actual effects of outsourcing, which distances workers from the large corporation and situates them in local/communal employment.

Outsourcing and subcontracting to small businesses means that production can be organized in diverse ways; “permitting older systems of domestic, artisanal, familial (patrilineal), and patrilineal (god-father, 'gov'nor,' or even mafia-like) labour systems to revive and flourish.”64 It is in the interest of large corporations acting as market coordinators to encourage culturally
distinct small and diverse groups to coalesce and incorporate. I would suggest that the shift away from mass rationalization opens the way not only for older kinship structures to rehabit production but for newer social groupings to inhabit the corporation, to manifest themselves as a corporation. The diversity of groups useful as niche market consumers can turn around and understand themselves, assert themselves, as producers. Various communities—gay, racial, ethnic/immigrant, religious, and so on—make perfectly good corporate-productive rubrics; so Korean markets, lesbian auto repair shops, Indian gas stations, “minority-owned” (African American) engineering and construction firms, and Asian American sweatshops are examples of production and distribution sites that facilitate the flow of capital by organizing themselves on the basis of, and thus producing, the community with which the business is identified. They become the site and structure through which the community enacts its very existence.

The dialectical dynamics of social formations
So while the disintegrative process of individuation occurs, new communal formations are simultaneously constituted. Marx focuses on the marketplace and the bourgeois “liberal” state as sites of new (if alienated) community. What are the relations between these multiple and divergent articulations of social relations?

Marx argues that under capitalism, the realms of production (construed as manufacturing) and exchange (the marketplace) appear to be independent of each other.

Accompanied by Mr. Moneybags and by the possessor of labour-power, we therefore take leave for a time of this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in view of all men, and follow both into the hidden abode of production... this sphere that we are deserting, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour-power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham.

On leaving this sphere of simple circulation or of exchange of commodities... we think we can perceive a change in the physiognomy of our dramatic personae. He, who before was the money owner, now strikes in front as capitalist; the possessor of labour-power follows as his labourer. The one with an air of importance, smirking, intent on business; the other, timid and holding back, like one who is bringing his own hide to market and has nothing to expect but—a hiding.35

In drawing production narrowly and representing these two realms as independent, Marx is here—dripping with irony—showing capitalism as it sees itself. Within capitalism, the inequities of production appear to be limited to the factory and appear not to determine (or be determined by) social relations, which appear to be free. It is precisely the implication of the realm of exchange in production that Marx needs to argue for in Capital. To say this another way, Marx is here making an argument much like the one I wish to make for the complicity of production in a narrow sense (manufacturing in this quote, the production of monetary surplus value in my argument) with production in a broader sense (the whole social organization of production, exchange, and consumption).

Marx characterizes the ideological process that makes the marketplace and the state appear independent of production as fetishism. Fetishism is a two-step process: first the subject objectifies itself in some way, through some product; then this product is alienated, that is, it appears to have, in fact does have, an independent life and acts as a power over the producer. The commodity is a fetish in that the value of the commodity in exchange (i.e., its relations with other things) seems to inhere in it and seems not to be a product of the producer. This results from the fact that the commodity’s value is social; it is only as a product of the whole society’s productive abilities and relations that the particular commodity gets its value; its value is not due to the actions of the individual producer alone. But the producer thinks he is producing the product by himself and isn’t aware of his relations with others in the society (or at least that is how Marx’s story goes). “A definite social relation between men... assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.”36

I would suggest that many social formations might be analyzed on the model of fetishism: communities created through production (through labor or participation) appear to be independent, organic entities over and against the subjects who produced them. This is true for identity-based groups in two ways. First of all, the participation and activism of group members is erased if groups appear as ongoing, self-generating, or eternal entities. Second, because of their supposedly organic nature, ethnic-, national-, or identity-based communal formations are frequently articulated as providing an alternative to the alienated realm of production; in other words, they are understood as independent of the larger social relations of production within which they are situated. As Marx says, civil society (his term for the realm of production when contrasted with the state rather than with the market) seems by contrast with the fetishized communality of the state to be a realm of “atomistic, antagonistic individuals,”37 when in fact civil society is where people enact their mutual dependence and have their real relations. Likewise, I would suggest that while civil society appears to be a realm of organic and independent communities, it is in fact where these communities are constituted through their interdependent productive practices.

Marx’s analysis of fetishism might make it seem that the market (or state) is merely the ideological projection of the production process, in which the
equality and interdependence of people that ought to exist and be explicitly acknowledged have become the equivalence and interchangeability of things (or citizens). But as he analyzes the interdependence of these two realms it becomes clear that the relation between these two spheres is not a relation of unidirectional determination in which the reality of production determines the ideological marketplace. They coexist and support each other: the marketplace is the realm of individuality and apparent free choice through which individuals freely enter into exploitative (productive) relations. Surplus value cannot be generated without the interplay of the two processes.

In addition, production and exchange yield two very different and equally consequential visions of the world. While the production realm yields an articulation of class subordination, the marketplace and the state provide any situation with alternative potential articulations: the discourses of rights and of nation are salient examples. The realm of production and the marketplace exceed each other: civil society and the state exceed each other and come to be antagonistic, dialectical, dynamic forces. It may be that only in combination with rights discourse can class subordination be articulated as class conflict. And the inequality of the production process makes the enactment of equality in exchange impossible; people's ability to participate in the market can become extremely limited, thus creating a segment of the population that does not buy the discourse of equality. Both views of social relations are equally real, and although they are both necessary for the realization of capital they are not structurally stable or coherent. They are in a relation of antagonism as well as co-production, in which, as two very different articulations of society, they generate social change.

The discursive production of an oppositional movement

Marx elaborates a third theory of social relations (counting the evolutionary and dialectical as the first two) in describing the development of the revolutionary proletariat. This class is produced through a process of (practical) consciousness raising based on participation, first in production and then in resistance.

The co-operation of the wage labourers is entirely brought about by the capital that employs them. Their union into one single productive body and the establishment of a connexion between their individual functions, are matters foreign and external to them, are not their own act, but the act of capital that brings and keeps them together. [56]

The transformation of this collectivity from working for capital to working for itself, ultimately in the production of goods but immediately as a revolutionary force, is a lengthy process.

The story told here can be read in a couple of different ways. It can be and has been read as a story of essentialism and determinism—of real material conditions (as some real essence or truth) producing a necessary result. Or it can be seen as describing and rhetorically promoting a process of consciousness raising, in which people both within and without the given class must witness, narrate, or practically inscribe—not necessarily verbally—the conditions and collectivity of the class in order for the class to form as a self-conscious actor. Marx's description of the evolution of the revolutionary class from geographically local rebellion to a worldwide revolution, through means of communication supplemented by "experience" of collectively taken actions and "political and general education," suggests that at each crucial turn it is the discursive/practical inscription of experience through in the appropriation (learning, education, enactment) of existing forms and methods of collective action (i.e., political parties) that allows the movement to grow.

The textual locus for the argument I am making about the discursive formation of classes in Marx is usually the 18th Bruntins, and especially its discussion of the lumpenproletariat. Marx sees the proletariat forming through "rubbing together in the factory," which is why he does not see a revolutionary role for the lumpenproletariat, a diverse and dispersed mass (not quite a class and not producers). The lumpenproletariat have not been brought together into a productive collectivity, which they can then reappropriate or narrate for new ends; they lack the prior connection within the realm of production that would support an economic determinist theory of their functioning as a coherent class. As Peter Stallybrass explains, "The lumpen seems to figure less a class in any sense that one usually understands than a
group that is amenable to political articulation.” The lumpenproletariat is constituted as a class by and for Bonaparte’s performance of political hegemony. Marx’s presentation of “Bonapartism... opens up the domain of politics and the state as something other than a reflection.”63 It is not clear that Marx was ready to recognize the full import of the discursive, participatory, performative process of class formation that he describes. Its full import is that capitalist societies are not split along one single axis but rather generate collectivities that align or agonize on many incoherent, unassimilable fronts. As noted in the previous section, while Marx’s theory offers a glimpse of the multidimensional dynamics of social formation, he limits his view to the process of monetary exchange and therefore misses the relevance of other sites of production to the process of exploitation.

Because of these limitations in Marx’s texts (and later orthodox Marxisms) many theorists have rejected his analysis altogether, finding a source of subjectivity and social relations outside of production. While I argue that the innovations and elaborations of contemporary capitalist production, especially when taken to include activities outside the factory, to include consumption can be analyzed as the site of a great diversity of social relations, others have chosen instead to reject productivism as a mode of analysis and look elsewhere. Laclau and Mouffe and Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis see the discourse of rights rather than the discourse of class as the more potent force for social change, as able to both generate and coordinate, into a unified counterhegemonic formation, various “new social movements.”64 My own argument is that this is not so much of a break with Marx as Laclau makes it out to be and that the discourse of rights appears within a productivist analysis. However, accounting for rights discourse is not enough. It is the particular diversity of collectivities and conflicts that really needs to be accounted for. I want now to turn to theories that account for heterogeneity by locating it outside of production, by opposing production and performance, production and liberation.

A queer interlude—performativity: productive or antiproducative?

There is a line of argument running from the Frankfurt school to some recent queer theory that attempts to account for the diversity of social movements, the diversity of axes of antagonism, by positing an exterior to production: these critiques posit production as creating a “one-dimensional,” rationalized, homogenized, and hegemonized society, and they look for expressions of heterogeneous—notting “free”—human intelligence, spirit, imagination, and sexuality to break through the discipline of production. “The heterogeneous includes everything ‘resulting from unproductive expenditure,’ everything that ‘homogeneous’ society defines as ‘waste’ or that it is ‘powerless to assimilate.’”65 In this view, the unproductive, equated with the heterogeneous, is celebrated as having a liberatory potential. The association of homogeneity with hegemony is a false one, as my arguments about the importance of diversity to contemporary capitalism demonstrate, it but is pervasive in the line of theorizing I am addressing. The current version of this critique can be found in scattered assertions of the “heteronormativity” of production (meaning not that it is based on or produces heterogeneous norms, but just the opposite, that it is based on and reproduces the hegemonic homogenizing norm of heterosexuality), and in celebrations of heterogeneity, homosexuality, and theatricality as subversive of dominant discourses.

In “Unthinking Sex,” Andrew Parker weaves together the various threads of contemporary arguments that characterize unproductivity, performativity, and homosexuality as heterogeneous and thus liberatory practices.66 His weaving technique is that of suggestive slippages, of metonymic associations: he states that Marx’s notion of productivity is modeled on procreation67 and that, citing the Marx-Engels correspondence, Marx sees homosexuality as an act ("lumpy"), wasteful, and thus unproductive.68 Parker argues that Marx sees homosexuality as a mere recirculation (rather than production) of goods, adding no value,69 such as goes on amid the lumpenproletariat, the scum, the heterogeneous, metonymically associated mass. Parker further associates this lumpensexuality with theatricality, with the parody of production,70 he claims that, in the 18th Brumaire, Marx criticizes the French political scene a a “farce,” because politics seems to have lost its realist representational relationship to class divisions, that is, to production.71 While a link between performance and unproductiveness can be found in Marx (and Adam Smith), who claimed that theatricality, like all service work, was unproductive in a technical sense because “it vanishes in the very instant of its production,” it is clear that such vanishing products are precisely what contemporary capitalism thrives on. And there is another reading of the 18th Brumaire that shows that Marx recognized the political productivity of Louis Bonaparte’s farcical performance.72

Parker claims that he is doing something different, in generating this chain of verbal associations that ultimately connects homosexuality (very narrowly evoked as male-male anal penetration and a queeey theatricality) with unproductiveness, from prior Marxist (Frankfurt school) dealings with sex, which see natural sexuality as repressed under capitalism (i.e., a regime of productivism). But Parker’s rhetoric, which condemns Marx for his (indisputable) homophobia and his (highly disputable) anti-theatricalism, enacts a very similar move: it seems also to condemn production and productivism. It’s just that it is Marx’s productivism rather than capitalist production that is doing the repressing of subversive sexuality.

Associations between homosexuality and heterogeneous, free, subversive, unproductive unproductivity are well established in the earlier Frankfurt school theory to which Parker refers. In The Dialectic of Enlightenment, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno elaborate the view that capitalist
production has colonized more and more of an otherwise free human life or spirit, including knowledge, cultural production, and leisure time, mobilizing all of these aspects of life according to a rational logic of performance—in the administrative sense of job performance, measured according to the needs of capitalist production. In *Eros and Civilization*, Herbert Marcuse works out this same analysis of capitalist rationalization in relation to sexuality. Marcuse argues that "the performance principle" is "the prevailing historical form of the reality principle," as defined by Freud, is the conformation of man's drive for pleasure to the social and natural realities in which he finds himself. Marcuse:

We designate it as the performance principle in order to emphasize that under its rule society is stratified according to the competitive economic performances of its members. Men do not live their own lives but perform pre-established functions. Libido is diverted for socially useful performances. His erotic performance is brought into line with his societal performance.31

"The perversions thus express rebellion against the institutions which guarantee this order."32 It is interesting that the term performance here has none of the liberatory connotations that it takes on in contemporary queer theory. My point is that heterogeneity, undeformed human nature expressed through homosexuality, is posited as external to production. However, because of the extensive reach of this regime of production, that "outside" is very difficult to find. Adorno suggests that evidence of this nature or spirit or psyche can only be found in relatively private artistic expression such as lyric poetry.

In *The Mirror of Production*, Baudrillard, like Parker, develops this critique of the totalizing and repressive nature of production in the direction of Marx, arguing that like the political economists, Marx celebrates production and thus does not expose the way in which man is alienated by being identified with his labor power (and not just by the sale of that labor power).33 It is not the organization of production (which he very narrowly imagines as wage labor) but the system of meaning that values only production that is oppressive in Baudrillard's analysis.

According to Baudrillard, freedom is to be found not, as Marx would suggest, through production (i.e., through binary class conflict), but through subversion of the code by diverse oppressed groups: ethnic minorities, women, youth, sexual perverts. Revolution must involve heterogeneous expression, wasteful gift exchange (pure expenditure rather than accumulation, final consumption rather than productive consumption), and nonproductive sex. (I'll just note again that contemporary capitalism uses final consumption to make room for more production.)

For Baudrillard the exteriority from which this heterogeneous expression can occur is a product of the system itself.

THE PERFORMANCE OF PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

Subversion is born there, an elsewhere... Segregated, discriminated against, satellitized—[youth, blacks, women] are gradually relegated to a position of non-marked terms by the structuring of the system as a code.36

And yet Baudrillard does ascribe a peculiar freedom to this forced exteriorization: the "unmarked" are able to rebel against the code rather than demanding equality within the terms of the code, so these groups would seem to have some source of subjecthood other than their exclusionary construction by the code. My question is what that source might be.

The link between performance and unproductiveness found in contemporary queer theory such as that of Parker and Peggy Phelan, whose work I will address shortly, is made by constructing two analogies: first between representation and production, and second between political and symbolic representation. As Spivak points out, the structure of analogy is problematic here, producing a conflation of the two forms of representation which erases their complicity. Cultural representation, she says, has the structure of subject predication, while political representation relies on "rhetoric-as-persuasion." It is the work of critique to see when these two things work together, when hegemonizing political representation "behaves like" subject predication. In erasing this complicity, Spivak argues, the analogy obscures discontinuities within the subject and defers that subject to a space of silent unrepresentability.37 In the analogic model, representation is understood as a (re)productive technology operating within the symbolic. The falsity, the insufficiency, oppressiveness, and homogenizing character of any realist (political or cultural) representation of a social group is emphasized, based on (post)structuralist arguments against the referentiality of the signifier (this is to go no further than Baudrillard), and theatricality is promoted as a nonrealist and thus a less hegemonized, repressive, possessable, co-optable form of signification. A Brechtian sort of performance is singled out for praise here: a performance that announces its own constructedness and thus disrupts the realist truth claims of productive/representational hegemony. Parker and Stallybrass focus on Marx's discussions of farce and parody. Peggy Phelan talks about performance that includes "the marked reproduction of the real production" (i.e., representations of things used to make the artwork are included in the work itself).38

These theorists disagree about what antirealist theatricality makes possible. Parker seems to suggest that it is the free play of signification. Stallybrass is interested in giving the political relative freedom from economic determination, making available diverse forms and sites for social protest and political activity. Phelan and Baudrillard, however, suggest that theatricality frees political subjects from representation altogether and thus offers access to the (supposedly) inaccessible (Lacanian) Real. Brecht did not see his work as antirealist but rather antinaturalist—in disrupting the illusion of reality it
revealed the real reality—and Phelan likewise believes in the possibility of a performance that really exposes the Real.

In Unmarked, Phelan celebrates the political potential of the invisible, which she claims is relatively free, as against the co-opted, predetermined, preassimilated visibility that identity-based political movements make the mistake of endlessly striving for. Her argument makes Baudrillard’s Lacanian formulation explicit. In her terms, “the code” is “the Symbolic,” and that which is unmarked, or unrepresented, exists as the unappropriated Real, “full being itself . . . forever impossible to realize within the frame of the symbolic.”

Phelan’s argument depends on splitting the world into two levels. Unlike Marx’s levels, the marketplace and production, which are dialectically agonistic articulations, equally real and equally constructed, Phelan’s levels are ranked, with false and oppressive representation standing against the good but unrepresentable reality. The Real that is being (mis)represented, both excessively and inadequately, is a truth, an origin, a guarantor of some sort. For her and for Baudrillard this Real is the source of unratified subjectivity. It is the locus of liberatory exteriority.

Phelan sets up a dichotomy that is very similar to that proffered by the Frankfurt school theorists: on the one hand a totalizing homogenizing production system and on the other the liberatory un(re) productive, named here “performance.”

Performance, insofar as it can be defined as representation without reproduction, can be seen as a model for another representational economy, one in which the reproduction of the other as the Same is not assured.

Performance eviscerates the smooth machinery of reproductive representation necessary to the circulation of capital . . . . Live performance . . . disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control.

The notion that performance is unproductive because it is live, because it is produced and consumed in the same moment, because it is not a material commodity (even while, as the Real, it is in the structural position of pure materiality, unmediated by discourse) is, as I think I’ve made clear by now, simply wrong. Performance is just as well able to bear value (use, exchange, surplus, status) and to produce subjects and social formations as any material commodity, arguably better able: “the commodification of images of the most ephemeral sort would seem to be a godsend from the standpoint of capital accumulation.”

In order to claim that performance resists exchange value, or equivalence, and thereby approaches the unrepresentable Real itself, Phelan discounts the work of the audience; their productive consumption of the work, their act of witness, is for her the mere memory of something presented by someone else.

She can not recognize the audience’s consumption as production, for then it would not offer the escape from regulation and control that she seeks. In losing the audience, though, she loses the theatrical aspect of the artwork’s performativity (both its reiterative and witnessed, and therefore social, aspects) and is left with the speech act connotations (that it enacts that which it names). As Mary Louise Pratt points out, by focusing on “excessively private” dyadic examples of communication, speech act theory loses the ability to recognize “people always speak from and in a socially constituted position . . . in which the subject and context mutually determine each other ongoingly.” Performance, for Phelan, appears to be the act of a fully constituted subject, a subject thus unavailable for articulation with a liberatory collectivity and unable itself to articulate resistance.

Conclusion

The reading of Marx I have suggested works against the view that production would produce a totalized society and against the view that representation or production would ever be reproduction of the same. But I am also very doubtful of the existence of some sort of heterogeneous exteriority to production from which subversion might come. Butler, using Lacan’s formulation of social dynamics as antagonistic articulations, argues that what appears to be exterior, to be “the Real,” what can bring one particular social formation into crisis, is actually just another discursive schema. As Parker correctly points out, it is impossible to repeat after Foucault . . . a story of how a natural or potentially liberatory sexuality has been set upon, repressed, commodified or otherwise constrained by the institutions of capitalism: as if sexuality were not already institutional, existing only in historically sedimented forms and discourses.

Likewise Stallybrass, citing George Bataille, to describe a Marxian view, argues that “social heterogeneity does not exist in a formless and disoriented state, but is itself structured through its relation to the dominant homogeneous forces.”

What Lacan’s and Butler’s arguments, circumscribing subversion within signification and social relations (making it a product of sociality), mean to me is that critique needs to continue to focus on production. But what all the theorists I have reviewed here have made clear is that critique of production needs to look at sign production as well as material production, at the performativity of production, at the circulation of social formations as well as at goods. From Marcuse through Baudrillard to Phelan, concern shifts from production as a rationalizing system to the Lacanian Symbolic and its reproductive capacity as the system by which subjects are operationalized.
In place of this shift, my own argument intends to put production and significature into a necessary relation with each other and not posit the political economy of the sign as superseding political economy. Attending to the productivity of performance, Baudrillard and the Frankfurt school theorists argue that sign production primarily functions in the service of capitalism (they just also think it can have an independent existence) and that capitalism mobilizes, enforces, and materializes discursively articulated social divisions. Attending to the performative of production, a Butlerian reading of Marx makes possible to recognize the opportunities as well as the constraints available within production.

Notes

There is no adequate way to acknowledge Russell Berman's contribution to my ability and desire to think through these issues; it was made over the course of many years of respectful but challenging conversation and argument. This paper is the fortuitous result of the fact that in the spring of 1994 two fabulous reading groups just happened to be going on at Stanford University, one on Butler's Bodies That Matter and the other on Marx. I would like to thank all the members of those groups for their insights but especially Regina Gagnier for facilitating the Marx group, Eric Schiess for being my principal interlocutor on Marx, and Morris Kaplan, who made the Butler group happen. I am very grateful for the tremendous work Marcia Klotz, Lee Medovoy, and Ben Robinson put into the initial formulation of this essay. More recent conversations with Janet Jakobsen have been crucial to my finally "getting it" about exploitation and domination. Sallie Marston has offered excellent editorial suggestions. And I would like to thank Neil Smith and others on the Social Text editorial board for pushing me to clarify the relation between economic production in a narrow sense and social production in the broadest sense.


5 Butler, Bodies, 2.


7 She frequently substitutes the word production for construction in this book, again as a way of emphasizing constraint against connotations of voluntarism. The term production appears many, many times throughout the text, generally in lists of phrases attempting to generate the particular version of social construction she has in mind; materialization is another important term for her.

8 Butler, Bodies, 2. Cindy Patton ("Tremble, Hetero Swine," in Fear of a Queer Planet, ed. Michael Warner [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993]) also recognizes that the performative nature of identity means not that one is free to be any identity but rather that to achieve identity one is constrained to follow its rules: "Identities suture those who take them up to specific moral duties. Identities carry with them a requirement to act, which is felt as 'what a person like me does.'" (147).

9 Butler, Bodies, x.

10 Ibid., 15.


12 Butler, Bodies, 15.


14 Ibid., 78.

15 Karl Marx, The German Ideology, in The Marx-Engels Reader, 2d ed., ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 158. I use the Tucker anthology as the source for all Marx quotations except those taken from the Grundrisse. Tucker was used most often in the classes and reading groups in which I first read Marx, so these are the translations that determined my interpretations of Marx. In comparing Tucker's version with the Ben Fowkes translation of Capital, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1977), I have found Fowkes's language simply less lively, so I have stuck with Tucker.

16 Marx, German Ideology, 150.

17 Ibid., 157.

18 Ibid., 160.

19 Thanks to Russell Berman for this insight.


22 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics [London: Verso, 1985]) make this point: "Since the worker is capable of social practices, he could resist the imposed control mechanisms and force the capitalist to use different techniques. Thus, it is not a pure logic of capital which determines the evolution of the labour process, the latter is not merely the place where capital exerts its domination, but the ground of struggle" (79).

23 Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, has described not use or exchange value in the Marxian sense, but status or what he calls the "distinction" value of the commodity, arguing that commodities are consumed and traded with the goal of accumulating "cultural capital" (Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984]). Both of these approaches create a lot of trouble for the use/exchange value binary and thus for the analysis of exploitation, which I will have to rework to accommodate this expansion of the purview of production.

and the rush to convert those innovations to commercial advantage” (Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 289).

As Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman (“Queer Nationality,” *boundary 2* 19 [1992]: 149–80) point out, the Gap has, for many years, done a prominent advertising campaign using gay celebrities and gay styles to sell its clothing to straight people.

Ibid., 168.


Marx, *German Ideology*, 185.

Ibid., 163–64.


Marx, *Capital*, 415.


Criminated is probably the wrong word here, as the evolution from post-Civil War robber baron capitalism to post-World War II Fordism was not a continuous or necessary process and was shaped by intense and violent labor struggles and by the Great Depression, which instigated a dramatic restructuring of labor-capital relations. Martyn J. Lee accounts for the shift from pre-Fordism to Fordism as a shift from an extensive to an intensive mode of accumulation. See his *Consumer Culture Reborn: The Cultural Politics of Consumption* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 73–74.

Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), esp. 70–100.

Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 138.

Ibid., 124, 145.

I have gleaned a general characterization of post-Fordism and flexible accumulation from Harvey’s *Condition of Postmodernity*. His characterization of changes in the location and composition of commodity production is reinterpreted by Lee in *Consumer Culture Reborn*, which is unsurprising since both rely on “regulation school” theorists, principally: Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The U.S. Experience* (London: Verso, 1987); Scott Lash and John Urry, *The End of Organized Capital* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987); and Michael J. Piore and Charles F. Sabel, *The Second Industrial Divide: Possibilities for Prosperity* (New York: Basic, 1984). There are disputes over the extent to which, as “core” developed countries have actually deindustrialized, the extent to which services and information have replaced durable commodities, and the extent to which mass production has been replaced by small-scale batch production. Paul Krugman makes an argument against the dominance of deindustrialization in particular (“Fantasy Economics,” *New York Times*, 26 September 1994, A15, and *Peddling Prosperity* [New York: Norton, 1994]). And Lee acknowledges that “the argument that the sort of mass production/mass-consumption economy which dominated the post-war years is now in rapid decline simply does not stand up to empirical scrutiny” (111). Harvey and Lee both dismiss the concerns of the doubters by noting that while these changes may not be statistically significant, they are an increasing trend and have already come to dominate the ideology, the discursive construction of capitalism; certainly this info-service-niche-marketed capitalism is the image of capitalism being promoted throughout the popular media. What this ideological, if not
statistical, dominance means that the social relations implied by these new forms of production probably exceed and motivate the implementation of these forms.

51 Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 147.

52 An article in the *New York Times* about the strike, over outsourcing, at one General Motors parts plant in Anderson, Indiana, reported, “Local [union] officials are heavily influenced by the national leadership, but their re-election depends on how well they serve their small constituencies. That of some of the outsourcing GM wanted to do at Anderson involved sending work to other GM plants, and the local union leadership is interested in the declining number of jobs in their community” (James Bennet, “*Job Cuts and Grassroots*,” *New York Times*, 17 August 1994, natl. ed., A17, 19). Harvey points to the fact that towns and cities act in an entrepreneurial mode, competing with each other for tax base by going to great lengths to get businesses to settle within their borders (*Condition of Postmodernity*, 171).

53 My sources for this characterization of labor-capital relations are (1) the recent debate over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which I absorbed through media representations (primarily the *New York Times* and National Public Radio); and, more important, (2) informal interviews with my father, who, as a labor lawyer for AT&T, participated in AT&T’s triannual national collective bargaining. During the 1992 bargaining process, he gave me a patient and thoughtful lesson in how AT&T, which sees itself as a progressive leader and innovator in business practices, viewed the claims of labor unions—as regressive, not in the modern world—and in the various rhetorical and financial techniques AT&T brought to bear to get the unions to get with the program (diversifying, outsourcing, etc.). Prominent among these were (1) discussions of competition facing the company; (2) stock as part of wages; (3) less hierarchical shop floor management; and (4) outplacement, education, and retraining programs.

54 Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 152.


56 It is not clear to me that people are as unknowing as Marx suggests. As Slavoj Žižek argues, we all act as if we did not know, which is effectively as good as a lack of awareness (The Sublime Object of Ideology [London: Verso, 1989], 31).


61 Ibid., 91.


65 On this point, see Hannah Arendt (*The Human Condition*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959), who makes a rather different antiproductivist argument based on the notion that production is the realm of necessity and that what is truly human is the political realm purged of all necessity. She makes a further distinction between the repetitive labor of reproduction and the production of works of art, which is neither truly unproductive nor mere animalistic existence.

66 As I noted earlier, Marx does not count hetero-sexual reproduction as production per se. In fact, he seems to feel, not unlike Marilyn Waring (*If Women Counted*, 286), that the insertion of sexual relations in market terms is a corruption of what should be valued on its own distinct terms (1844 *Manuscripts*, 105). But I am not here particularly interested in Marx’s views of hetero- or homosexuality except to the extent that, as Parker argues, they form a metaphorical basis for his analysis of production and unproductivity, respectively.

67 Ibid., 25.

68 Parker relies heavily on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in his argument here, citing her assertion of the tie between self-display and sexuality in the nineteenth century (straight men do not engage in self-display). Separately, in explicitly antihomophobic projects she does engage in celebrations of heterogeneity: for instance, *Epistemologies of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) begins with an elaboration of the sheer variety of possible sexual preferences (and possible definitions of sexual preference), all of which have been condensed into the binary homo vs. hetero; and *Tendencies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993) begins with an attempt to separate out the diverse pieces of identity that have all been condensed into gender. However, I am not sure that Sedgwick ties heterogeneity, theatricality, and homosexuality to an anti-productivist stance as Parker suggests, since she also claims to be fascinated with the productivity of performativity—the ability of the speech act to produce the reality it describes.

69 While Stallybrass uses the 18th Béarnaise to locate in Marx a recognition of the importance of the political (a representational or discursive realm with some independence from economic determinism), Parker focuses on Marx’s condemnation of this independence and thus finds Marx in a self-contradiction, rejecting performative, discursive, and rhetorical strategies even while he uses them. I am not sure what the point is of catching Marx in this self-contradiction: it seems to me more politically useful to see Marx recognizing and offering a useful strategy than to posit Marx as the enemy and to throw out, along with Marx’s clear and repugnant homophobia—which Parker has very valuably uncovered—his very potent analysis of social production and change.

70 Stallybrass, “Marx and Heterogeneity,” 87.

71 Lyotard uses the term *performativity* in this sense.

72 Marcuse, *Eros*, 32.

73 Ibid., 40–42.

74 Ibid., 45.


76 Ibid., 131–35.


79 Because Phelan’s mode of articulation is primarily Lacanian she is interested in reproduction, both in the sense of culture, the Symbolic, and in the sense of procreation and women’s roles therein (explicitly giving homosexuality an especially unproductive role) (Phelan, *Unmarked*, 135–36).

80 Ibid., 3.
Phelan and Baubillard might argue that in looking to representational excess for liberation they are precisely not looking to exteriority, but I find the term excess rather mystical and misleading, yet another invocation of the emergence of something out of nothing.

The role that Phelan gives to performance is not far from the role Theodor Adorno (“Lyric Poetry and Society,” Telos 20 [summer 1974]: 56–71) sets out for lyric poetry: both are expressions of that unformed human spirit I referred to earlier. However, in both cases this role is so clearly demarcated by the realm of the produced, the formed, that one can read the quality of the formed world by the nature of the protest of this unformed subjectivity.

Phelan, Unmarked, 3.

Ibid., 148.

Harvey, Postmodernity, 288.

Phelan does recognize that the notion that performance does not produce something of a fantasy. She is aware that her own work for instance turns performance into production: “Writing about it necessarily cancels the ‘tracelessness’ inaugurated within this performative process” (Unmarked, 149).

She cites in this context J. L. Austin’s discussion of performative utterances and specifically focuses on the promise (ibid., 149). Pratt specifically cites the focus on the promise as a tip-off to the assumption of the intentional a priori subject underlying the theory (“Ideology and Speech Act Theory,” 62).


In “Praxis and Performativity” (Women and Performance 8 [1996]: 265–73), Andrew Parker offers a critique of Marjorie's appeal to praxis as appeals to a Real that is prior to a mediated secondary superstructure of consciousness and representation. He suggests that a theory of performativity makes a radical break with this theory of praxis because it does not distinguish between these two levels. He proposes that the two might be brought together by reading performativity as constitutive of praxis, especially of the dialectical efficacy of praxis that produces “representations presumably alien to its own essential structure” (271). While I would have to argue with the presumption of alienness, in as much as that presumption is attributed to Marxism, I find Parker’s argument for locating performativity as constitutive of whatever is presented as the Real—be it praxis, use value, performance, or homoexitual and useful.

Stallybrand, “Marx and Heterogeneity,” 81. He is citing Bataille, “Psychological Structure of Fascism,” 140.

In thinking about performance in relation to American law, I choose to focus on copyright and the law of evidence because these branches of jurisprudence address that relationship most immediately. Copyright governs the ownership and circulation of cultural objects and therefore determines the conditions under which performance participates in a commodity economy. As such, it is the branch of jurisprudence that deals most directly with the status of performance in the law. Evidence law regulates “the proof used to persuade on fact questions at the trial of a lawsuit” (Rotstein 1981:1); it therefore sets conditions that regulate the conduct of trials as performances of the law. I want here to survey statutes and decisions that shed light on both performance’s status in the law and the nature of legal proceedings as performance. Although copyright and evidence are separate areas of law, considering them in relation to performance reveals that memory is a thematic common to both, perhaps the central thematic of law generally. Using the thematic of memory as a pivot point, my analysis moves from a consideration of performance in relation to copyright to a discussion of what the rules of evidence tell us about legal proceedings as performance. In so doing, it also moves from considering performance primarily in terms of cultural economy to questions that touch on what Peggy Phelan calls “the ontology of performance” (1993: 146–66).

In order to be protected under Title 17 of the United States Code, otherwise known as the 1976 Copyright Act, a work must be “fixed in a tangible medium of expression” that renders it replicable (that is what copyright means, after all). The definition of “creation” in Title 17 reflects this requirement: “A work is created when it is fixed in a copy […]for the first time” (sec. 101).

As far as copyright law is concerned, a work exists legally only insofar as it has been copied; if a work has not been reproduced, it has not yet been created. There are no “originals” under copyright law: “The term ‘copies’ includes the material object […] in which the work is first fixed” (sec. 101).
With Title 17, we have entered the realm of Baudrillard's simulacrum: every copyrightable work is always already a reproduction of itself.

Title 17 is also a work of performance theory. Historically, copyright law has refused to grant to performance the status of intellectual property. The Copyright Clause of the United States Constitution (Article I, section 8, clause 8) grants to Congress the power to secure "to Authors [...] the exclusive Right to their respective Writings [...]." Although Congress and the courts have shown themselves, over the years, to be willing to construe the concept of a "Writing" quite broadly as "any physical rendering of the fruits of creative, intellectual or aesthetic labor" (Goldstein v. California [1973] as quoted in Miller and Davis 1990: 304), they have never granted that status to "intangible expression," which is to say, performed expression.²

The copyright statute's definition of fixation states that "a work is 'fixed' [...] when its embodiment [...] is sufficiently permanent or stable to permit it to be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated for a period of more than transitory duration" (sec. 101). Live performance, which exists only in the transitory present moment, is therefore excluded. Similarly, the statutory definition of "publication" states explicitly that inasmuch as "publication" is the distribution of copies [...] of a work to the public [...] a public performance or display of a work does not of itself constitute publication" (sec. 101).² Both definitions reflect the fundamental purpose of copyright, which is to regulate the ownership and circulation of cultural objects. Although Title 17 specifically mentions "choreographic works" as one type of protectable work of authorship (see. 102a), this is true only for choreographic works that have been notated or otherwise recorded. A dance that exists only as a live performance or a speech that was presented to an audience but never written down or recorded cannot be copyrighted (Miller and Davis 1990: 303). A performance that exists for no more than a transitory period cannot be owned and is therefore neither a publication nor protectable under copyright.

The hazards the concept of fixation creates for performance are illustrated by the much publicized case of BrightTunes Music Corp. v. Harrisons Music, Ltd. (420 F. Supp. 177 [1976]), in which former Beatle George Harrison was sued for copyright infringement because of the strong resemblance of his song "My Sweet Lord" to the earlier song "He's So Fine." The question of whether the two songs are "substantially similar" (the legal standard for infringement) hinged in part on the presence of a "unique grace note" in Harrison's song that had also appeared in the earlier piece. As the judge recounts in his decision, this grace note appears on the first recording of Harrison's song, made by Billy Preston, and on the sheet music prepared from that recording, but not on Harrison's own, much better-known recording of the sheet music derived from it (180). Even though it is likely that the success of Harrison's own recording of the song was what prompted the suit (following the principle that "Where there's a hit, there's a writ"), the judge took the first fixation of the song, Preston's recording, to be the object under scrutiny. According to Harrison's testimony, the presence or absence of that particular note on Preston's recording was attributable to accident: "[Billy Preston] might have put that there on every take, but it just might have been on one take, or he might have varied it on different takes at different places" (181). It was Harrison's misfortune that the particular take on which the sheet music deposited for U.S. copyright was based included the inerminating note. According to the judge, Harrison himself takes a performative view of music: he "regards his song as that which he sings at the particular moment he is singing it and not something that is written on a piece of paper" (180). Copyright, however, acknowledges only fixed texts, not intangible performances. The result in the Harrison case was that one moment of performance, frozen in textual form, became the song "My Sweet Lord" in the eyes of the law.

The copyright statute's refusal to recognize performance as intellectual property has been articulated broadly in the statutory concept of fixation and in terms of specific performance genres through case law. Writing in 1950, one appellate judge observed that "There is a line of cases which holds that what we may call generically by the French word representation,—which means to perform, act, impersonate, characterize, and is broader than the corresponding English word,—is not copyrightable [...]" (Supreme Records v. Decca Records [90 F. Supp. 904 (1950), 909]. Until a 1971 amendment to the law, for example, sound recordings were uncopyrightable because they were considered, in the words of a 1912 decision, "captured performances" (Gaines 1991: 131; 270 n.80). Supreme Records applies this doctrine to theatrical performance: "the mere portrayal of a character by an actor in a play which is the creation of another is not of itself an independent creation" and therefore cannot enjoy copyright protection (908). The most often cited reason why copyright protection does not apply to performance is that to grant a performer exclusive rights to particular performed gestures or intonations would severely limit the vocabulary available to other performers and thus "impede rather than promote the useful arts" (Booth v. Colgate-Palmolive [1973] as quoted in Gaines 1991: 124). If such a right of ownership in performance existed, "We would have to hold that Mr. Charles Laughton, for instance, could claim the right to forbid anyone else from imitating his creative mannerisms in his famous characterization of Henry VIII, or Sir Laurence Olivier could prohibit anyone else from adopting some of the innovations which he brought to the performance of Hamlet" (Supreme Records, Inc. v. Decca Records, Inc., 909; see also note 7 below).

This view of performance is not universal among American legal thinkers. Cheryl Hodson, for example, argues that as the expression of an idea, performance could qualify as a "writing" in the expanded sense of that concept accepted by copyright. Unlike the Supreme Records court, Hodson also feels that a performer's interpretation of a text (a song or a role) can be isolated
from the text itself and deserves recognition as a writing (1978: 569–72). As Hodgson acknowledges, however, the United States Congress has never seen fit to recognize performance as protectable under copyright. From the point of view of the copyright statute as it stands, performances are not writings or structuralism notwithstanding and, as French legal scholar Robert Homburg puts it, a "performer is not an author" (as quoted in Gaines 1991: 135).

_Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc. v. DeCotta_ (377 F. 2d 315 [1967]) is a good case to examine in this context because it offers a particularly clear illustration of the legal status of live performance. Victor DeCotta, a Rhode Island mechanic with an enthusiasm for the Old West, developed a cowboy character he called Paladin, which he performed at "parades, the openings and finales of rodeos, auctions, horse shows [...]," etc. He would also distribute photographs of himself in costume and a business card reading "Have Gun Will Travel, Wire Paladin, N. Court St., Cranston, R. I." (316). After he had performed this character for ten years, he saw a television program called _Have Gun Will Travel_ in which the main character, played by Richard Boone, was a cowboy called Paladin whose costume, business card, and personal idiosyncrasies (e.g., his use of a cowboy hat as an adornment and of a derringer in shoot-outs) were identical to those created by DeCotta, save for the address on the card. DeCotta sued the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) for pirating his character and won a judgment that was reversed on appeal.

The appellate judge did not reverse the jury's decision because he felt that no piracy had taken place. To the contrary, Judge Coffin sympathized with DeCotta and agreed with the jury that the resemblances between the two Paladins were more than just coincidence and that CBS had stolen the Paladin character from DeCotta (317). He nevertheless reversed the decision on the grounds that the federal copyright statute only protects works that can be reduced to "some identifiable, durable, material form" and that "the plaintiff's creation, being a personal characterization, was not reduced and could not be reduced to such a form" (320). Because DeCotta's Paladin existed only as a live performance, he could not prevail, despite the striking resemblances between his character and the television show's. The judge observed that DeCotta could have sued CBS for duplicating his business card, the one fixed and tangible artifact of his performance, but since he had never copyrighted the card, he had no cause of action (321).

That the copyright statute does not grant standing to live performance as intellectual property is very clear. A close examination of situations in which performances are fixed through sound recording suggests that although the underlying text and, since 1971, the recording itself may be copyrightable, the performance on the recording cannot be. In _Supreme Records v. Decca Records_, one record company sued another for producing a recording of a song that supposedly imitated the first company's recording of the same song. The judge found, however, that the first company could not assert a "right of ownership in a musical arrangement," by which he meant not just an instrumental or vocal score but the whole style of the performance on the record (509). _Supreme Records_ was decided well before the 1976 revision of the copyright statute, which includes the following, more extensive limitation: "The exclusive rights of the owner of copyright in a sound recording [...] do not extend to the making or duplication of another sound recording that consists entirely of an independent fixation of other sounds, even though such sounds imitate or simulate those in the copyrighted sound recording" (sec. 114b). It is unlawful to duplicate a recording in which you do not hold the copyright, yet it is perfectly legal to replicate the performance on that recording in order to make your own recording of it. This example serves to show that even a performance that has been fixed and rendered replicable through reproduction is not protected by copyright. Virtually every component of a sound recording can be so protected: the underlying text, the arrangement of the text, and the recording itself all can be copyrighted. The only thing that cannot be the performance of the text or materials in question, which can be imitated with impunity. The same is true for other recorded performances, such as video-tapes of choreography, which can be deposited with the Copyright Office. Although the choreography itself is thus protected against copying, the particular performance of that choreography on the tape is not protected. While Balanchine (as an "author") might be able to copyright his choreography of _The Nutcracker_, no dancer could copyright his particular interpretation or performance of the Mouse King in Balanchine's ballet.

Nevertheless, there have been a number of decisions over the years in which performers apparently have been determined to have rights of ownership in their performances, live and recorded. _Goldin v. Clarion Photoplay_ (195 N.Y.S. 455; 202 AD 1 [1922]), for example, is a case in which the magician who invented the "Sawing a Lady in Half" illusion successfully sued to protect his exclusive right to perform it. In 1928, Charlie Chaplin won a decision against another actor, Charles Amador, for imitating his Little Tramp character in films. Bert Lahr won a judgment against a company that used a voice that sounded like his in a television commercial (Lahr v. Adell Chemical Co. 300 F. 2d 256 [1st Cir. 1962]). An important recent case is _Mildred v. Ford Motor Company_ (1988), in which singer Bette Midler sued the automobile company and its advertising agency for using a singer who sounded exactly like Mildred in a commercial. She lost her initial case but won on appeal.

It is important to observe that although the cases I just cited all had the effect of extending legal protection to specific performances (a magic trick, a distinctive character) or performance styles (speaking and singing voices), none of these cases actually establishes a performer's right of ownership in performance as a work of authorship. Each was decided on a different basis, none under the copyright statute. In _Chaplin v. Amador_ (93 Cal. App. 388; 269 P. 544 [1928]), the court stated explicitly that "the case of plaintiff does
HISTORY, POLITICS, POLITICAL ECONOMY

not depend on his right to the exclusive use of the role, garb, and mannerisms, etc.; it is based on fraud and deception. The right of action in such a case arises from the fraudulent purpose and conduct of appellant and injury caused to the plaintiff thereby, and the deception to the public [...]"

This understanding of the case arose from the fact that not only had Amador imitated the Little Tramp, he had also billed himself in the films as Charlie Aplin. The decision stemmed from the conclusion that Amador had practiced fraud and was guilty of "unfair competition in business," not from the theory that Chaplin had a copyright in his performance as the Little Tramp. The original dismissal of Lahr v. Adell Chemical was reversed on a similar basis: the appeals court found that using a voice that sounded like Lahr's could constitute "passing off" and, therefore, unfair competition. The decision in Goldin also was based, in part, on grounds of unfair competition. Clarion Photoplay had made a film revealing how the illusion was achieved; the court found against the company on grounds of unfair competition, since distributing the film would render Goldin's illusion worthless and thus deprive him of "the fruits of his ingenuity, expense, and labor" (202 AD 1, 4).

**Miller v. Ford Motor Company (849 F. 2d 460 [1988])** likewise does not hold that Miller has a copyright in her vocal style. Judge Noonan states bluntly in his decision that "a voice is not copyrightable. The sounds are not fixed." (462). In this case, the decision was made on the basis of a California statute enshrining what has come to be called the right of publicity—Civil Code, Section 990, also known as the Celebrity Rights Act—originally designed to allow the estate of a deceased celebrity to continue to control the use of the name, voice, signature, photograph, and likeness of that celebrity. Judge Noonan interpreted this statute as protecting a living celebrity's identity or personhood and found that Miller has a property right not in her voice or performance but in her identity, her self. "A voice is as distinctive and personal as a face," he wrote. "The singer manifests herself in the song. To impersonate her voice is to pirate her identity." (463). Performers have the right to be protected from fraud and unfair business practices; they may even have property rights in their identities. None of these rights is equivalent, however, to a copyright in performance.

The central difference between copyright and the right of publicity is that while the former protects works of authorship, the latter protects personhood and, therefore, applies only to those whose persons have market value: to celebrities. Judge Noonan's decision carefully spells out Miller's claim to celebrity by summarizing her career, quoting her reviews, and indicating her status as a cultural icon appealing to baby boomers. In the last paragraph of the decision, he states: "We need not and do not go so far as to hold that every imitation of a voice to advertise merchandise is actionable. We hold only that when a distinctive voice of a professional singer is widely known and is deliberately imitated in order to sell a product, the sellers have appropriated what is not theirs [...]"

This implies that even if an advertising agency set out deliberately to replicate the voice of an unknown singer in a commercial, that singer would not enjoy the same rights as Miller because, unlike Miller's, that singer's identity has no generally established value.

Jane Gaines observes that the Miller decision "signaled a new development in intellectual property law, one that had been evolving since the 1950s but that was not recognized in common law until the early '70s: the right of publicity paradigm" (1991: 142). The origins of this development can be traced back even further in case law. The illusionist in Goldin v. Clarion Photoplays, for instance, was able to control the performance of the Sawing a Lady in Half illusion because the illusion and its title have become identified with plaintiff's name to such an extent that theatre managers and the public immediately connected the two (202 AD 1, 3). DeCosta, too, can be seen as a step in the evolution of the right of publicity paradigm and has nuances that are worth examining in that light.

In his DeCosta decision, Judge Coffin did not discount the possibility that a character could be copyrighted and even imagines "a procedure for registering 'characters' by filing pictorial and narrative description [of them] in an identifiable, durable, and material form" with the Copyright Office. Why then does he say not only that DeCosta could not prevail because he had not "reduced his creation to a fixed form" (Miller and Davis 1990: 305) but also that "the plaintiff's creation, being a personal characterization [...] could not be reduced to such a form" (320, emphasis added)? The answer lies in the judge's use of the phrase "personal characterization." In discussing this matter, the judge reveals himself to be a fairly sophisticated performance theorist, conversant with the concept of "everyday-life performance." "All human beings—and a good part of the animal kingdom—create characters every day of their lives," writes Coffin, but he goes on to say that the kind of character people often invent "for their own and others' amusement [...] is so slight a thing as not to warrant protection by any law. [...] To the extent that a creation may be ineffable, we think it ineligible for protection against copying simpliciter under either state or federal law" (320).

The judge's reasoning concerning everyday-life performance is sound: to create a situation in which one person could seek legal remedy because another had copied his Halloween costume or his humorous performance at the office watercooler clearly would be intolerable. This reasoning extends logically to professional performance as well. What is interesting in DeCosta, however, is the judge's refusal to treat DeCosta's creation as anything more than a "personal characterization" on the order of a Halloween costume even though it turned out to be considerably more than that to CBS. Coffin notes that, in the original trial, DeCosta's attorneys had cited several cases [...] around the general proposition that it is an actionable wrong to appropriate and exploit the product of another's creative effort, but all seem to involve distinguishable wrongs of at
least equal or even superior significance. Most rest on the tort of "passing off": appropriation not of the creation but of the value attached to it by public association [ ... ] by misleading the public into thinking that the defendant's offering is the product of the plaintiff's established skill.

(317-18)

Certainly, there was no "passing off" in this instance: unlike Amador's implying that he was Charlie Chaplin, CBS had no reason to state or imply that its Paladin was DeCosta because DeCosta's name and reputation were of no value to CBS. Although Coffin does not express this conclusion, it is hard to believe that it played no role in his formulation of the concept of "personal characterization." I suspect that if DeCosta's performance had been professional rather than avocational and he had become famous for it (like the illusionist in Goldin), the result of the appeal would have been different even before the advent of the right of publicity paradigm because then CBS unquestionably would have poached something of established value. The irony of DeCosta is that the plaintiff could have prevailed had he proved that CBS had poached a creation of established value but, because DeCosta was not a celebrity, the value of his creation could be proven only by the fact that CBS found it worthy of poaching. The Midler decision makes it even clearer that a celebrity DeCosta could expect to have a right of ownership in his performance only if he were a celebrity and CBS had something to gain by appropriating his identity, not the character he created.

In a discussion of whether ordinary people can benefit from the right of publicity, Gaines finds that the law enshrines a paradox:

Before exploitation [ ... ] the ordinary person and the unknown actor can be said to have a right of publicity that, in its dormancy, is both there and not there. It is inherent in the same time as it must be produced by exploitation. What I mean is that in current legal thought a person does not have publicity rights in him or herself unless, at one time or another in the course of a career, he or she has transferred these rights to another party.

(1991: 190; original emphasis)

An author does not have to be well-known, or even published, to enjoy copyright protection for her work, but a performer must be sufficiently famous so that someone else would seek to purchase her identity to enjoy protection of her performance under the right of publicity paradigm. Even then, that protection is not of the performance as a work, but as an extension of the performer's identity, construed as having value in itself. Although it is not clear that it is desirable to formulate a general property right in performance, the success of the right of publicity paradigm suggests that any attempt
do so would have to take the tack that all performances are manifestations of the performer's self and that, therefore, the unlicensed use of any performance is an appropriation of the performer's property in her identity. This is a highly problematic position from the perspective of acting and performance theory, in which the relationship between the performer's identity and her performance is much more ambiguous than the right would seem to allow. While some performers may see their performances as manifestations of identity, others may prefer to see their performances more as "works of authorship" separate from themselves. Arguably, the ambiguity of the relationship between self and other is at the heart of performance; to eliminate that ambiguity in favor of defining performance as necessarily a manifestation of the performer's self would be a reductive enterprise. In saying this, I am not suggesting that the law is wrong about the nature of performance, though it would surely benefit from a review of performance theory. The more important point is that the law, through its particular historical evolution, has constructed the concepts of performance and performer, and therefore of performers' rights, in particular ways which may not accord with the ways that acting and performance theory have constructed these terms through their own historical evolutions.

The suspicions of theorists who see performance's evanescence as a site of resistance to a cultural economy based in reproduction seem justified by the vagaries of some of the decisions I've cited. George Harrison certainly learned the hard way that copyright law has no respect for what Henry Sayre has called the "aesthetic of impermanence" (1989). The lesson of DeCosta is that, in a capitalist representational economy, the entity legally defined as the "author" of a creation is the one that can extract profit from it. Midler and related cases raise troubling questions about property rights that seem to accrue only to a celebrity elite. Given these considerations, it is easy to understand the appeal of seeing performance as a discourse that escapes and resists the terms of this cultural economy. That sword is double-edged, however, for it is also not difficult to sympathize with performers who might want to put that economy to work for themselves by acquiring greater control over their creations even though that would mean sullying their performative purity.

Copyright law shares with performance theory the premise that live performance exists only in the present and has no copy, that it is constituted by an ontology of disappearance (Phelan 1993: 146): that is why it is not protectable under copyright. To copyright law, an undocumented performance is less than invisible; inasmuch as it has no copy, it was never created; it does not exist at all. As we have seen, even performance that has been fixed through reproduction is not actually governed by copyright—only the underlying texts and the fixation itself are protected. Decisions in which performers appear to have been accorded rights of ownership in their performances turn out to have been made on other grounds, whether those of fraud, unfair competition, or the right of publicity, not on the basis of an idea
that photographs merely catch dancers at specific instants in time. Therefore, the court reasoned, photographs could not capture movement, which is the essence of choreography” (Hilgad 1994: 770-71). The appellate court felt that the trial court had not employed the appropriate standard for infringement and sent the case back to be tried on its merits. The appellate court proposed two theories of how photographs might infringe on choreography, the second of which is of interest here. “The court stated that a photograph could elicit in the imagination of a person who had recently seen a performance the flow of movement immediately preceding and following the split second recorded in the photograph” (Hilgad 1994: 776). Although the case was settled before it was decided on appeal, Horgan is the only extant decision in a copyright infringement case involving choreography under the 1976 statute. One legal scholar suggests that: “The court’s approach would provide a choreographer with a claim based on an observer’s recall of the movement surrounding the moment captured in the photograph” (Hilgad 1994: 780-81). In this interpretation of Horgan, spectatorial memory is far from being out of the reach of regulatory processes, in fact, it is pressed into service by the law. Even if the deposited videotape, rather than spectatorial memory, were used to decide the case, the comparison between the photographs and the video would still be made by means of human memory, for no human being could look at the video and the photos simultaneously. When it comes to the evaluation of copyright infringement claims, human memory is not the safe haven from regulation and control that Phelan proposes. Rather, it becomes a mechanism for the enforcement of regulation. Performance’s ontological resistance to objectification does not make performance a privileged site of ideological resistance to a cultural economy based in capital and reproduction. If performance persists only as spectatorial memory, then it persists in precisely the form in which it can be useful to the law that regulates the circulation of cultural objects as commodities.

Not only is memory an agent of control, it is a site of regulation as well. In Bright Tunes Music Corp. v. Harrisons Music, Ltd., the court did not find that Harrison had deliberately plagiarized the earlier song but concluded that “his subconscious knew [...] a song his conscious mind did not remember. [...] This is, under the law, infringement of copyright, and is no less so even though subconsciously accomplished” (180-81). In such cases, memory and other psychic operations are subject to policing. The very undependability of memory becomes the object of legal surveillance. Even the processes by which subconscious materials enter into consciousness and the relation between the subconscious and memory become matters of legal scrutiny. In Harrison’s case, a subconscious memory of a performance made itself manifest in a way that rendered him subject to legal discipline.

Arguably, memory is the very foundation of law, not just in the sense that Anglo-American common law is “an inscription of the past in the present” (Goodrich 1990: 36) but in the larger sense British legal scholar
Peter Goodrich invokes when summarizing the thought of a late 19th-century legal thinker:

"Memory governs law not as a series of established particularities, precedents that will always differ from circumstance to infinite circumstance, but as "essential law," as a method of handling, defining and dividing a system of argument. [. . .] Memory establishes legal institutions and not the banal specificity of individual cases [. . .]."

(1990: 35)

Legal memory, then, is not just a matter of being able to cite precedents relevant to specific circumstances. Memory is the deep structure of a language of law whose utterances take the form of specific acts of recollection.

If memory is the langue of law, then performance, the enactments that constitute a trial, is its parole. To give testimony is to perform recollection, the retrieval of memory, in the performative present moment of the trial. A textbook analysis of the legal concept of hearsay describes the function of witnesses as the "recording and recollection" of perceived events; this process of the storage and retrieval of memories is the basis for in-court testimony (Graham 1992: 262). The text of Federal Rule of Evidence 804(a) offers further support for this characterization of the witness function. The Rule presents the following definition of "unavailability as a witness":

"Unavailability as a witness" includes situations in which the declarant—[. . .]
(3) testifies to a lack of memory of the subject matter of the declarant's statement; or
(4) is unable to be present or to testify at the hearing because of death or then existing physical or mental illness.

(in Graham 1992: 376)

Brennan's conflation of identity, presence, and, indeed, existence itself with memory reaffirms the central role of memory and performance as mechanisms of law. In Brennan's analysis, it is not because certain contents had been erased from Foster's memory that he was "unavailable as a witness." Foster had retrieved and articulated those contents while in the hospital; they were known and had served as the basis for a trial. Rather, it was Foster's inability to perform the retrieval of those memories in the present moment of the trial, to "affirm, explain, or elaborate upon" what he had said earlier and outside the courtroom, that led Brennan to declare that the trial court should have considered Foster to be functionally dead and his hospital bed identification inadmissible hearsay.

In the interest of intellectual honesty, I have to underline that Brennan's opinion was the dissenting one and that the Court found that the admission of Foster's identification of his assailant had been proper despite his loss of memory. At first glance, this circumstance problematizes my thesis: if memory is the deep structure of law, how could the Court accept the testimony of an amnesiac witness? The constitutional question at issue in U.S. v. Owens was whether the defendant's Sixth Amendment right to confront his accuser, known as the "confrontation clause," had been violated by Foster's "unavailability as a witness" due to memory loss. Justice Scalia, writing for the majority, found that as long as cross-examination of Foster had been possible, there was no Sixth Amendment violation. His argument was that "Meaningful cross-examination [. . .] is not destroyed by the witness' assertion of memory loss, which is often the very result sought to be produced by cross-examination [. . .]" (1988).

Regardless of its merits as law, which are open to question, Scalia's opinion supports my contention that the performance of recollection is the essence of testimony. In Scalia's view, to assert memory loss in the courtroom is to perform recollection, albeit in a negative way that makes the opposing attorney's job very easy. If testimony is the performance of recollection, the purpose of cross-examination is to discredit that performance specifically by showing that it has no legitimate claim to being a performance of recollection, whether by demonstrating that the accuracy of the witness's memory is open to question or by showing that the witness has, in fact, no memory of the events at issue. There is no disagreement between Brennan and Scalia on the theoretical question of whether testimony is a performance of recollection. Rather, they disagree on the critical question of whether John Foster should be described as having failed to give such a performance (Brennan) or as having given a bad performance that helped the other side (Scalia). For
Brennan, a bad performance is no performance at all, a point of view with which many performance critics would no doubt be in sympathy.

Federal Rule of Evidence 612, concerning the use of documents to "refresh the witness's memory" in the courtroom, also clearly illustrates the premium placed within the legal discourse on the idea that testimony is a present performance of memory retrieval (in Graham 1992: 210). Such documents may be used only to stimulate the witness's "independent recollection" of the issue at hand; they may not function as scripts from which witnesses recount their recollections (Rothstein 1981: 49). The judge must be persuaded that "the witness's statement, springing from active, current (though revived) recollection will be the evidence [...]" (45). If the judge feels that the witness is testifying "from what purports to be a revived present memory when his testimony is actually a reflection, conscious or unconscious, of what he has read rather than what he remembers," the judge has the right "to reject such testimony by finding that the writing did not in fact revive the witness's recollection" (Graham 1992: 213). In order to constitute valid testimony, the witness's statements must be persuasive as present performances of memory retrieval. Some American jurisdictions forcibly extend the same logic to the process by which a verdict is reached by forbidding jurors from taking written notes on the trial. Their decision-making thus becomes a performance of memory retrieval guaranteed to be unprompted by written texts (see Hibi BFS 92: 895).

Inasmuch as memory is brought into legal discourses as both a policed site and a mechanism of regulation, Phelan's proposition that memory eludes regulation and control seems true only of materials stored in memory and never retrieved from it. As long as a memory remains stored, it apparently has no engagement with mechanisms of regulation and control. But once a memory is retrieved, it can no longer claim to take up a position outside the reach of those mechanisms but becomes both a subject and a means of regulation and control. If a witness cannot or will not retrieve memories of the matter at issue, the court considers that witness to be unavailable to the legal discourse and, therefore, to be dead. If George Harrison had not retrieved "He's So Fine" from his memory, even subconsciously, his psychic processes would not have been the subject of a court decision. "Visibility is a trap [...]", Phelan warns, "it summons surveillance and the law [...]" (1993: 6). Although Phelan is referring here to visibility politics, not memory, the making present of memories surely must run the same risk—once they emerge from the safe haven of memory, recollections become visible and, therefore, subject to surveillance and to being pressed into service as testimony. As soon as a memory is retrieved, it becomes available to the law.

The question that emerges from this analysis: At what point in the process of memory retrieval does this risk actually appear? Does a memory become visible and, thus, summon the law, simply by being retrieved, or is visibility the legacy of the moment at which the retrieved memory explicitly enters into discourse? In other words, is it possible for a memory to remain safe from surveillance at some moment after it has been retrieved but before it has been entered into discourse? My argument is that there is no such moment, that memory itself solicits discourse. Title 17 states that a copy of a work need not be deposited with the Copyright Office for that work to receive copyright protection, but a copy must be deposited to support a claim of infringement (secs. 407a, 411a). The sole purpose of storing a copy of the work in the governmental memory bank is to enter it into (legal) discourse. It is perhaps for this reason that Jacques Derrida suggests that in order for performance to escape objectification, "Its act must be forgotten, actively forgotten" ([1966] 1978: 247). Unlike Pavis and Phelan, both of whom seem to see memory as functioning outside of reproduction, at least where performance is concerned, Derrida suggests that the recording of an event in memory is itself a form of reproduction. The memory thus assumes the form in which it can be appropriated by such regulatory agencies as the law. In order to escape the economy of reproduction, performance must not only disappear, it must also be excluded from memory.

The question of when memory may be said to enter into discourse and thus summon the law is addressed by Goodrich, in a provocative passage:

The path of the law is that of experience, in the words of one American judge. Could we not take that to mean that we live the law, that what is interesting and at the same time frightening about the law is precisely that it is integral to experience, that it is everywhere present, not as command or facile rule but rather as an architecture of daily life, a law of the street, an insidious imaginary. In terms of any phenomenology of the law in its forms of daily life, we would need to study the images of possibility, the imagery, the motive and affective bonds that tie the legal subject quite willingly, though not necessarily happily, to the limits of law, to this biography, to this persona, to this body and these organs.

(1990: 9–10)

Goodrich's Foucauldian suggestion that law is not a secondary overlay on individual experience but a constituent of that experience itself has important implications. From the perspective afforded by Goodrich's account, it becomes clear that the experiences stored in memory were themselves shaped in relation to the law as part of the phenomenology of daily life.

Perhaps Goodrich's reference to the legal subject's persona can be taken to suggest that the psychic functions of memory storage and retrieval (or, in legal parlance, recordation and recollection) also do not occur outside the context of law as a constituent of experience. In view of Goodrich's discussion of the phenomenology of law, it is clear that memories do not summon the law by becoming visible or by being entered into discourse, because there
is no moment at which a memory exists prior to its inscription in and by law at the phenomenological level. The content of any memory has already been shaped by law as part of the phenomenology of daily life. In that sense, all memory is inhabited by the structures of law, is always already entered into legal discourse.

The extent to which memory is both embedded in and structured by legal discourse problematizes it as a site of resistance to that same discourse. Much the same can be said of liveness, the ontological quality some performance theorists see as placing performance outside of a cultural economy governed by reproduction. I have already stated that the witness's live performance of memory retrieval in the present moment of the courtroom, not the information retrieved, is the essence of testimony. A procedural issue that has also provoked Sixth Amendment questions is the propriety of using depositions, written or on videotape, in the place of live testimony in the courtroom. Even decisions in favor of the use of depositions generally, and of videotaped depositions in particular, reflect the law's strong preference for live witnesses.

For example, the Georgia Court of Appeals judge who ruled that "the taking of the deposition of an expert witness to be used at the trial [...] by means of videotaping" is an acceptable practice stressed in his decision that: "It is well to remember that the taking of a deposition [...] is a substitute, at best, for the actual live testimony of the witness" (Mayor v. Palmiero 135 Ga. App. 147 [1975], 150). Indeed, most of the court decisions that have allowed the use of depositions at criminal trials stipulate very clearly that this practice is acceptable only when the witness is legitimately unavailable to testify live. In Stores v. State (625 P.2d 820), heard by the Supreme Court of Alaska in 1980, the court overturned a conviction in a rape case on these grounds, finding that the prosecution had not made sufficient good-faith efforts to secure at the trial the presence of the doctor who had examined the victim and whose testimony had been provided on video while she was vacationing. The higher court's interpretation of the prosecution's strategy was that: "The sole purpose of taking the deposition was to create former testimony to be used in lieu of live testimony. We will not sanction such an evasion of the constitutionally based preference for live testimony in open court [...]" (827). The law's preference for the live presence of witnesses, implied by the confrontation clause of the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution, is clear.

Writing for the dissent in Stores v. State, Justice Matthews argues that "the critical question is whether there was a significant difference between the testimony as it was actually presented to the jury on the videotape and as it might have been presented had Dr. Sydnum appeared in person at Stores' trial" (830). Justice Matthews's position was that inasmuch as the circumstances of the taping were similar to those of the trial (the same attorneys were present, as was a trial judge, and the witness was cross-examined), there was no reason to believe that the videotape did not provide an accurate rendition of her testimony. In the majority opinion, Justice Connor stressed that jurors' perception of a live witness is not necessarily the same as their perception of the same witness on video and that "with videotape, the witness cannot be cross-examined in the context of other evidence and testimony which has been presented at trial" (829). It is interesting that Justice Connor did not argue that the doctor's testimony would have been different had she appeared live, only that it might have been, and that that performative possibility was grounds on which to reverse the original decision. Justice Connor's opinion insists on the importance of live performance to the legal proceeding: the witness's live presence before the jury and the possibility that something could happen in "the materially charged present" of the trial. But since the videotape did not happen on the videotape are issues of sufficient moment to require the reversal of a rape conviction.

As I have described it here, the relationship of performance to current American jurisprudence is complex, especially when considered through different bodies of law. One way of summarizing these complexities is to compare implications about the status of performativity in a copyright case with those in a case focused on evidentiary issues. George Harrison's argument, in Bright Tunes, that a song is not a fixed text but an evanescent performance fell on deaf ears, with the result that the textualized version of one performance of his song became the song as far as the law was concerned. When Justice Connor argued in Stores that the fixed (videotaped) version of the doctor's testimony—which I have defined as a performance of memory retrieval—was not an acceptable substitute for her live presence, he seems to respect the ontological status of performance in a way that copyright does not. In the former case, the possibility of what I have called performative accident is effaced: the song is identified with a written text, regardless of how that text came into existence. In the latter instance, performative accident is valorized: the doctor's testimony is valid only if given under circumstances allowing for such accident. Despite this apparent contradiction, the argument that performance ontologically resists fixation is accepted at a fundamental level by both branches of the law. Because it cannot be fixed, performance has no standing under copyright. Therefore, a cultural object such as "My Sweet Lord" cannot be defined as a performance for the purposes of copyright litigation. The same recognition, that performance cannot be fixed without ceasing to be performative, yields the procedural preference for live testimony over videotaped depositions.

Herbert Blau has noted the strong desire in current theory for "a language of 'performativity' that will outlaw, battle, or abolish the regulatory functions that work in the name of the law" (1996: 274). In my view, the fact that the grounding of performance in an ontology of disappearance is as fundamental to the understanding of performance in and of the law as it is to many accounts of performance emerging from theory problematizes this desire. Sometimes, the desire to which Blau alludes results in a theoretical privileging
of performance’s existence only in the present moment and its subsequent storage in memory. This privilege derives from a claim that these ontological qualities permit performance to evade the regulatory discourses of a cultural economy based on reproduction. I have shown here that liveness—performance in the present—and memory are central mechanisms by which the law that governs that economy is actualized and privileged terms within the discourse of law. Far from constituting sites of resistance to the law, memory and performance are woven deeply into the fabric of law, both theoretically and procedurally. In a double gesture of recuperation, American law denies performance legal standing as intellectual property and recuperates it as central to the legal process itself.

Notes

1 Obviously, the context in which the relationship between copyright and performance is most frequently discussed is that of the rights of authors of plays and other performance texts. Title 17 grants to authors an exclusive right “to do and to authorize” public performances of their works (sec. 106). There have been some interesting controversies, especially over the past ten years, on playwrights who assert their rights against productions whose interpretations of their work they dislike. I discuss one such controversy against a background of changing information technologies and their impact on the concept of intellectual property in Auslander (1992). Because I am concerned here with the status of performance per se under copyright, I will not address the issues arising from disputes over textual interpretation beyond this note. A more technical comment on the legal status of playscripts appears in note 3.

2 Recently, there has been a successful movement within American law to extend the rights of visual artists over their productions, modeled on the French legal concept of droit moral (moral rights). Inasmuch as droit moral derives from a conception of the work of art as an extension of the artist’s personality, not a work created by but separate from the artist, it bears a certain resemblance to the American legal doctrine of right of publicity, which I discuss below. For a general discussion of droit moral and comparison with American law, see DuBoff (1984: 224–59). For a more theoretical and historical comparison of droit moral with copyright, see Saunders (1992: passim).

Droit moral is very attractive to artists, in part because it gives artists the right to control the integrity of their work, “to prevent their works from being altered, distorted or destroyed” (DuBoff 1984: 235). A 1990 addition to Title 17 extended these rights to visual artists (Visual Artists Rights Act of 1990, sec. 106a). In order for droit moral to extend to performing artists, they would have to be characterized as “authors.” As I point out here, this is a vexed question. Performers who are in the business of interpreting texts created by others certainly should hesitate before supporting droit moral legislation for writers. Under droit moral, an author need only claim that a performance of her text distorts it to block public performance of that presentation. As David Saunders observes, opponents of the importation of droit moral into American law stress the impossibility of defining an objective standard for distortion and the consequent potential for capriciousness on the part of authors (or their heirs) in determining which uses of a text are acceptable and which are not (1992: 207).

3 In a report presented to the American Bar Association in 1981, a committee looking into “problems of creators of works of fine and applied art” makes the following observation: “Although the exhibition of a motion picture or television film, not in an integral part of a publication, offering a choice of the image of the picture or film to a group of persons for purposes of public performance would constitute publication” (American Bar Association 1981: 6). By analogy, even though a public performance of a play does not constitute publication, making the play available for performance by placing it with a script service, for example, presumably would constitute publication even if the play were being circulated in manuscript form and were “unpublished” in the sense of never having being printed by a publishing company.

4 According to Adeline J. Hilgard, the fixation requirement is particularly vexing for choreographers because “none of the available means of fixation—video, written notation, or computer graphics—is entirely satisfactory.” She also notes that some choreographers fear that fixing their works will either transform them into “museum pieces” or make it easier for others to pirate them. To some degree, choreographers prefer to rely on the so-called custom of ostracizing choreographers who steal from others rather than depending on copyright law. (1994: 766–67). Perhaps for these reasons, the federal copyright statute’s protection of choreographic works has been tested only once, in Horgan v. MacMillan, Inc. (1986), a case that was settled before being decided on appeal. I discuss Horgan, and Hilgard’s analysis of it, below and in note 16.

5 Supreme Records (1950) is fascinating for reasons that go beyond my focus here. In its decision, the court compares the two recordings and notes “that the Supreme record is clearly identified as ‘a race or blues and rhythm’ recording, while the Decca record is ‘popular’ [...]” The judge characterizes the “race” recording as inferior to the “popular” one, which he describes as possessing “clearer intonation and expression” and making use of a “more precise, complex and better organized orchestral background” (912). Anyone familiar with the vexed history of race relations in American popular music might wonder to what extent the judge’s characterization of the “race” record as inferior was a product of musical racism. More important, perhaps, is the possibility that this case could establish that the legal system could use the legal system to redress the problem of white artists “covering” successful recordings by black artists and reaping the benefits of the black artists’ efforts by
HISTORY, POLITICS, POLITICAL ECONOMY

of the superior distribution and airplay granted to “popular” (i.e., white) recordings. This problem would become even more acute with the advent of the rock and roll era in 1955, especially given the preponderance of white artists and their producers to fail to pay royalties to black songwriters. (For a summary discussion of this situation, see Szwarc 1991: 27-31.)

Although it may seem extraordinary that the law explicitly permits the imitation of existing sound works, this clause is reflective of the underlying principles of copyright as they pertain to written texts. The copyright statute protects “original works of authorship” (sec. 102a). As Miller and Davis note, however, “a work of originality need not be novel. An author can claim copyright in a work as long as he created it himself, even if a thousand people created it before him. Originality does not imply novelty: it only implies that the copyright claimant did not copy from someone else” (1990: 290). In principle, if a writer were to produce a book that was identical in word for word, with another, previously copyrighted book and could prove that she had had no access to the earlier book and that her work was purely the result of independent effort, she could have a copyright in her book, despite its lack of novelty. Similarly, as long as the producer of a recording does not copy an existing recording but makes a new recording that sounds identical to the existing one, the new recording is copyrightable as an “independent fixation.” Although the two circumstances are not identical (in the case of the book, the resemblance between the older and newer texts must be coincidental; this is not the case for identical sound recordings), the concept of “independent fixation” can be understood as the correlative of an “original work of authorship” in the realm of sound recording. In both cases, the fact that the later object lacks novelty is no obstacle to its being copyrightable, so long as that lack of novelty is not due to illicit copying of the protected object.

7 The practical ramifications of this clause were brought home to me by a compact disc entitled Back to Rock N Roll, an anthology of American pop songs from the 1950s. The recordings on the disc are recreations of the original recordings by the same singers, who have earned their livings for the past 25 years by performing their early hits. Keep in mind that the owner of the copyright in a sound recording need not be the performer; considering the practices of the music and film industries, it is in fact unusual for performers to own the copyrights to their own recordings. If the copyright law permitted the owner of the copyright in a sound recording to prevent others from making another recording that sounds the same, the performers on this disc would be deprived of a significant portion of their income.

This clause also permits musical artists who traffic in pastiche, such as the Manhattan Transfer and Bette Midler (about whom more below), to make records that do, indeed, sound like other records; it enables performers who, by whatever trick of nature, sound exactly like other performers to record; and it presumably discourages recording artists from subverting over matters of style. (My examples derive primarily from musical recordings, but the principle extends to all types of sound recordings.)

8 As Judge Noonan noted in his decision, the commercial in which a voice like Midler’s was used was part of a series known within the agency as “The Yuppies Campaign” in which “the aim was to make an emotional connection with Yuppies, bringing back memories of when they were in college” in the 70s. The agency used a different song in each commercial and tried to recruit the artist who had originally popularized it to re-record it. When Midler declined to re-record “Do You Want To Dance,” a song she had originally recorded in 1973, the agency employed Uta Hedwig, who had once worked for Midler as a back-up singer, to imitate Midler’s voice for the commercial (Midler v. Ford Motor Company 849 F. 2d 460 [1988], 461).

9 In Sinatra v. Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. (435 F. 2d 711 [1970]), Nancy Sinatra lost her case against the company and its advertising agency for using a recording of “These Boots Are Made for Walking” that sounded like her own. Since Sinatra did not have the benefit of California’s Celebrity Rights statute, she advanced a different argument: “that the song has been so popularized by the plaintiff that her name is identified with it; [i.e.] that said song [ . . . ] has acquired a second meaning [ . . . ]” (712). “Secondary meaning” is a concept derived from trademark law referring to “a mark [that] has been used so long that it has come to be synonymous with the goods or services with which it is connected [ . . . ]” (Miller and Davis 1990: 165). Sinatra argued, by analogy, that the close association of the song with her performance of it means that the song inevitably refers to her. Had this right been recognized, Sinatra would have had control over all performances of the song, since any renditions of “These Boots Are Made for Walking” would presumably evoke her as a secondary meaning. The central difference between Sinatra’s argument and Midler’s is that whereas Sinatra was claiming a kind of ownership in the song itself as a consequence of her having executed a famous performance of it, Midler’s claim was based only on her proprietorship of her voice. The appellate judge upheld the original decision against Sinatra because granting her the right to control performance of the song on these grounds would conflict with the federally sanctioned rights of the copyright holders in the song and its arrangement to do so. “Moreover,” the judge observed, “the inherent difficulty of protecting or policing a ‘performance’ or the creation of a performer in handling copyrighted material licensed to another exposes problems of supervision that are almost impossible for a court of equity” (717–18). For a detailed analysis of Sinatra and a comparison of it with Miller, see Gaines (1991: 105–42).

10 See Apfelbaum (1983: 1570–74), Gaines (1991: 187–91), Levine (1980: 130–38), and Wohl (1988: 447–50) for overviews of the right of publicity and its origins. Gaines, Levine, and Wohl discuss the right of publicity in relation to the right to privacy, while Apfelbaum compares right of publicity with copyright. Whereas Levine and Wohl argue for broad construal of the right of publicity, Apfelbaum claims that right of publicity can only be appropriately used to protect “works of authorship not fixed in tangible form” (1983: 1593). In Apfelbaum’s view, all other applications of right of publicity are preempted by federal copyright statute.

11 This claim suggests that the right of publicity has not evolved organically through common law but may have been codified to justify existing economic practices in the entertainment industry, then provided with a genealogy in case law after the fact. If so, I am contributing to the latter process in the discussion that follows.

11 Only characters that are very specific in their development can be copyrighted.

The general idea of a character is unprotected. Stock figures, stereotypes, or stereotypical figures likewise are unprotected. [ . . . ] Characters become more protected as they become more detailed. But the attribution of general qualities—such as strength—or emotional features—such as compassion—is not sufficient to gain copyright protection.

(Miller and Davis 1990: 344–45)

12 In a comparative discussion of the relation of self to performance in the theories of Stanislavski, Brecht, and Grotowski, I suggest that although that relationship
is configured differently in each case, each theorist grounds performance in a concept of "self" that precedes performance. My deconstruction of these theories finds that all of those "selves" are, in fact, products of the performance theories they are said to ground (Auslander 1995 [1986]).

13 For an outstanding analysis of entertainment law as a product of and a means of sustaining capitalism, see Gaines (1991, passim).

14 The binary opposition between unreliable human memory and reliable technological memory I am using here is generated by the juxtaposition of Phelan and Pavis with copyright law, not from my own epistemology. If anything, I find technological memory, especially in the form of computer hard drives, to be every bit as unreliable and subject to degradation as human memory.

15 As we saw from the Rodney King trials, this also holds true for criminal or civil trials in which videotaped evidence is used. Again, the reproduction of the event at issue is not permitted to "speak for itself." Rather, it is tested against the memory, and this creates and constrains the discursive construction of the videotaped evidence that emerges from the "live" courtroom performance is what counts. I discuss why this is so in terms of the underpinnings of evidence law in the last portion of this essay.

16 Hilgard does not write approvingly of this decision. She finds substantial fault with the Horgan court and suggests an alternate standard for infringement of choreography: "an artist must copy both the movement and timing of a piece for a court to find copyright infringement" (1975: 787). This would mean that no static representation of dance movement in photography or painting could infringe the copyright on the choreography depicted.

17 Gaines's suggestion that one reason sound recordings were not recognized under copyright law is because it was thought that the unreliability of oral memory would make the resolution of claims of infringement overly subjective further reinforces my point (1991: 17–18).

18 The legal system's dependence on memory is illustrated differently by the law's ambiguity where false claims of memory lapse are concerned. As David Greenwald has pointed out, judges have a tendency to treat witnesses whom they suspect of such a false claim as fully present and available for cross-examination and impeachment despite their technical unavailability (1993: 194).

19 Una Chaudhuri has pointed out to me that the spatial dimension is perhaps as important here as the temporal one I emphasize: to be valid, testimony must be presented within the ritual space of the courtroom as well as during the present moment of the trial.

20 Claire Seltz offers a thoroughgoing critique of Scalia's decision, arguing that "the Court's reasoning is erroneous, extreme, and not indicative of legislative history or precedent" and creates "the illogical possibility that all out-of-court identifications of any cooperative witnesses, regardless of the value of the cross-examination achieved, will be admissible at trial" (1988: 867, 897–98). Although far gentler in tone, David Greenwald's analysis of the case is also critical of the decision, which he fault for invoking a false precedent and misinterpreting an ambiguity in the Federal Rules of Evidence (1993: 178, 186).

Although Seltz and Greenwald agree that the Owens decision displays faulty legal logic and sets a dangerous precedent, neither argues that the court came to the wrong conclusion concerning the particular case. Both commentators agree that, because Foster retained partial memory of the circumstances of his attack and identification, he could be effectively cross-examined concerning the basis and credibility of that identification and that Owens therefore suffered no Sixth Amendment violation (Seltz 1988: 888–90; Greenwald 1993: 179). As Greenwald notes, a case in which the witness could not even remember making the identification would demand a different analysis (1993: 179, 187).

21 In addition to justifying the use of a deposition, the unavailability of a witness enables a variety of types of testimony that would otherwise be considered hearsay to be admitted (Federal Rule of Evidence 807, in Graham 1992: 379–94).

22 A U.S. Supreme Court case almost exactly contemporaneous with Stores turned, in part, on the same question. In Ohio v. Roberts (488 U.S. 96 [1988]), the court addressed, among other evidentiary issues, the question of whether or not the prosecution had made sufficient good-faith efforts to secure a witness before introducing her testimony from a preliminary hearing. Justice Brennan's dissent focuses entirely on this question.

23 The idea that admissible prior testimony should have been given under "trial-like" conditions emerges in many decisions, as does debate over whether or not the circumstances of pretrial depositions and preliminary hearings are sufficiently trial-like for testimony given under them to be admissible. Whether or not the witness is available in court to testify about the previous testimony also has a bearing on what kinds of previous testimony are potentially admissible (see note 21).

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