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# SEARCH FOR A GREAT TRADITION IN CULTURAL PERFORMANCES

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During a visit to India in 1954–55, I had an opportunity to do a methodological field study in South India. The purpose of this study was to chart an intellectual map of some of the researchable territory that lies between the culture of a village or small community and the culture of a total civilization. This study is not easy to classify in terms of prevailing conceptions about "research," since it falls between the intensive anthropological field study and the purely conceptual types of methodological analysis. But despite its unorthodox character, it seemed an appropriate study to undertake in a new and not-well-known field. Although the study was primarily designed to serve the methodological purpose of giving an empirical content to some very general ideas and to suggest concrete hypotheses for further research, it also turned up some substantive findings that have importance on their own account. In this report, I shall mention some of these in passing but will in the main confine myself to the problems of method posed by the study.

Before I went to India I already had a fairly explicit framework of ideas for the study of civilizations. Most important of these was the view of a civilization, suggested by Redfield, as a complex structure of a Little Tradition and a Great Tradition.[1] Using these ideas, as well as another distinction of Redfield's between "orthogenetic" and "heterogenetic" cities, I had tried to formulate several broad hypotheses concerning the relation of Little and Great Traditions in Indian civilization.[2] These were:

1. that because India had a "primary" or "indigenous" civilization which had been fashioned out of pre-existing folk and regional cultures, its Great Tradition was culturally continuous with the Little Traditions to be found in its diverse regions, villages, castes and tribes

2. that this cultural continuity was product and cause of a common cultural consciousness shared by most Indians and expressed in essential similarities of mental outlook and ethos
3. that this common cultural consciousness has been formed in India with the help of certain processes and factors that also play an important role in other primary civilizations: i.e., sacred books and sacred objects as a fixed point of worship, a special class of literati (Brahmans) who have the authority to recite and interpret the sacred scriptures, professional story-tellers, a sacred geography of sacred centers—temples, pilgrimage places, and shrines—and leading personalities who by their identification with the Great Tradition and with the masses mediate the one to the other
4. that in a primary civilization like India's, cultural continuity with the past is so great that even the acceptance of "modernizing" and "progress" ideologies does not result in linear forms of social and cultural change but may result in the "traditionalizing" of apparently "modern" innovations.

In considering how such broad hypotheses might be tested by a field study in India, I got some help and encouragement from several other quarters. One of these was M. N. Srinivas's study, *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India.*[3] From this work I learned that the Great Tradition of Indian civilization might be approximately identified with what Srinivas called "Sanskritic Hinduism" and what previous writers like Monier-Williams called "Brahmanism" in contrast to popular Hinduism. As Srinivas defines it, Sanskritic Hinduism is the generalized pattern of Brahman practices and beliefs that have an all-India spread, in contrast to those forms of Hinduism with a local, regional, or peninsular spread. From Srinivas's work, too, I learned that Sanskritic Hinduism was not confined to the Brahmans but, as in the case of the Coorgs, might be taken over by non-Brahman groups as part of an effort to raise their status. To this process Srinivas has given the name "Sanskritization," and it is obviously an important way in which the Great Tradition spreads from one group and region to another group and region.

Other ways of conceiving the relationship of the great Indic civilization to the culture and social structure of a particular Indian village were suggested by McKim Marriott in a seminar that we held in Chicago during the spring of 1954.[4] Between Srinivas's conception of Sanskritic Hinduism as a generalized all-India phenomenon and Marriott's description of one village as the locus of interacting Little and Great Traditions, there appeared to me to be a gap which might be filled by a synchronic and functional type of field study.

## Defining the unit of field study

The unit of field study proved to be much smaller than the "intelligible unit of study" with which our methodological discussions in the Chicago seminar had dealt—namely, a total civilization in its full historical and geographical sweep. I did not, of course, expect to encompass the history of Indian civilization within a few observations and interviews carried out over a period of several months. But I must confess I entertained some hope of making contact with Indian civilization on an all-India level. The basis of this—as it turned out—naive hope was the assumption that, if Hindu traditions were still cultivated by professional specialists and if Sanskritic Hinduism, at least, had an all-India spread, a strategic selection of the main types of such specialists should offer a quick access to the structure of the civilization. I was not sufficiently familiar with India to feel confident in my selection of the "strategic" specialists, but, with the help of my reading and the advice of some who knew India better than I did, I obtained introductions to caste genealogists (Bhāṭs) in Uttar Pradesh, a subcaste of bards (Cāraṇs) in Rājasthān and Saurāṣṭra, some individual *sādhus* and pandits in Benares, a Sanskritist in Madras, a cultural historian in Bombay, and several political-cultural leaders in New Delhi. While this rather broad geographical spread was in part an accident of the location of my advisers, it seemed to assure a genuine all-India scope to my inquiry.

When I arrived in India, I quickly saw that, however strategic such a selection might appear from 10,000 miles away, it did not take sufficient account of the cultural and noncultural realities of the Indian scene. The sheer physical problem of traveling around to these various points in India would leave little time for even a preliminary study of any of these groups. But this was not the decisive obstacle; in the end, I did get to almost all these regions and to several others. A more serious obstacle to my original program arose from the fact that, even if I had been able to make studies of these various groups, I did not see how I could directly relate them to one another and to Indian culture as a whole. Perhaps one deeply learned in the history of Indian civilization and familiar with its regional and local varieties could have brought off such an integration, but to a neophyte the task appeared overwhelming. The regional variations alone were sufficient to give me pause. Indians in the north and south did not speak the same language or identify with the same tradition.

Beset by such difficulties, I decided to abandon the plan for an all-India unit of field study and to reformulate a plan that would limit the study to one region. Because I had met in Madras a very knowledgeable Sanskritist sympathetic with the study, and because Madras itself seemed to he a rich center of cultural activities. I selected the Madras area for an exploratory study. This selection, however, still left open a number of other alternatives. Should I set the bounds of the study by the boundaries of the linguistic region, that is, all of the Tamil-speaking country; should I concentrate on a village or a city, or on one group of specialists, or perhaps on one individual or on one institution, like a temple? Had I been doing an intensive field study over a longer period of time, I should probably have chosen the smallest manageable unit and concentrated on it alone. Since I was interested in charting the topography of Indian culture, its general terrain, and its different mountains, valleys, and river sources, such a procedure would have given me too narrow a perspective. For my purpose, it seemed better to begin with a rich and complex cluster of Indian culture so that I could find representatives of the major kinds of cultural institutions, cultural specialists, and cultural media. Such a cluster was offered to me by the cultural activities and institutions of the city of Madras and the adjoining towns of Conjeeveram, Mahābalipuram, and Chingleput, as well as about six villages on the immediate outskirts of Madras. It is difficult to characterize such a cluster with any degree of precision, and perhaps it would be futile to try for great precision. It might be characterized geographically in terms of the land area covered and in terms of the different kinds of settlement units included within it. But since my criteria of selection were not geographical, this characterization would be misleading. The cluster could also be described in terms of political-administrative and cultural categories. Madras is the capital of the state, Chingleput is a district seat, Conjeeveram is an ancient temple and pilgrimage city. These characterizations, although quite apposite, were not the basis of selection. Perhaps the characterization that comes closest to describing my actual unit of field study is that which describes it in social terms as a community of people. For it was primarily the subcaste of Smārta Brahmans in the Madras area whose culture I found myself studying most persistently and intimately. It was their rites and ceremonies, their households, temples, and *maṭha*, their Sanskrit and *Āyurvedic* colleges, their storytellers, devotees, patrons, scholars, and spiritual leaders that I got to know best.

But even this description of the unit is inaccurate. For I did not set out to study a community of Smārta Brahmans, and because of the dispersed character of this community, I doubt that it would be possible to do a community study on them. Through a series of coincidences, I simply found that members of the Smārta Brahman community were also leading representatives of the Great Tradition of Sanskritic Hinduism. While most of these representatives have face-to-face interpersonal relations, the relationships among these representatives alone would be a very fragmentary segment of the social relations to be found in the community as a whole.

On the other hand, I was not prevented by a concentration on the Smārta Brahmans from studying other subcastes of Brahmans, like the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, or non-Brahmans, like the followers of Tamil Śaivism. Sometimes I was led to take notice of these "out groups" by the Smārtas themselves, e.g., of the non-Brahman performers of classical *bharatanāṭya* dancing and Carnatic music, because the Brahmans are patrons and connoisseurs of these arts; sometimes I came upon these other groups quite independently—as in the case of village folk plays, still performed by lower castes in the villages and in the cities.

## Defining the units of observation: cultural performances

When I got my program of observations and interviews in the Madras area under way, I discovered what I suppose every field worker knows, that the units of cogitation are not units of observation. There was nothing that could be easily labeled Little Tradition or Great Tradition, or "ethos" or "world view." Instead, I found myself confronted with a series of concrete experiences, the observation and recording of which seemed to discourage the mind from entertaining and applying the synthetic and interpretative concepts that I had brought with me. These experiences had an intrinsic fascination, which also tended to discourage the broad, reflective view to which I had been accustomed. As I grew more familiar with my environment, however, I gradually saw emerging the relation of the woods to the trees. There *were* units of observation; they were quite distinct from the interpretative categories, but I came to see by what mental operations one might pass from the one to the other.

I was helped to identify the units of observation not by deliberately looking for them but by noticing the centrality and recurrence of certain types of things I had observed in the experience of Indians themselves. I shall call these things "cultural performances," because they include what we in the West usually call by that name—for example, plays, concerts, and lectures. But they include also prayers, ritual readings and recitations, rites and ceremonies, festivals, and all those things we usually classify under religion and ritual rather than with the cultural and artistic. In the Madras area—and India generally, I suspect—the distinction cannot be a sharp one because the plays are more often than not based on the sacred Epics and Purāṇas, and the concerts and dances are filled with devotional songs. The religious rituals, on the other hand, may involve the use of musical instruments, songs, and dance *mudrās* similar to those used in the concerts by cultural "artists." One of the leading Madras newspapers daily lists forthcoming cultural events under three headings: "Discourses," for religious readings and discourses on the sacred books; "Entertainments," for performances of plays, dances, and concerts—mostly classical; and "Miscellaneous," for meetings of political and professional groups, public lectures on current topics, and receptions.

As I observed the range of cultural performances (and was allowed, sometimes asked, to photograph and record them) it seemed to me that my Indian friends—and perhaps all peoples—thought of their culture as encapsulated in these discrete performances, which they could exhibit to visitors and to themselves. The performances became for me the elementary constituents of the culture and the ultimate units of observation. Each one had a definitely limited time span, or at least a beginning and an end, an organized program of activity, a set of performers, an audience, and a place and occasion of performance. Whether it was a wedding, an *upanayana* (sacred thread) ceremony, a floating temple festival, a village *Pongal* festival, a ritual recitation of a sacred text, a *bharatanāṭya* dance, or a devotional movie, these were the kinds of things that an outsider could observe and comprehend within a single direct experience. I do not mean that I could, even with the help of interpreters, always understand everything that went on at one of these performances or appreciate their functions in the total life of the community.

And sometimes even the "limited" time span was not limited enough: I was not accustomed to sitting through a four-hour movie, a play or devotional gathering that lasted all night, or a reading that took fifteen days. But it consoled me to observe that the local audiences did not sit through these stretches of time either; they would doze, talk, walk around, go home and come back, and find other resources for diverting their attention. Yet, despite such qualifications, whenever I looked for the ultimate units of direct observation, it was to these cultural performances that I turned.

## Analysis of cultural performances

Once the units of observation had been identified, my interest in the conceptual ordering and interpretation of the observed revived. How were the cultural performances interrelated so as to constitute "a culture"? And were there among them persistent patterns and structures of organization, perhaps diverse patterns of cultural tradition, which were related as Little Tradition and Great Tradition? Two types of ordered patterns suggested themselves almost at once as being particularly obvious and natural. One grouping included the cultural performances that marked and celebrated the successive stages of the individual life cycle from birth to death (the *rites de passage*), and the other marked nature's cycle of seasons, phases of the moon, and the like. I was somewhat surprised to find, however, that neither grouping had any special prominence in the minds of my friends and acquaintances. In fact, I do not recall a single instance when anyone identified a particular cultural performance as belonging to one or the other of these two groups. In formal discussions of the *āśrama* system and in discussions of a Brahman's duties, the individual life cycle is used as an ordering principle. But this usage is highly abstract and conventionalized and rarely takes account of the prevailing local rites and customs. When I found that the ordering of cultural performances by these distinct principles was not in the forefront of consciousness of the participants and did not in any case include all of the cultural performances I had observed, I ceased to regard these principles as compellingly "natural." It occurred to me then that the cultural performances may be susceptible to a number of different types of patterning, varying in explicitness and degree of significance for cultural analysis. I therefore re-examined my materials to see what some of these alternative patterns might be.

### *The cultural stage*

One type of analysis might study the place where the cultural performance occurs. The home, for example, is the center for a fixed cycle of rites, ceremonies, and festivals (including both the life-cycle and nature-cycle rites), and the temple is a center for another set of daily rites and periodic festivals. This division is consciously recognized, and there are two quite distinct sets of ritual functionaries, domestic and temple priests, who may conduct the rites in the two places. Temples and pilgrimage places are also specialized with respect to the type of deity to whom they are dedicated and the kind of motive for which they are visited: to have a specific request granted; to fulfil a vow; to expiate for sins; to gain spiritual edification, for example. Beyond the home and the temple is the *maṭha*, not so much a center for cultural performances as a seat of the highest spiritual authority of the sect, the *jagadguru*, who approves the annual religious calendar and whose blessings and advice are much sought after. The more secular performances of popular culture are put on in public halls before mixed audiences and are usually sponsored by cultural associations or *sabhās*, when they are not completely commercialized. In the villages, they may still be performed in the houses of well-to-do patrons or in the temple hall, but there, too, the institution of the community center is introducing a new kind of stage, less closely tied to individual, caste, and sect.

In all of these institutions, much goes on that is culturally significant but may not be part of an organized cultural performance. This is particularly true of the informal and casual cultural "training" that children receive from their parents. But this function, too, is probably being increasingly professionalized and institutionalized in training centers—schools, Sanskrit academies, dancing schools.

An analysis of cultural performances in terms of their institutional settings would be relatively comprehensive both as to the range of performances and the range of performers and institutions to be found in South India. It cannot deal, however, with those types of performance that have no fixed or recurrent institutional base—e.g., a folk play (*terukkūttu*), which is given in a village field or city lot, or a group of devotees who sing devotional songs along a street or country road. It also fails to include certain types of cultural specialists whose primary function is not to participate in or conduct cultural performances but to give advice about proper times (astrologers) or to supply the necessary props (imagemakers). Thus, a construction of the cultural pattern that starts from institutional settings would have to be completed with constructions that include noninstitutionalized performances and "nonperforming" cultural specialists.

### *Cultural specialists*

One wants to know more about a cultural specialist than can be learned from watching him perform: his recruitment, training, remuneration, motivation, attitude toward his career, his relation to his audience, patron, other performers, and his community—all matters that can best be discovered by interviewing the specialist himself. While all of these things cannot be directly observed in the field, some aspects of them can be observed in favorable circumstances, for example, the training process or the performer's relation to an audience. In the main, however, the analysis of culture in terms of the careers and social roles of the professional cultural specialists is, like the institutional analysis, a construct for analyzing observable cultural performances. Redfield has suggested that such a construct is a specialization and extension of the social anthropologist's constructs of "social structure" and "social organization" to a community of cultural specialists; he therefore has called it the "social organization and the social structure of tradition."[5]

The Madras area provided representatives of five types of specialists that I had on my original list as well as a considerable number of others that I had not previously known about. The only type I did not get to hear or meet were the local bards and caste genealogists, although I was told that there were some in the area. Most of the specialists I interviewed were affiliated with special cultural institutions—temple priests with the temples, domestic priests or *purohitas* with household ceremonies, Sanskrit pandits with Sanskrit schools and colleges, a Sanskrit research scholar with the university, and a whole group of reciters, storytellers, singers, dancers, dramatic performers, and instrumental musicians with the cultural associations or *sabhās.* The press, the radio, and the movies have also developed new types of cultural specialists in the form of editors, program directors, story writers, and producers, and I interviewed several. As far as possible I tried to observe the performances of these specialists in their respective institutional settings as well as to interview them outside of these settings. There was also a group of cultural specialists, as I have already mentioned, without any fixed institutional affiliations, who nevertheless still play an active role in transmitting traditional culture. Among them were a specialist in Vedic *mantras*, an astrologer, a maker of metal images for temple and domestic shrines, leaders of devotional meetings, and an *Āyurvedic* doctor.

Whether associated with an institution or not, the cultural specialist rarely stands alone. Supporting him are usually other specialists and assistants, a teacher or guru, a patron, an organizer of performances, an institutional trustee, a public critic of the specialty. Occasionally I was lucky enough to interview the several representatives of such a functionally linked series, e.g., a dancer and her patron, a dance teacher, student dancers, the organizer of a dance school, and a publicist and critic of the classical dance. The patron, organizer, and critic are usually not themselves specialists, although they may know a good deal about a particular specialty and play an important role in setting standards of public taste and criticism. In this respect, they function as cultural policy-makers. I also found cultural policy-makers who assumed responsibility not merely for formulating the aspirations and standards governing a particular cultural specialty but for an entire cultural tradition. The head of a *maṭha* in the region, a svāmī and *sannyāsin*, highly respected and influential, showed much concern about the future of orthodox Hinduism in the area and throughout India. Another svāmī, without any institutional affiliation, was through public lectures urging a policy of democratizing the

Vedas. Such matters, too, were the concern of some people who held political office and who were in a position to affect public opinion and legislative policy.

### *The social organization of tradition in the village*

In the villages, too, one can find cultural policy-makers, especially among individuals associated with the introduction of village development plans and extension services. The heads of the village development committees and youth leagues, the social recreation officers, the village-level worker, although primarily concerned with agricultural improvements, sanitation, and similar matters, are also affecting cultural aspirations and policies. The building of new village schools, community and recreation centers with their libraries, radios, and community stages, are creating in the village single centers of cultural life that formerly revolved around its several temples.

The villages lack the variety of cultural specialists to he found in the cities and towns. In the villages I visited, a temple priest, a domestic priest, and a schoolteacher seemed to be the usual minimum. Several villages had more specialists, but the social organization of tradition in the village still differed from that of the city because it involved less specialization, less full-time and professional activity, and depended more on traveling specialists from other villages and nearby towns. In one village, the temple priest is also something of a pandit, a ritual reciter of sacred texts, a singer of devotional songs, and an astrologer—functions that tend to be carried out by different people in the city. In this same village, a resident dramatics teacher trains the village boys to perform in purāṇic plays, but he is also a drummer and the village potter. There are no professional dancers, actors, doctors, or image-makers in this village, although residents know about these specialists from having seen them in neighboring villages and towns or occasionally when they pass through the village. Specialists representative of the newer mass media—the newspaper, radio, and film—are of course not to be found in the villages.

I heard about villages in South India that until recently were the homes of famous musicians, dance teachers, poets, and pandits and were active cultural centers. This situation is no longer common, however, since it depended on grants of village lands or on grants of temple privileges to families of specialists. Except for the occasional village that is the seat of a famous shrine, the village looks to the city and to the planning committee for its cultural specialists. Even the most traditional cultural specialists told me how their itineraries have shifted from the villages to the towns in the last twenty years because the most educated and "cultured" villagers have moved to the cities and towns.

Despite the declining position of the village as a center for cultural specialists, for several reasons, one nevertheless still finds a strong sense of cultural continuity between village and town. Until recently, many villages were active centers of traditional culture; even today, some of the basic cultural institutions and specialists are the same in both village and town. Moreover, in the Indian countryside, there is what Oscar Lewis[1] has called a "rural cosmopolitanism" built up in part by the network of caste and kin ties and in part by the traveling cultural specialists. Finally, in the cities and towns there is a cosmopolitan folk culture, sometimes little modified from its village counterpart and sometimes assimilated to the mass culture of the urban center. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the continuity in culture between village and city is the common stock of mythological and legendary themes shared by both villager and city man. The same stories from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, and the *Mahābhārata* are recited, sung, and played in both village and city. Even among a colony of untouchables who were otherwise culturally impoverished I found a teacher who knew these plays teaching boys to act them out. It is because they perform and know the same stories that we can say that villager and urbanite belong to the same culture and civilization. Or, to put it more cautiously and more operationally, a contextual analysis of epic and purāṇic stories would probably disclose an underlying continuity of mental outlook and ethos between the villager and the urbanite.

## Cultural media

To describe the cultural continuity between village and town in terms of a common stock of epic and purāṇic stories is to shift attention from the cultural specialists and their social organization to certain elements of cultural content. Before I went to India, I knew these stories as occurring in printed books called the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, parts of which I had read in translation. This knowledge gave me a welcome sense of recognition when I heard some of the stories, but it did not prepare me for the rich variety of ways in which they are told and retold. Seldom did I come across an Indian who had read these stories as I did, simply in a book. This is not how they learn them and it is not how they think of them. There is a sense of intimate familiarity with the characters and incidents in the references made to Hariścandra, Rāma and Sītā, Krishna, Arjuna, and Prahlāda, as if the world of the stories were also the everyday world. Many children are told these stories from an early age by parents and grandparents, but this is by no means the only way in which they learn them. The very tissue of the culture is made from purāṇic themes. Practically every cultural performance includes one—in song, dance, play, recitation, and exposition. Characters and scenes are ever present on the colored lithographs used in homes and public halls (as well as in the brilliantly colored figures on temple towers, for example, on the modern Śrī Kapālīśvara temple in Mylapore, Madras). The cultural and physical landscapes are literally and imaginatively painted with them.

As I grew familiar with the different ways in which the stories were communicated in the Madras area, I realized that the modes of communication—the "cultural media"—were themselves worthy of study, for it was these forms and not printed books that carried the content of belief and practice expressing the living outlook of a majority of the population. Such media, too, are "cultural" in two other senses: In their differentiation of forms as song, dance, and drama, they constitute what is popularly considered "culture"; and these formal differentiations are in turn well articulated with other aspects of the culture and society. Cultural specialists, for example, are distinguished according to their mastery of the different media—in singing, dancing, acting, knowledge of Sanskrit, technique of dramatic recitation, and the like. Even when a performer is a hereditary specialist, his status is not taken for granted but is judged in terms of his proficiency in the medium.

Spoken language is the pre-eminent cultural medium; it is a constituent of culture, symbolizes elements of belief and practice, and, as an activity, articulates with other aspects of sociocultural organization. Nonlinguistic media, however, also played an important role in the cultural performances I observed. Song, dance, acting out, and graphic and plastic art combine in many ways to express and communicate the content of Indian culture.[7] A study of the different forms of cultural media in their social and cultural contexts would, I believe, reveal them to be important links in that cultural continuum which includes village and town, Brahman and non-Brahman, north and south, the modern mass-media culture and the traditional folk and classic cultures, the Little and the Great Traditions.

From my limited observation, I cite one example to illustrate the possibilities for such inquiry. The *Rāmāyaṇa is* probably one of the most popular sacred texts in the area and is communicated through a variety of cultural media. One—called *Rāmāyaṇa pārāyaṇa*—is a daily ritual reading of a canto of the Vālmīki Sanskrit text. It is done in the household by the Brahman householder or by a special Brahman reader, and at the temple by a Brahman reciter. The reading is continued until the entire text is completed, and then a new cycle of readings with the same or another text is begun. I have called it a "ritual reading" because it is a prescribed religious duty for all Brahmans; it is done before a sacred shrine by a Brahman, and the correct repetition of the holy words in Sanskrit is as important as understanding their meaning. In these respects, it resembles recitations and chanting of Vedic *mantras* and may be considered a part of the sacred culture. Another form of reading is expository. Its chief purpose is to explain the story in the regional language, Tamil, and to draw moral lessons. Depending on the erudition of the *paurāṇika* and of his audience, the text is Sanskrit or a Tamil version composed by a Tamil poet, Kamban, about 700 years ago. Expository recitations are usually given in public halls, although they may also be given in private homes and in temples. Brahmans most frequently are the expounders, but non-Brahmans do it also. A third form, *Harikathākālakṣepam*, resembles the second in using expository narration in Tamil as the chief medium but differs from it in adding relevant songs from Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Hindi, Marathi, and

Tamil with musical accompaniment. The performer in the latter case must be something of a singer, a linguist, and an "artist," as well as a dramatic storyteller. This art form is relatively recent in the Tamil country, having been developed about 250 years ago from Mahārāṣṭrian models. It is practiced by non-Brahmans as well as by Brahmans, and one of the outstanding artists is a woman. Then there is the variety of dance and dramatic forms, traditional and modern, through which themes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* are presented. Folk as well as classical forms are used, and both have been adapted to such mass media as the film.

A detailed analysis of cultural media would cast much light on the ways in which cultural themes and values are communicated as well as on processes of social and cultural change. The ritual reading in the sacred setting seems to be the oldest form and differs from the others in types of institutional setting, specialists, values expected, and amount of Sanskrit used. Yet it is possible to see strong links of continuity between this form and the less ritualized forms of popular culture. Even the most recent of the mass media, the movies, draws heavily upon the older cultural media and on the common stock of traditional devotional and mythological stories.

## From field study to the study of a total civilization

Some anthropologists advised me before I went to India not to spend much time preparing myself by studying the history of Indian civilization or reading the Indian epics and other texts. A field study, they said, has a strict obligation to record only those realities which the field worker himself can observe within a limited area and what is within the living memory of the people he interviews. Historical and literary research would only clutter the mind with preconceptions and should be done, if at all, after the field work is finished. Although I did not take this advice, the course of the study would seem to justify it: I was compelled to limit my attention to a particular group of people within one region restricted enough to be brought under a single conspectus of interrelations; I had to set aside generic conceptual categories about total civilizations in favor of concrete units of observation like cultural performances; and even the analysis of cultural performances runs in terms of constituent factors such as cultural institutions, cultural specialists, and cultural media, which in part, at least, are amenable to the direct observation and interview of the field worker.

Yet the necessity of concrete research does not quite end the story. The purpose of the study was to test some general concepts and hypotheses about Indian civilization as a whole—particularly about the cultural continuity of its Great and Little Traditions across the barriers of village and town, caste and caste, region and region, past and present. How can the results of a limited field study be relevant to hypotheses so general in scope? How can the "cultural pattern of Indian civilization" be found in a regionally delimited cultural cluster with a very shallow historical depth? Must we then abandon the civilizational frame of reference or reconsider how a limited and functional field study is relevant to the study of a whole civilization in its full regional and temporal scope?

Methodologically, there are two different ways to relate a limited field study to a total civilization. One way is to consider the unit of field study—whether it be a village or a cluster of villages and towns—as an isolate that contains within it the culture pattern. Once the pattern is delineated for one field unit, it may be compared with the pattern found in similar units in other regions until enough cases are studied to give good measures of central tendency and of the range of variation in patterns. To give historical depth to such patterns, it would of course be necessary to supplement the field studies with historical and archaeological studies of similar isolates in the past. This procedure results in a view of the cultural pattern of a civilization as a kind of statistical aggregate of the patterns of all the cultural molecules, past and present, that have been isolated for study.

If, however, a civilization is, as Redfield writes, "a great whole in space and in time by virtue of the complexity of organization which maintains and cultivates its traditions and communicates them from the great tradition to the many and very small local societies within it,"[8] then it is doubtful whether the procedure will reveal the required complexity of organization. Within a delimited unit of field study, such as I started with, it was possible to find a variety of cultural institutions, specialists, and media that link Brahman and non-Brahman, villager and townsman, one sect and another, to a common cultural tradition. But if a unit is to disclose the cultural links with the past and with other regions, it cannot be regarded as an isolate but must be considered rather as one convenient point of entry to the total civilization, as one nodule in the organized network of cultural communication to which Redfield refers. Different field studies may of course choose different points of entry—in terms of size, character, and location—but the interest in comparing their results will be not to count them as instances for statistical generalization but rather to trace the actual lines of communication with one another and with the past. The general description of this organization in its most embracing spatial and temporal reach will then be a description of the cultural pattern of the total civilization.

In closing this preliminary report, I should like to mention several lines of cultural communication that lead out from my chosen unit of field study into other regions and other times. The pilgrimage to the Ganges and to other sacred spots is undertaken by many ordinary people, but one also hears of many *sannyāsins* who have been to the Himalayas or who are planning to retire there. Thus does the sacred geography of the land extend cultural consciousness beyond one region. One *harikathā* artist I interviewed told me that she has performed all over India, as well as in Burma and Ceylon. Outside of the Tamil-speaking areas, her audiences rarely understood her

Tamil narration but never failed to respond to her songs and pantomime because they were familiar with the purāṇic and epic stories she recited.

The links to the past are plentiful in a culture based until recently on the transmission of oral and written texts within families of hereditary specialists. An image-maker I interviewed still knew a separate Vedic *mantra* to help him draw each image and occasionally consulted on difficult points ancient manuals (*Śilpaśāstras*) that had been handed down to him on palm leaf manuscripts. Specialists on different types of *śāstras* as well as on the Purāṇas are still regularly consulted to settle difficult cases, and Vedic prayers and chanting still accompany many rites and ceremonies. To follow up these various strands would require competence in the different regional languages, in Sanskrit, in Indian cultural history, and other subjects, and more time than is usually given to a single field study. It is obviously a task that requires cultural historians, linguists, and Sanskritists, as well as field anthropologists.

Occasionally one finds, especially among the cultural leaders and scholars of Tamiḻnāḍu, persons whose outlook seeks to comprehend the total pattern of Indian civilization and to define its Great Tradition. A Sanskrit scholar, a Smārta Brahman, sees Sanskritic and Vedic Hinduism as the Great Tradition that has in the course of history incorporated many elements of folk and regional cultures not included in the Vedic one. He sees the formative process as a constructive Sanskritization that has conserved existing practices and customs, has reduced a bewildering mass to some cultural homogeneity, and has resulted in a refinement and "civilization" of lower practices. A Vaiṣṇavite Brahman pandit, on the other hand, spoke of two lines of tradition that lie had inherited: one "familial and spiritual"—the Vedic—and the other "spiritual only"—Vaiṣṇavism. The latter has its scriptures, rituals, temples, *maṭhas*, saints, and functionaries that overlay a Vedic foundation and that he shared with non-Brahman Vaiṣṇavites. A non-Brahman Śaivite scholar made the cleavage between the Vedic and Tamil traditions sharper still. Respectful to the former, lie identified with a Śaivism whose medium was Tamil and whose institutions, practices, and beliefs were, as he described them, largely non-Brahman and non-Sanskritic. And then there are individuals who speak only of a great Tamil and Dravidian tradition and who actively reject the Vedic and Sanskritic tradition as cunning impositions of a northern, Aryan, Brahman "fifth column." Representatives of this group, pursuing a program of de-Sanskritization, have rewritten the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as a drama in which Rāvaṇa is the southern hero, and Rāma the northern villain.

All of these views represent in one sense "autodefinitions" of the Great Tradition, since they all begin from some special vantage point—usually inherited—of occupation, caste, sect, and region. But they can also serve, especially the more scholarly and informed among them, as valuable guides in the effort to add regional scope and historical depth to a limited field study.

## Notes

1 Robert Redfield, "The Social Organization of Tradition," *FEQ* 15, No. 1 (November, 1955): 13–21.

2 Robert Redfield and Milton Singer, "The Cultural Role of Cities," *EDCC* 3, No. 1 (October, 1954): esp. 64–73.

3 Srinivas, *Coorgs* (see note 15 to Chapter 2, above).

4 McKim Marriott, "Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization," in Marriott, ed., *VI* (see note 6, Introduction to Part One).

5 Redfield, "Social Organization of Tradition."

6 Oscar Lewis, "Peasant Culture in India and Mexico: A Comparative Analysis," in *VI*.

7 An ancient manual on the classical dance beautifully expresses this organic interrelationship of different media: "The song should be sustained in the throat; its meaning must be shown by the hands; the mood (*bhāva*) must be shown by the glances; time (*tāla*) is marked by the feet. For wherever the hand moves, there the glances follow; where the glances go, the mind follows; where the mind goes, the mood follows; where the mood goes, there is the flavour (*rasa*)." *The Mirror* of *Gesture: Being the Abhinaya Darpana of Nandikesvara*, trans. by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Duggirala Gopalakrishnayya (New York: E. Weyhe, 1936), p. 35.

8 Redfield, "Social Organization of Tradition."

# 4

# RITUAL DRAMA AS "HUB"

## *Kenneth Burke*

Source: Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, New York: Vintage Books, 1957, pp. 87–113.

The general perspective that is interwoven with our methodology of analysis might be summarily characterized as a *theory of drama*. We propose to take *ritual drama* as the Ur-form, the "hub," with all other aspects of *human* action treated as spokes radiating from this hub. That is, the social sphere is considered in terms of situations and acts, in contrast with the physical sphere, which is considered in mechanistic terms, idealized as a flat cause-and-effect or stimulus-and-response relationship. Ritual drama is considered as the culminating form, from this point of view, and any other form is to be considered as the "efficient" overstressing of one or another of the ingredients found in ritual drama. An essayistic treatise of scientific cast, for instance, would be viewed as a kind of Hamletic soliloquy, its rhythm slowed down to a snail's pace, or perhaps to an irregular jog, and the dramatic situation of which it is a part usually being left unmentioned.[1]

The reference to Hamlet is especially appropriate, in view of the newer interpretation that has been placed upon Hamlet's quandaries. For more than a hundred years, we had been getting a German translation of Hamlet, a translation in terms of romantic idealism, a translation brought into English by Coleridge, who interpreted Hamlet as an Elizabethan Coleridge, the "man of inaction." The newer and juster interpretation, which Maurice Evans has done much to restore for us, largely by the simple expedient of giving us the play uncut, is that of Hamlet as the "scientist," a man anxious to weigh all the objective evidence prior to the act. Among other things, it has been pointed out, there was the "scientific" problem (as so conceived within the beliefs current in Shakespeare's day) of determining whether the ghost was *really* the voice of his father or a satanic deception. And Hamlet, as preparation for his act, employed the stolid Horatio and the ruse of the play-within-a-play as "controls," to make sure that his interpretation of the scene was not fallacious, or as we might say, "subjective."[2]

The objection may be raised that "historically" the ritual drama is *not* the Ur-form. If one does not conceive of ritual drama in a restricted sense (but allows for a "broad interpretation" whereby a Greek goat-song and a savage dance to tom-toms in behalf of fertility, rain, or victory could be put in the same bin), a good argument could be adduced, even on the historical, or genetic, interpretation of the Ur-form. However, from my point of view, even if it were proved beyond all question that the ritual drama is not by any means the poetic prototype from which all other forms of poetic and critical expression have successively broken off (as dissociated fragments each made "efficient" within its own rights), my proposal would be in no way impaired. Let ritual drama be proved, for instance, to be the *last* form historically developed; or let it be proved to have arisen anywhere along the line. There would be no embarrassment: we could contend, for instance, that the earlier forms were but groping towards it, as rough drafts, with the ritual drama as the perfection of these trends—while subsequent forms could be treated as "departures" from it, a kind of "aesthetic fall."

The reason for our lack of embarrassment is that we are not upholding this perspective on the basis of historical or genetic material. We are proposing it as a *calculus*—a vocabulary, or set of coördinates, that serves best for the integration of all phenomena studied by the *social* sciences. We propose it as the logical alternative to the treatment of human acts and relations in terms of the mechanistic metaphor (stimulus, response, and the conditioned reflex). And we propose it, along with the contention that mechanistic considerations need not be *excluded* from such a perspective, but take their part in it, as a statement about the predisposing structure of the *ground* or *scene* upon which the drama is enacted.[3]

Are we in an "Augustinian" period or a "Thomistic" one? "Faith" cannot act relevantly without "knowledge"—"knowledge" cannot act at all without "faith." But though each requires the other, there is a difference of emphasis possible. The great political confusion of the present, which is matched in the poetic sphere by a profusion of rebirth rituals, with a great rise of adolescent characters as the bearers of "representative" rôles (adolescence being the transitional stage *par excellence*), gives reason to believe that we are in a kind of "neo-evangelical" era, struggling to announce a new conception of purpose. And we believe that such a state of affairs would require more of the "Augustinian" stress upon the *agon*, the contest, with knowledge as the Hamletic preparation for the act required in this agon. Scientific pragmatism, as seen from this point of view, would be considered less as a philosophical assertion per se than as the lore of the "complicating factors" involved in any philosophic assertion. It would be a *necessary admonitory adjunct* to any philosophy, and thus could and should be engrafted as an essential corrective ingredient in any philosophy; its best service is in admonishing us *what to look out for* in any philosophic assertion.

The relation between the "drama" and the "dialectic" is obvious. Plato's dialectic was appropriately written in the mode of ritual drama. It is concerned with the maieutic, or midwifery, of philosophic assertion, the ways in which an idea is developed by the "coöperative competition" of the "parliamentary." Inimical assertions are invited to collaborate in the perfecting of the assertion. In fact, the greatest menace *to* dictatorships lies in the fact that, through their "efficiency" in silencing the enemy, they deprive themselves of competitive collaboration. Their assertion lacks the opportunity to mature through "agonistic" development. By putting the quietus upon their opponent, they bring themselves all the more rudely against the *unanswerable opponent*, the opponent who cannot be refuted, the nature of brute reality itself. In so far as their chart of meanings is inadequate as a description of the scene, it is not equipped to encompass the scene. And by silencing the opponent, it deprives itself of the full value to be got from the "collective revelation" to the maturing of which a vocal opposition radically contributes.

And there is a "collective revelation," a social structure of meanings by which the individual forms himself. Recent emphasis upon the great amount of superstition and error in the beliefs of savages has led us into a false emphasis here. We have tended to feel that a whole collectivity can be "wrong" in its chart of meanings. On the contrary, if a chart of meanings were ever "wrong," it would die in one generation. Even the most superstition-ridden tribe must have had many very accurate ways of sizing up real obstacles and opportunities in the world, for otherwise it could not have maintained itself. Charts of meaning are not "right" or "wrong"—they are relative *approximations* to the truth. And only in so far as they contain real ingredients of the truth can the men who hold them perpetuate their progeny. In fact, even in some of the most patently "wrong" charts, there are sometimes discoverable ingredients of "rightness" that have been lost in our perhaps "closer" approximations. A ritual dance for promoting the fertility of crops was absurd enough as "science" (though its absurdity was effectively and realistically corrected in so far as the savage, along with the mummery of the rite, planted the seed; and if you do not abstract the rite as the essence of the event, but instead consider the act of planting as also an important ingredient of the total recipe, you see that the chart of meanings contained a very important accuracy). It should also be noted that the rite, considered as "social science," had an accuracy lacking in much of our contemporary action, since it was highly *collective* in its attributes, a *group dance* in which *all* shared, hence an incantatory device that kept alive a much stronger sense of the group's consubstantiality than is stimulated today by the typical acts of private enterprise.

In equating "dramatic" with "dialectic," we automatically have also our perspective for the analysis of history, which is a "dramatic" process, involving dialectical oppositions. And if we keep this always in mind, we are reminded that every document bequeathed us by history must be treated as a *strategy for encompassing a situation*. Thus, when considering some document like the

American Constitution, we shall be automatically warned not to consider it in isolation, but as the *answer* or *rejoinder* to assertions current in the situation in which it arose. We must take this into account when confronting now the problem of abiding by its "principles" in a situation that puts forth questions totally different from those prevailing at the time when the document was formed. We should thus claim as our allies, in embodying the "dramatic perspective," those modern critics who point out that our Constitution is to be considered as a rejoinder to the theories and practices of mercantilist paternalism current at the time of its establishment.[4]

Where does the drama get its materials? From the "unending conversation" that is going on at the point in history when we are born. Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.

It is from this "unending conversation" (the vision at the basis of Mead's work) that the materials of your drama arise.[5] Nor is this verbal action all there is to it. For all these words are grounded in what Malinowski would call "contexts of situation." And very important among these "contexts of situation" are the kind of factors considered by Bentham, Marx, and Veblen, the material interests (of private or class structure) that you symbolically defend or symbolically appropriate or symbolically align yourself with in the course of making your own assertions. These interests do not "cause" your discussion; its "cause" is in the genius of man himself as *homo loquax*. But they greatly affect the *idiom* in which you speak, and so the idiom by which you think. Or, if you would situate the genius of man in a *moral* aptitude, we could say that this moral aptitude is universally present in all men, to varying degrees, but that it must express itself through a medium, and this medium is in turn grounded in material structures. In different property structures, the moral aptitude has a correspondingly different idiom through which to speak.

By the incorporation of these social idioms we build ourselves, our "personalities," i.e., our *rôles* (which brings us again back into the matter of the drama). The movie version of Shaw's *Pygmalion* shows us the process in an almost terrifyingly simplified form, as we observe his heroine building herself a character synthetically, by mastering the insignia, the linguistic and manneristic labels of the class among whom she would, by this accomplishment, symbolically enroll herself (with the promise that this symbolic enrollment would culminate in objective, material fulfillment). In its simplicity, the play comes close to heresy, as might be revealed by matching it with a counter-heresy: Joyce's individualistic, absolutist, "dictatorial" establishment of a language from within. Shaw's heroine, in making herself over by artificially acquiring an etiquette of speech and manners, is "internalizing the external" (the term is Mead's). But Joyce is "externalizing the internal."

I call both of these "heresies" because I do not take a heresy to be a flat opposition to an orthodoxy (except as so made to appear under the "dialectical pressure" arising from the fact that the two philosophies may become insignia of opposed material forces); I take a heresy rather to be the isolation of one strand in an orthodoxy, and its following-through-with-rational-efficiency to the point where "logical conclusion" cannot be distinguished from "*reductio ad absurdum*." An "orthodox" statement here would require us to consider complementary movements: both an internalizing of the external and an externalizing of the internal. Heresies tend to present themselves as arguments rather than as dictionaries. An argument must ideally be consistent, and tactically must at least have the *appearance* of consistency. But a dictionary need not aim at consistency: it can quite comfortably locate a mean by terms signalizing contradictory extremes.[6]

The broad outlines of our position might be codified thus:

(1) We have the drama and the scene of the drama. The drama is enacted against a background.

(2) The description of the scene is the rôle of the physical sciences; the description of the drama is the rôle of the social sciences.

(3) The physical sciences are a calculus of events; the social sciences are a calculus of acts. And human affairs being dramatic, the discussion of human affairs becomes dramatic criticism, with more to be learned from a study of tropes than from a study of tropisms.

(4) Criticism, in accordance with its methodological ideal, should attempt to develop rules of thumb that can be adopted and adapted (thereby giving it the maximum possibility of development via the "collective revelation," a development from first approximation to closer approximation, as against the tendency, particularly in impressionistic criticism and its many scientific variants that do not go by this name, to be forever "starting from scratch").

(5) The error of the social sciences has usually resided in the attempt to appropriate the scenic calculus for a charting of the act.

(6) However, there is an interaction between scene and rôle. Hence, dramatic criticism takes us into areas that involve the act as "response" to the scene. Also, although there may theoretically be a common scenic background for all men when considered as a collectivity, the acts of other persons become part of the scenic background for any individual person's act.

(7) Dramatic criticism, in the idiom of theology, considered the individual's act with relation to God as a personal background. Pantheism proclaimed

the impersonality of this divine rôle. I.e., whereas theology treated the scenic function of Nature as a "representative" of God, pantheism made the natural background identical with God. It narrowed the circumference of the context in which the act would be located. Naturalism pure and simple sought to eliminate the rôle of divine participation completely, though often with theological vestiges, as with the "God-function" implicit in the idea of "progressive evolution," where God now took on a "historicist" rôle. History, however, deals with "events," hence the increasing tendency in the social sciences to turn from a calculus of the act to a "pure" calculus of the event. Hence, in the end, the ideal of stimulus-response psychology.

(8) Whatever may be the character of existence in the physical realm, this realm functions but as scenic background when considered from the standpoint of the human realm. I.e., it functions as "lifeless," as mere "property" for the drama. And an ideal calculus for charting this physical realm must treat it as lifeless (in the idiom of mechanistic determinism). But to adopt such a calculus for the charting of life is to chart by a "planned incongruity" (i.e., a treatment of something in terms of what it is *not*).

(9) The ideal calculus of dramatic criticism would require, not an incongruity, but an inconsistency. I.e., it would he required to employ the coördinates of *both* determinism *and* free will.

(10) Since, like biology, it is in a realm midway between vital assertions and lifeless properties, the realm of the dramatic (hence of dramatic criticism) is neither physicalist nor anti-physicalist, but physicalist-plus.

Narrowing our discussion from consideration of the social drama in general to matters of poetry in particular, we may note that the distinction between the "internalizing of the external" and the "externalizing of the internal" involves two different functions of imagery: imagery as confessional and imagery as incantatory, the two elements that John Crowe Ransom has isolated from Aristotle's *Poetics* in his chapters on "The Cathartic Principle" and "the Mimetic Principle." Imagery, as confessional, contains in itself a kind of "personal irresponsibility," as we may even relieve ourselves of private burdens by befouling the public medium. If our unburdening attains an audience, it has been "socialized" by the act of reception. In its public reception, even the most "excremental" of poetry becomes "exonerated" (hence the extreme anguish of a poet who, writing "with maximum efficiency" under such an aesthetic, does not attain absolution by the suffrage of customers).

But we must consider also the "incantatory" factor in imagery: its function as a device for inviting us to "make ourselves over in the image of the imagery." Seen from this point of view, a thoroughly "confessional" art may enact a kind of "individual salvation at the expense of the group." Quite as the development of the "enlightenment" in the economic sphere was from a collective to an individual emphasis (with "private enterprise" as the benign phase of an attitude which has its malign counterpart in the philosophy of "*sauve qui peut*—and the devil take the hindmost"), so have mass rituals tended to be replaced by individualist revisions, with many discriminations that adjust them with special accuracy to the particular needs of their inventor and "signer"; while this mode in turn attains its logical conclusion or reduction to absurdity in poetry having the maximum degree of confessional efficiency, a kind of literary metabolistic process that may satisfy the vital needs of the poet well enough, but through poetic passages that leave offal in their train. Such puns seem to have been consciously exploited by Joyce when he is discussing his *ars poetica* in *Finnegans Wake*, hence should be considered by any reader looking for the work's motivations (i.e., the center about which its structure revolves, or the law of its development). Freud's "cloacal theory" would offer the simplest explanation as to the ways in which the sexually private and the excrementally private may become psychologically merged, so that this theme could be treated as consubstantial with the theme of incest previously mentioned.

For if we test the efficient confessional (as perhaps best revealed in a writer like Faulkner) from the standpoint of the incantatory (from the standpoint of its exhortation to "come on" and make ourselves over in the image of its imagery), we quickly realize its sinister function, from the standpoint of overall social necessities. By the "incantatory" test, a sadistic poetry, when reinforced by the imaginative resources of genius, seems to be a perfect match, in the aesthetic sphere, to the "incantatory" nature of our mounting armament in the practical or political sphere, or to the efficiency of newspaper headlines (got by the formation and training of worldwide organizations devoted to the culling of conflicts, calamities, cataclysms, and atrocities "rationally" selected from the length and breadth of all human society, and given as our "true" representation of that day's "reality").

Confessional efficiency, in its range from poem to report, has given rise to an equally fallacious counter-efficiency which, recognizing the incantatory function of imagery, diligently selects for "reassuring" purposes. Hence, the confessional emphasis of the nineteenth century was "dialectically complemented" by an aesthetic of easy optimism, merging into the sentimental and hypocritical, making peace with the disasters in the world by flatly decreeing that "all's right with the world." I think that much of Whitman's appeal resides in this poetic alchemy, whereby the dangerous destruction of our natural resources could be exaltedly interpreted as an "advance"—while simple doctrines of automatic and inevitable progressive evolution were its replica in the "scientific" bin.

So, in sum, we had two opposite excesses: the "cathartic" poetry which would relieve the poet of his spell by transferring its malignities to his audience, in so far as he was capable of doing so (as the Ancient Mariner got a measure of relief from his curse by a magnetic transference from himself to the wedding-guest, and by the disasters besetting the Pilot's boy). It is an art that tries to "leave the spell upon us," an art that I would propose to sum up as the "aesthetic of the Poe story," a "monotonic" art, from which the reader can escape only by refusal, by being "wholesomely trivial" enough to respond but superficially to the poet's incantations. And we had a "mimetic" poetry that did proceed on the recognition of the incantatory quality in imagery (its function in inviting us to assume the attitudes corresponding to its gestures), but was disposed towards the strategy of the "idealistic lie," in simply renaming an evil as a good, establishing solace by magical decree.

Perhaps the situation is most clearly revealed in music, in the gradual change from "symphony" to "tone poem," with Liszt as an important fulcrum in the change. The symphonic form contained a "way in," "way through," and "way out." It sought to place a spell of danger upon us, and in the assertion of its *finale* to release us from this spell. But the tone poem sought *to lead us in and leave us there*, to have us sink beneath the ground with Alpheus and never to reemerge with Arethusa. It sought to *bewitch* us—and our only protection against it was either triviality of response or infection by a hundred other witcheries, a general clutter of spells, so falling across one another on the bias, that in their confusion they somewhat neutralized the effects of one another.

As regards the borderline area, in which the symbolic act of art overlaps upon the symbolic act in life, I would now offer an anecdote illustrative of spells, and how one might serve the ends of freedom, not by the attempt to eliminate spells (which I consider impossible) but by a critical attempt to coach "good" spells:

A man is, let us say, subject to spells of alcoholic debauchery. For weeks he subsists, in a drugged stupor. After which he recovers, is "purified," and for varying lengths of time rigorously abstains from alcohol.

He also has a sporadic gift for writing. But he cannot sustain this happier kind of spell, and when he relapses into an alcoholic debauch, he has no greater powers of articulacy than a cabbage. His friends say that his weakness for alcohol is gradually destroying his gift for writing; and he also fears this to be the case. Their interpretation seems borne out by a correlation between the two kinds of spell, the malign "gift for" alcoholism and the benign "relapses into" writing. For after he has ended a debauch, and has abstained from alcohol for a time, his literary aptness returns.

He is especially apt, let us say, in depicting the current scene by a felicitous twist of humor that gets things picturesquely awry. And when the benign spell is upon him, some very appealing squibs of this sort occur to him. Then he is happy—and his friends begin to renew their hopes for him. They bestir themselves to assist him in getting the items published.

But what if the correlation between the malign alcoholic spell and the benign literary spell should be differently interpreted? What if they are but different stages along the same graded series, different parts of the same spectrum?

The literary gift of felicitous distortion would thus be but an incipient manifestation of the extreme distortions got by alcohol. Hence, when our hero writes his squibs in the belief that they are the *opposite* of his alcoholism, he may really be turning to the kind of incantation that acts as the "way in" to his period of debauch. Precisely when he thinks he is on the road to recovery, he would have begun the first stage of yielding.

The squibs, that is, are in his psychic economy a representative of the alcohol; they are part of the same cluster; they function synecdochically, and thus contain implicitly, as "foreshadowing," the whole of the cluster. Hence, in writing them, he is taking alcohol vicariously. This is not to say that the squibs are a mere "sublimation" of alcoholism; you could with more justice say that the alcoholism is a more "efficient" embodiment of the aesthetic exemplified in the squibs. What is got by materialistic manipulation through the taking of the alcohol, "*ex opere operato*," is but the attainment, in a simplified, restricted idiom, of the effects got in a more complex idiom through the writing of the squibs.

The Latin formula is borrowed from theological controversy about the nature of the sacrament. In pagan magic, the material operations of the sacrament were deemed enough to produce the purification. Ritual purification was a "scientific" process, with the purifying effects got simply by the *material operations* of the rite. No matter of conscience was involved; no private "belief" was thought necessary to the success of the rite. The purification was, rather, thought to operate like the cures of modern medicine (from the mere performing of the correct material acts themselves)—as the effects of castor oil are the same with "believer" and "nonbeliever" alike. Theological tacticians had the problem of taking over the "scientific" magic of paganism and introducing a religious emphasis upon the need of conscience or belief as a factor in the effectiveness of the rite, without thereby implying that the rite was purely "symbolic." The magical doctrine was "realistic"; and similarly, the religious sacrament was "realistic" (that is, the rite was held *really* to have transubstantiated the holy wafers and the wine into the body and blood of Christ: the act was not deemed merely "symbolical," except among schismatics; it was as materialistic a means of purification as castor oil, yet at the same time its effective operation required the collaboration of belief, as castor oil does not; the effect could not be got, as with pagan magic and scientific materialism, through the objective operation alone, i.e., *ex opere operato*). We find this delicate state of indeterminacy in the relation between the squibs and the alcoholism, though the "piety" here is of a sort different from that considered as the norm by orthodox Christian theologians: a piety more in keeping perhaps with the genius of Bacchantic services, the cult of methodic distortion that stressed the element of Priapic obscenities and finally became sophisticated, alembicated, and attenuated in comedy. The writing of the squibs corresponds to the stage aimed at by the theologians: it is a material operation, yet at the same time it requires "belief." The alcoholic stage is purely materialistic, the results now being attained efficiently by the "real" power of the substance alone.

But note the ironic element here. If the writing of the squibs is in the same equational structure with the taking of the alcohol, in writing the squibs it is as though our hero had "taken his first drink." This is the one thing he knows he must not do. For he knows that he is incapable of moderation, once the first drink has been taken. But if the squibs and the alcohol are in the same cluster, he has vicariously taken the first drink in the very act which, on its social face, was thought by him and his friends to belong in an opposing cluster.

Thus, he has begun his "way in." He has begun infecting himself with a kind of incantation that synecdochically foreshadows, or implicitly contains, the progression from this less efficient, ritualistic yielding to an efficient, practical yielding: he has begun the chain of developments that finally leads into alcohol as the most direct means for embodying the same aesthetic of distortion as was embodied in his squibs.

The irony is that, if he wanted to guard properly against relapse, *instead of writing the squibs, he would resolutely refuse to write them.* He would recognize that, however it may be in the case of other men, in his case he conjures forth a djinn (or, if you will, gin) that will come at his beckoning but will develop powers of its own, once summoned. He may know the magical incantations that summon it; but he does not know the magical incantations that compel it to obey him, once it has been summoned; hence, let him not summon it.

Would this mean that our hero should not write at all? I do not think so. On the contrary, I think it means that he should *attempt to coach some other kind of writing, of a different incantatory quality.* From this kind he would rigorously exclude the slightest distortion, no matter how appealing such distortion might be. *For him,* such distortions are in the category of intemperance, regardless of what category they may be in *for others.* Only thus, by deliberately refusing to cultivate such incantatory modes, would he be avoiding a "way in" to a dangerous state of mind and utilizing a mode of incantation truly oppositional to his weakness.[7]

We are not proposing here a mere literary variant of Buchmanism. We take it for granted that our hero's alcoholism is also interwoven with a material context of situation, which has become similarly endowed with "incantatory" quality, and must be critically inspected from the standpoint of the possibility that many environmental ingredients would also require alteration. We do hold, however, that environmental factors which one is personally unable to change can be given a different incantatory quality by a change of one's relationship towards them (as with a change of allegiance from one band to another).

It is, then, my contention, that if we approach poetry from the standpoint of situations and strategies, we can make the most relevant observations about both the content and the form of poems. By starting from a concern with the various tactics and deployments involved in ritualistic acts of membership, purification, and opposition, we can most accurately discover "what is going on" in poetry. I contend that the "dramatic perspective" is the unifying hub for this approach. And that it is not to be "refuted," as a calculus, by introducing some "argument" from logic or genetics, or simply by listing a host of other possible perspectives; the only serviceable argument for another calculus would be its explicit proclamation and the illustrating of its scope by concrete application. I do not by any means maintain that no other or better calculus is possible. I merely maintain that the advocate of an alternative calculus should establish its merits, not in the abstract, but by "filling it out," by showing, through concrete applications to poetic materials, its scope and relevance.

Some students, however, seem to feel that this perspective vows us to a neglect of the "realistic" element in poetry. Its stress upon processes of ritual and stylization, they feel, too greatly implies that the poet is making passes in the air, mere blandishments that look silly, as tested by the "realistic" criteria of science.

In the first place, I would recall my distinction between "realism" and "naturalism," as a way of suggesting that much we call "realism" in science should be more accurately called "naturalism." In the aesthetic field, "naturalism" is a mode of "debunking." Where some group ideal is being exploited for malign purposes (as when the scoundrel has recourse to patriotism in cloaking his unpatriotic acts), the "naturalist" will proceed "efficiently" by debunking not only the scoundrel but the patriotism. Or he will "debunk" the religious hypocrite by "debunking" religion itself. Thurman Arnold's "scientific" analysis of social relations in his *Folklore of Capitalism* is largely of this "naturalistic" cast, leading him finally to a flat dissociation between the "scientist" and the "citizen." To act as a "citizen," by his criteria, one must participate in certain forms of political mummery. But to diagnose as a "scientist," one should simply "expose" this mummery.

Now, I grant that there is much faulty mummery in the world (indeed, I propose to wind up this discussion with a little burlesque revealing some of it). But where a structure of analysis is found to vow one to a flat antithesis between one's rôle as scientist and one's rôle as citizen, we should at least consider the possibility that the structure of analysis itself may be at fault. And I think that the distinction between the strategies of "realism" and "naturalism" may provide us with a handy way in to this matter.

Scientific "naturalism" is a lineal descendant of nominalism, a school that emerged in the late Middle Ages as an opponent of scholastic realism. And we might sum up the distinction between realism and nominalism, from the standpoint of strategies, by saying that *realism considered individuals as members of a group, whereas nominalism considered groups as aggregates of individuals.* We thus observe that the nominalist controversy, finally incorporated in the Franciscan order, prepared for scientific skepticism in undermining the group coördinates upon which church thought was founded, and also prepared for the individualistic emphasis of private enterprise.

This individualistic emphasis led in turn to naturalism. Thus, I should call Dos Passos a naturalist rather than a realist. And I should call the "hard-boiled" style today a kind of "academic school of naturalism" (a characterization suggesting that Steinbeck's sociality is still encumbered by "nonrealistic" vestiges). As used by Arnold, the naturalist-nominalist perspective finally leads to the assumption that the devices employed in a *group* act are mere "illusions," and that the "scientific truth" about human relations is discovered from an individualistic point of view, from outside the requirements of group action. One reviewer, intending to praise his book, hit upon the most damning line of all, in calling it a "challenge to right, center, and left," which is pretty much the same as saying that it is a "challenge" to *any* kind of social action.

But let us try out a hypothetical case. Suppose that some disaster has taken place, and that I am to break the information to a man who will suffer from the knowledge of it. The disaster is a *fact*, and I am going to *communicate this fact*. Must I not still make a *choice of stylization* in the communication of this fact? I may communicate it "gently" or "harshly," for instance. I may try to "protect" the man somewhat from the suddenness of the blow; or I may so "strategize" my information that I reinforce the blow. Indeed, it may even be that the information is as much a blow to me as it is to him, and that I may obtain for myself a certain measure of relief from my own discomfiture by "collaborating with the information": I may so phrase it that I take out some of my own suffering from the information by using it dramatically as an instrument for striking him. Or I may offer a somewhat similar outlet for both of us, by also showing that a certain person "is to blame" for the disaster, so that we can convert some of our unhappiness into anger, with corresponding relief to ourselves.

Now, note that in every one of these cases I have communicated "the fact." Yet note also that there are many different *styles* in which I can communicate this "fact." The question of "realistic accuracy" is not involved; for in every case, after I have finished, the auditor knows that the particular disaster, about which I had to inform him, has taken place. I have simply made a choice among possible styles—*and I could not avoid such a choice*. There is no "unstylized" feature here except the disastrous event itself (and even that may have a "stylistic" ingredient, in that it might be felt as more of a blow if coming at a certain time than if it had come at a certain other time—a "stylistic" matter of timing that I, as the imparter of the information, may parallel, in looking for the best or worst moment at which to impart my information).

I should call it a "naturalistic" strategy of communication if I so stylized the informative act as to accept the minimum of "group responsibility" in my choice. If I communicated the fact, for instance, without sympathy for the auditor. Or even more so, if I did have sympathy for the auditor, and the fact was as disastrous to me as it was to him, but I "took it out on" him by reinforcing the blow rather than softening it. And I should call it a "realistic" strategy if I stylized my statement with the maximum sympathy (or "group attitude").

Do not get me wrong. I am not by any means absolutely equating "science" with "naturalism." I am saying that there is a so-called science that identifies "truth" with "debunking"—and I am simply trying to point out that *such "truth" is no less a "stylization" than any other.* The man who embodies it in his work may be as "tenderminded" as the next fellow; usually, in fact, I think that he is even more so—as will be revealed when you find his "hard hitting" at one point in his communication compensated by a great humanitarian softness at another point (which, as I have tried to show elsewhere, is partly the case with Arnold).

Stylization is inevitable. Sometimes it is done by sentimentalization (saying "It's all right" when it isn't). Sometimes by the reverse, brutalization, saying it with an overbluntness, in "hard-boiled" or its "scientific" equivalents (sadism if you like to write it, masochism if you like to read it). I recall a surrealistic movie that revealed the kind of "protection" we may derive from this strategy, in the aesthetic field where the information to be imparted is usually not quite so "disastrous" as the hypothetical event we have been just considering. The movie opens with a view of a man sharpening his razor. We next see a close-up of his eye, an enormous eye filling the entire screen. And then, slowly and systematically, the blade of the razor is drawn across this eye, and in horror we observe it splitting open. Many other horrors follow, but we have been "immunized" by the first shock. We are calloused; we have already been through the worst; there is nothing else to fear; as regards further pain, we have become *roués*. Sometimes the stylization is by neutral description, the method more normal to scientific procedure. And tragedy uses the stylization of ennoblement, making the calamity bearable by making the calamitous situation dignified.

From this point of view we could compare and contrast strategies of motivation in Bentham, Coleridge, Marx, and Mannheim. Bentham, as "debunker," discusses motives "from the bottom up." That is: they are treated as "eulogistic coverings" for "material interests." Coleridge's motivation is "tragic," or "dignifying," "from the top down" (in his phrasing: "*a Jove principium*"). He treats material interests as a limited aspect of "higher" interests. Marx employs a factional strategy of motivation, in debunking the motives of the bourgeois enemy and dignifying the motives of the proletarian ally. Since he has reversed the values of idealism, he would not consider the material grounding of proletarian interests as an indignity. The proletarian view is dignified by being equated with truth, in contrast with the "idealistic lie" of a class that has special prerogatives to protect by systematic misstatements about the nature of reality. Mannheim seeks to obtain a kind of "documentary" perspective on the subject of motives, on a "second level" of generalization. That is: he accepts not only the Marxist debunking of bourgeois motives, but also the bourgeois counter-debunking of proletarian motives; and he next proceeds to attenuate the notion of "debunking" ("unmasking") into a more neutral concept that we might in English call "discounting" or "making allowance for."

Or let us consider another hypothetical case. A man would enroll himself in a cause. His choice may be justified on thoroughly "realistic" grounds. He surveys the situation, sizes it up accurately, decides that a certain strategy of action is required to encompass it and that a certain group or faction is organized to carry out this strategy. Nothing could be more "realistic." Yet suppose that he would write a poem in which, deliberately or spontaneously, he would "stylize" the processes of identification involved in this choice. His act, no matter how thoroughly attuned to the requirements of his times, will be a "symbolic act," hence open to the kind of analysis we have proposed for the description of a symbolic act. If his choice of faction is relevant to the needs of the day, its "realism" is obvious. If the chart of meanings into which he fits this choice of faction are adequate, the relevance is obvious. And to call his poetic gestures merely "illusory" would be like calling it "illusory" when a man, wounded, "stylizes" his response by either groaning or gritting his teeth and flexing his muscles.

There is, in science, a tendency to substitute for ritual, routine. To this extent, there is an antipoetic ingredient in science. It is "poetic" to develop method; it is "scientific" to develop methodology. (From this standpoint, the ideal of literary criticism is a "scientific" ideal.) But we can deceive ourselves if we erect this difference in aim into a distinction between "reality" and "illusion," maintaining that, as judged by the ideals of scientific routine or methodology, the ideals of poetic method, or ritual, become "illusions."

The body is an actor; as an actor, it participates in the movements of the mind, posturing correspondingly; in styles of thought and expression we embody these correlations—and the recognition of this is, as you prefer, either "scientific" or "poetic."

It will thus be seen that, in playing the game of life, we have at our command a resource whereby we can shift the rules of this game. It is as though someone who had been losing at checkers were of a sudden to decide that he had really been playing "give away" (the kind of checkers where the object is not to take as many of your opponent's men as possible, but to lose as many of your own as possible). Where our resources permit, we may piously encourage the awesome, and in so encompassing it, make ourselves immune (by "tolerance," as the word is used of drugs, by Mithridatism). Where our resources do not permit, where we cannot meet such exacting obligations, we may rebel, developing the stylistic antidote that would cancel out an overburdensome awe. And in between these extremes, there is the wide range of the mean, the many instances in which we dilute, attenuate, mixing the ingredient of danger into a recipe of other, more neutral ingredients, wide in their scope and complexity, a chart that concerns itself with the world in all its miraculous diverse plenitude. And for this plenitude of the Creation, being very grateful.

But our symbolic acts can vary greatly in relevance and scope. If we enact by tragedy a purificatory ritual symbolizing our enrollment in a cause shaped to handle a situation accurately, for instance, we may embody the same processes as if we enacted a purificatory ritual symbolizing our enrollment in a cause woefully inadequate to the situation. And the analyst of the two tragedies may, by reason of his over-all classificatory terms, find much in common between the two symbolic acts. The fact remains, however, that one of these acts embodies a chart of meanings superior to the other (and if the chart is too far out of accord with the nature of the situation, the "unanswerable opponent," the objective recalcitrance of the situation itself, will put forth its irrefutable rejoinder).

To illustrate the point, I will close this discussion by a burlesque in which a certain important faultiness of chart may be revealed. Our form here may be like that of the Greek drama, where the tragic trilogy was regularly topped off by a satyr-play exemplifying the same heroic processes, but in caricatured equivalents. So we would offer a kind of "critical analogue" to such a program, rounding out our observations on the nature of tragic purification by a burlesque in which our democratic elections are charted by the same coördinates, but with the President in the rôle of the Sacrificial King.

## Electioneering in Psychoanalysia

Psychoanalysia, an island situated in a remote area of the Not-so-Pacific Ocean, was given this name by the Western sociologists who went there to study its customs. The natives call their island Hobo-i, which means nearly the same as "En Route" in our idioms, and is also the Psychoanalysians' word for "investment." The most striking characteristic of Psychoanalysia is the natives' vivacious interest in popular elections, which are conducted in a vocabulary strikingly similar to that of our Freudian and post-Freudian psychologies.

## Notes

1 The Paget theory of "gesture speech" obviously makes a perfect fit with this perspective by correlating the origins of linguistic action with bodily action and posture.

2 An exceptionally good instance revealing the ways in which dramatic structure underlies essayistic material may be got by inspection of Max Lerner's article, "Constitution and Court as Symbols" (*The Yale Law Journal*, June, 1937). The essay is divided into four parts, or as we should say, four acts. (In modern playwriting, the four-act form has very often replaced the five-act form of earlier Western drama, the climax coming in the third act, with the aftermath of acts IV and V telescoped into one.)

Act I. "Symbols Possess Men." Here the dramatist acquaints us with the situation in which his tragedy is to be enacted. He describes the ways in which leaders prod people to desired forms of action by manipulating the symbols with which these people think. He then narrows the field to the "constitution as symbol," and places the Supreme Court as a personalized vessel of the Constitutional authority.

Act II. "Constitution into Fetich." The action is now under way. Reviewing American history, the dramatist develops in anecdotal arpeggio the proposition summed up by a timeless level of abstraction in Act I. The act ends on "evidence of the disintegration of the constitutional symbol," a theme that will be carried an important step farther in—

Act III. "Divine Right: American Plan." The Justices of the Supreme Court are here presented as our equivalent for kingship and godhead. And the act ends on the tragic crime, the symbolic slaying of the sacrificial king, as the author is attacking our "kings," (i.e., he advocates their deposition from authority). In a footnote, the symmetry is rounded out by a kind of "funeral oration" that gives the slain fathers their dues: "There seems to be something about the judicial robes that not only hypnotizes the beholder but transforms the wearer; Marshall and Taney are the principal, but not the only, instances of men whose capacities for greatness no one suspected until they faced the crucial tasks of the Court." Thus, in both their malign and benign functions, these offerings are "worthy" of sacrifice.

Act IV. "New Symbols for Old." The result of the slaying is indeed a surprise, if approached from other than the dramatic point of view. For a new vision emerges, a vision of the basic motives by which men are moved. And strangely enough, these "transcendent" motives are *hunger* and *fear*. They are *naturalistic* motives. The dramatist, released by the slaying of the fathers, has "gone primitive." The coördinates of the previous acts had been distinctly *social*; and, as anyone acquainted with Lerner's brilliant studies is aware, the coördinates customary to this author are social; but here, for the moment, the symbolic slaying surprises him into a new quality, a "Saturnalian" vision. The episode is, of course, essayistically refurbished elsewhere so that social coördinates are regained. I am here but discussing the form of this one article, taken as an independent integer.

3 In work on which I am now engaged, as a kind of "Prolegomena to any future imputation of motives," I have been applying coördinates that can, I think, carry a step further the ways of locating and distinguishing motivational elements. I now distinguish the three voices, active, passive, and middle (reflexive), as they show motivationally in theories stressing action, passion, and mediation. And instead of the situation-strategy pair, I now use five terms: act, scene, agent, agency, purpose.

These five terms, with a treatment of the purely internal or syntactic relationships prevailing among them, are I think particularly handy for extending the discussion of motivation so as to locate the strategies in metaphysical and theological systems, in accounts of the Creation, in theories of law and constitutionality, and in the shifts between logic and history, being and becoming, as these shifts occur in theories of motivation.

The use of this fuller terminology in the synopsizing of fictional works would require no major emendations in the methods discussed. But I might, as a result of it, be able to state the basic rules of thumb in a more precise way, thus:

The critic is trying to *synopsize* the given work. He is trying to synopsize it, not in the degenerated sense which the word "synopsis" now usually has for us, as meaning a mere "skeleton or outline of the plot or argument," but in the sense of "conveying comprehensively," or "getting at the basis of." And one can work towards this basis, or essence, from without, by "scissor-work" as objective as the nature of the materials permits, in focussing all one's attention about the *motivation*, which is identical with *structure*.

Hence, one will watch, above all, every reference that bears upon expectancy and foreshadowing, in particular every overt reference to any kind of "calling" or "compulsion" (i.e., active or passive concept of motive). And one will note particularly the *situational* or *scenic* material (the "properties") in which such references are contexts; for in this way he will find the astrological relationships prevailing between the plot and the background, hence being able to treat scenic material as representative of psychic material (for instance, if he has distinguished between a motivation in the sign of day and a motivation in the sign of night, as explicitly derivable by citation from the book itself, and if he now sees night falling, he recognizes that the quality of motivation may be changing, with a new kind of act being announced by the change of scene).

4 In this connection, we might note a distinction between positive and dialectical terms—the former being terms that do not require an opposite to define them, the latter being terms that do require an opposite. "Apple," for instance, is a positive term, in that we do not require, to understand it, the concept of a "counter-apple." But a term like "freedom" is dialectical, in that we cannot locate its meaning without reference to some concept of enslavement, confinement, or restriction. And "capitalism" is not a positive term, but a dialectical one, to be defined by reference to the concepts of either "feudalism" or "socialism."

Our courts consider the Constitution in accordance with theories of positive law—yet actually the Constitution is a dialectical instrument; and one cannot properly interpret the course of judicial decisions unless he treats our "guaranties of Constitutional rights" not as positive terms but as dialectical ones.

Our Bill of Rights, for instance, is composed of clauses that descended from two substantially different situations. First, as emerging in Magna Carta, they were enunciated by the feudal barons in their "reactionary" struggles against the "progressive" rise of central authority. Later, in the British Petition of Right and Bill of Rights, they were enunciated by the merchant class in their "progressive" struggles against the "reactionary" resistance of the Crown. It is in this second form that they came into our Constitution.

BUT:

Note this important distinction: in the British Bill of Rights, they were defined, or located, as a resistance of the *people* to the *Crown*. Thus they had, at this stage, a strongly collectivistic quality, as the people were united in a common cause against the Crown, and the rights were thus dialectically defined with relation to this opposition. The position of the Crown, in other words, was a necessary term in giving meaning to the people's counter-assertions.

In the United States document, however, the Crown had been abolished. Hence, the dialectical function of the Crown in giving meaning to the terms would have to be taken over by some other concept of sovereignty. And the only sovereign within the realm covered by the Constitution was the *government elected by the people*. Hence, since the opposite "cooperates" in the definition of a dialectical term, and since the sovereignty or authority against which the rights were proclaimed had changed from that of an antipopular Crown to that of a popularly representative government, it would follow that the quality of the "rights" themselves would have to change. And such change of quality did take place, in that the rights became interpreted as rights of the people as *individuals* or *minorities* against a government representing the will of the people as a *collectivity* or *majority*.

Eventually, this interpretation assisted the rise of the great super-corporations, linked by financial ties and interlocking directorates. And these super-corporations gradually come to be considered as a new seat of authority, placed outside the direct control of parliamentary election. And as this kind of business sovereignty becomes recognized as *bona fide* sovereignty, you begin to see a new change taking place in the "dialectical" concept of Constitutional rights. For theorists begin now to think of these rights as assertions against the encroachments of the super-corporations (the New Crown). That is: the tendency is to think once more of the rights as claimed by the people as a *majority* against the rule of the super-corporations as a sovereign minority.

However, the statement that a term is "dialectical," in that it derives its meaning from an opposite term, and that the opposite term may be different at different historical periods, does not at all imply that such terms are "meaningless." All we need do is to decide what they are *against* at a given period (in brief, to recognize that the Constitution cannot be interpreted as a positive document, but must continually be treated as an *act in a scene outside it*, hence to recognize that we must always consider "the Constitution *beneath* the Constitution," or "the Constitution *above* the Constitution," or "the Constitution *beyond* the Constitution," which may as you prefer be higher law, divine law, the laws of biology, or of big business, or of little business, etc.). Much of the cruder linguistic analysis done by the debunko-semanticist school involves the simple fallacy of failing to note the distinction between positive and dialectical terms, whereby, in applying to *dialectical* terms the instruments of analysis proper to *positive* terms, they can persuade themselves that the terms are meaningless.

5 Also, it is in this "unending conversation" that the assertions of any given philosopher are grounded. *Strategically*, he may present his work as departing from some "rock-bottom fact" (he starts, for instance: "I look at this table. I perceive it to have. . . ." etc.). Actually, the very selection of his "rock-bottom fact" derives its true grounding from the current state of the conversation, and assumes quite a different place in the "hierarchy of facts" when the locus of discussion has shifted.

6 An ideal philosophy, from this point of view, would seek to satisfy the requirements of a perfect dictionary. It would be a calculus (matured by constant reference to the "collective revelation" that is got by a social *body* of thought) for charting the nature of events and for clarifying all important relationships. In practice, however, a philosophy is developed partially *in opposition to other philosophies*, so that tactics of refutation are involved, thus tending to give the philosopher's calculus the stylistic form of a lawyer's plea.

The connection between philosophy and law (moral and political) likewise contributes to the "lawyer's brief" strategy of presentation. The philosopher thus is often led to attempt "proving" his philosophy by proving its "justice" in the abstract, whereas the only "proof" of a philosophy, considered as a calculus, resides in showing, by concrete application, the scope, complexity, and accuracy of its coördinates for charting the nature of events. Thus, the name for "house" would not be primarily tested for "consistency" with the names for "tree" or "money." One would reveal the value of the names by revealing their correspondence with some important thing, function, or relationship. This is what we mean by saying that a philosophy, as a "chart," is quite at home in contradictions.

I recall a man, for instance, of "heretical" cast, who came to me with a sorrow of this sort: "How can you ever have a belief in human rationality," he complained, "when you see things like this?" And he showed me a news clipping about a truck driver who had received a prize for driving his truck the maximum distance without an accident. When asked how he did it, the truck driver answered: "I had two rules: Give as much of the road as you can, and take as much as you can." I saw in this no grounds to despair of human reason; on the contrary, I thought that the prize winner had been a very moral truck driver, and I was glad to read that, for once at least, such great virtue had been rewarded. This was true Aristotelian truck driving, if I ever saw it; and whatever else one may say against Aristotle, I never heard him called "irrational."

What, in fact, is "rationality" but the desire for an *accurate chart for naming what is going on*? Isn't this what Spinoza had in mind, when calling for a philosophy whose structure would parallel the structure of reality? We thus need not despair of human rationality, even in eruptive days like ours. I am sure that even the most arbitrary of Nazis can be shown to possess it; for no matter how inadequate his chart of meaning may be as developed under the deprivations of the quietus and oversimplifying dialectical pressure, he at least *wants* it to tell him accurately *what is going on* in his world and in the world at large.

Spinoza perfected an especially inventive strategy, by this stress upon the "adequate idea" as the ideal of a chart, for uniting free will and determinism, with rationality as the bridge. For if one's meanings are correct, he will choose the wiser of courses; in this he will be "rational"; as a rational man, he will "want" to choose this wiser course; and as a rational man he will "*have* to want" to choose this wiser course.

7 I should contend that our hero, in thus altering his incantatory methods, would get greater freedom by acting more rationally. Others, however, might consider any incantation as per se a sign of "irrationality." The issue probably resolves into two contrasting theories of consciousness. There is a one-way theory, which holds that freedom is got by a kind of drainage, drawing something ("energy"?) from the unconscious and irrational into the conscious and rational. I call this the "reservoir theory," according to which a "dark" reservoir is tapped and its contents are gradually pumped into a "light" reservoir, the quantities being in inverse proportion to each other. Against this, I should propose a two-way, "dialectical" theory, with "conscious" and "unconscious" considered as reciprocal functions of each other, growing or diminishing concomitantly. An infant, by this theory, would be sparse in "unconscious" (with sparse dreams) owing to the sparsity of its consciousness (that provides the material for dreams). And by this theory, the attempt to "drain off" the unconscious would be absurd. Instead, one should seek to "harness" it. I believe that this dialectical theory, as ultimately developed, would require that *charitas*, rather than "intelligence," be considered as the primary faculty of adjustment.

## 5

# LECTURE I IN *HOW TO DO THINGS WITH WORDS*

### *J. L. Austin*

Source: J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (eds) *How to Do Things with Words* (2nd edn), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975, pp. 1–11.

What I shall have to say here is neither difficult nor contentious; the only merit I should like to claim for it is that of being true, at least in parts. The phenomenon to be discussed is very widespread and obvious, and it cannot fail to have been already noticed, at least here and there, by others. Yet I have not found attention paid to it specifically.

It was for too long the assumption of philosophers that the business of a 'statement' can only be to 'describe' some state of affairs, or to 'state some fact', which it must do either truly or falsely. Grammarians, indeed, have regularly pointed out that not all 'sentences' are (used in making) statements:[1] there are, traditionally, besides (grammarians') statements, also questions and exclamations, and sentences expressing commands or wishes or concessions. And doubtless philosophers have not intended to deny this, despite some loose use of 'sentence' for 'statement'. Doubtless, too, both grammarians and philosophers have been aware that it is by no means easy to distinguish even questions, commands, and so on from statements by means of the few and jejune grammatical marks available, such as word order, mood, and the like: though perhaps it has not been usual to dwell on the difficulties which this fact obviously raises. For how do we decide which is which? What are the limits and definitions of each?

But now in recent years, many things which would once have been accepted without question as 'statements' by both philosophers and grammarians have been scrutinized with new care. This scrutiny arose somewhat indirectly—at least in philosophy. First came the view, not always formulated without unfortunate dogmatism, that a statement (of fact) ought to be 'verifiable', and this led to the view that many 'statements' are only what may be called pseudo-statements. First and most obviously, many 'statements' were shown to be, as KANT perhaps first argued systematically, strictly nonsense, despite an unexceptionable grammatical form: and the continual discovery of fresh types of nonsense, unsystematic though their classification and mysterious though their explanation is too often allowed to remain, has done on the whole nothing but good. Yet we, that is, even philosophers, set some limits to the amount of nonsense that we are prepared to admit we talk: so that it was natural to go on to ask, as a second stage, whether many apparent pseudo-statements really set out to be 'statements' at all. It has come to be commonly held that many utterances which look like statements are either not intended at all, or only intended in part, to record or impart straightforward information about the facts: for example, 'ethical propositions' are perhaps intended, solely or partly, to evince emotion or to prescribe conduct or to influence it in special ways. Here too KANT was among the pioneers. We very often also use utterances in ways beyond the scope at least of traditional grammar. It has come to be seen that many specially perplexing words embedded in apparently descriptive statements do not serve to indicate some specially odd additional feature in the reality reported, but to indicate (not to report) the circumstances in which the statement is made or reservations to which it is subject or the way in which it is to be taken and the like. To overlook these possibilities in the way once common is called the 'descriptive' fallacy; but perhaps this is not a good name, as 'descriptive' itself is special. Not all true or false statements are descriptions, and for this reason I prefer to use the word 'Constative'. Along these lines it has by now been shown piecemeal, or at least made to look likely, that many traditional philosophical perplexities have arisen through a mistake—the mistake of taking as straightforward statements of fact utterances which are *either* (in interesting non-grammatical ways) nonsensical *or else* intended as something quite different.

Whatever we may think of any particular one of these views and suggestions, and however much we may deplore the initial confusion into which philosophical doctrine and method have been plunged, it cannot be doubted that they are producing a revolution in philosophy. If anyone wishes to call it the greatest and most salutary in its history, this is not, if you come to think of it, a large claim. It is not surprising that beginnings have been piecemeal, with *parti pris*, and for extraneous aims; this is common with revolutions.

## Preliminary isolation of the performative[2]

The type of utterance we are to consider here is not, of course, in general a type of nonsense; though misuse of it can, as we shall see, engender rather special varieties of 'nonsense'. Rather, it is one of our second class—the masqueraders. But it does not by any means necessarily masquerade as a statement of fact, descriptive or constative. Yet it does quite commonly do so, and that, oddly enough, when it assumes its most explicit form.

Grammarians have not, I believe, seen through this 'disguise', and philosophers only at best incidentally.[3] It will be convenient, therefore, to study it first in this misleading form, in order to bring out its characteristics by contrasting them with those of the statement of fact which it apes.

We shall take, then, for our first examples some utterances which can fall into no hitherto recognized *grammatical* category save that of 'statement', which are not nonsense, and which contain none of those verbal danger-signals which philosophers have by now detected or think they have detected (curious words like 'good' or 'all', suspect auxiliaries like 'ought' or 'can', and dubious constructions like the hypothetical): all will have, as it happens, humdrum verbs in the first person singular present indicative active.[4] Utterances can be found, satisfying these conditions, yet such that

A. they do not 'describe' or 'report' or constate anything at all, are not 'true or false'; and
B. the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as, or as 'just', saying something.

This is far from being as paradoxical as it may sound or as I have meanly been trying to make it sound: indeed, the examples now to be given will be disappointing.

Examples:

(E. *a*) 'I do (sc. take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife)'—as uttered in the course of the marriage ceremony.[5]

(E. *b*) 'I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*'—as uttered when smashing the bottle against the stem.

(E. *c*) 'I give and bequeath my watch to my brother'—as occurring in a will.

(E. *d*) 'I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow.'

In these examples it seems clear that to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to *describe* my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing[6] or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it. None of the utterances cited is either true or false: I assert this as obvious and do not argue it. It needs argument no more than that 'damn' is not true or false: it may be that the utterance 'serves to inform you'—but that is quite different. To name the ship *is* to say (in the appropriate circumstances) the words 'I name, &c.'. When I say, before the registrar or altar, &c., 'I do', I am not reporting on a marriage: I am indulging in it.

What are we to call a sentence or an utterance of this type?[7] I propose to call it a *performative sentence* or a performative utterance, or, for short, 'a performative'. The term 'performative' will be used in a variety of cognate ways and constructions, much as the term 'imperative' is.[8] The name is derived, of course, from 'perform', the usual verb with the noun 'action': it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something.

A number of other terms may suggest themselves, each of which would suitably cover this or that wider or narrower class of performatives: for example, many performatives are *contractual* ('I bet') or *declaratory* ('I declare war') utterances. But no term in current use that I know of is nearly wide enough to cover them all. One technical term that comes nearest to what we need is perhaps 'operative', as it is used strictly by lawyers in referring to that part, i.e. those clauses, of an instrument which serves to effect the transaction (conveyance or what not) which is its main object, whereas the rest of the document merely 'recites' the circumstances in which the transaction is to be effected.[9] But 'operative' has other meanings, and indeed is often used nowadays to mean little more than 'important'. I have preferred a new word, to which, though its etymology is not irrelevant, we shall perhaps not be so ready to attach some preconceived meaning.

## Can saying make it so?

Are we then to say things like this:

'To marry is to say a few words', or
'Betting is simply saying something'?

Such a doctrine sounds odd or even flippant at first, but with sufficient safeguards it may become not odd at all.

A sound initial objection to them may be this; and it is not without some importance. In very many cases it is possible to perform an act of exactly the same kind *not* by uttering words, whether written or spoken, but in some other way. For example, I may in some places effect marriage by cohabiting, or I may bet with a totalisator machine by putting a coin in a slot. We should then, perhaps, convert the propositions above, and put it that 'to say a few certain words is to marry' or 'to marry is, in some cases, simply to say a few words' or 'simply to say a certain something is to bet'.

But probably the real reason why such remarks sound dangerous lies in another obvious fact, to which we shall have to revert in detail later, which is this. The uttering of the words is, indeed, usually a, or even *the*, leading incident in the performance of the act (of betting or what not), the performance of which is also the object of the utterance, but it is far from being usually, even if it is ever, the *sole* thing necessary if the act is to be deemed to have been performed. Speaking generally, it is always necessary that the *circumstances* in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, *appropriate*, and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other persons should *also* perform certain *other* actions, whether 'physical' or 'mental' actions or even acts of uttering further words. Thus, for naming the ship, it is essential that I should be the person appointed to name her, for (Christian) marrying, it is essential that I should not be already married with a wife living, sane and undivorced, and so on: for a bet to have been made, it is generally necessary for the offer of the bet to have been accepted by a taker (who must have done something, such as to say 'Done'), and it is hardly a gift if I *say* 'I give it you' but never hand it over.

So far, well and good. The action may be performed in ways other than by a performative utterance, and in any case the circumstances, including other actions, must be appropriate. But we may, in objecting, have something totally different, and this time quite mistaken, in mind, especially when we think of some of the more awe-inspiring performatives such as 'I promise to . . .'. Surely the words must be spoken 'seriously' and so as to be taken 'seriously'? This is, though vague, true enough in general—it is an important commonplace in discussing the purport of any utterance whatsoever. I must not be joking, for example, nor writing a poem. But we are apt to have a feeling that their being serious consists in their being uttered as (merely) the outward and visible sign, for convenience or other record or for information, of an inward and spiritual act: from which it is but a short step to go on to believe or to assume without realizing that for many purposes the outward utterance is a description, *true or false*, of the occurrence of the inward performance. The classic expression of this idea is to be found in the *Hippolytus* (l. 612), where Hippolytus says

ἡ γλῶσσ' ὀμώμοχ', ἡ δὲ φρὴν ἀνωμοτός,

i.e. 'my tongue swore to, but my heart (or mind or other backstage artiste) did not'.[10] Thus 'I promise to . . .' obliges me—puts on record my spiritual assumption of a spiritual shackle.

It is gratifying to observe in this very example how excess of profundity, or rather solemnity, at once paves the way for immodality. For one who says 'promising is not merely a matter of uttering words! It is an inward and spiritual act!' is apt to appear as a solid moralist standing out against a generation of superficial theorizers: we see him as he sees himself, surveying the invisible depths of ethical space, with all the distinction of a specialist in the *sui generis*. Yet he provides Hippolytus with a let-out, the bigamist with an excuse for his 'I do' and the welsher with a defence for his 'I bet'. Accuracy and morality alike are on the side of the plain saying that *our word is our bond*.

If we exclude such fictitious inward acts as this, can we suppose that any of the other things which certainly are normally required to accompany an utterance such as 'I promise that . . .' or 'I do (take this woman . . . )' are in fact described by it, and consequently do by their presence make it true or by their absence make it false? Well, taking the latter first, we shall next consider what we actually do say about the utterance concerned when one or another of its normal concomitants is *absent*. In no case do we say that the utterance was false but rather that the utterance—or rather the *act*,[11] e.g. the promise—was void, or given in bad faith, or not implemented, or the like. In the particular case of promising, as with many other performatives, it is appropriate that the person uttering the promise should have a certain intention, viz. here to keep his word: and perhaps of all concomitants this looks the most suitable to be that which 'I promise' does describe or record. Do we not actually, when such intention is absent, speak of a 'false' promise? Yet so to speak is *not* to say that the utterance 'I promise that . . .' is false, in the sense that though he states that he does, he doesn't, or that though he describes he misdescribes—misreports. For he *does* promise: the promise here is not even *void*, though it is given *in bad faith*. His utterance is perhaps misleading, probably deceitful and doubtless wrong, but it is not a lie or a misstatement. At most we might make out a case for saying that it implies or insinuates a falsehood or a misstatement (to the effect that he does intend to do something): but that is a very different matter. Moreover, we do not speak of a false bet or a false christening; and that we *do* speak of a false promise need commit us no more than the fact that we speak of a false move. 'False' is not necessarily used of statements only.

## Notes

1 It is, of course, not really correct that a sentence ever *is* a statement: rather, it is *used* in *making a statement*, and the statement itself is a 'logical construction' out of the makings of statements.

2 Everything said in these sections is provisional, and subject to revision in the light of later sections.

3 Of all people, jurists should be best aware of the true state of affairs. Perhaps some now are. Yet they will succumb to their own timorous fiction, that a statement of 'the law' is a statement of fact.

4 Not without design: they are all 'explicit' performatives, and of that prepotent class later called 'exercitives'.

5 [Austin realized that the expression 'I do' is not used in the marriage ceremony too late to correct his mistake. We have let it remain in the text as it is philosophically unimportant that it is a mistake. J. O. U.]

6 Still less anything that I have already done or have yet to do.

7 'Sentences' form a class of 'utterances', which class is to be defined, so far as I am concerned, grammatically, though I doubt if the definition has yet been given satisfactorily. With performative utterances are contrasted, for example and essentially, 'constative' utterances: to issue a constative utterance (i.e. to utter it with a historical reference) is to make a statement. To issue a performative utterance is, for example, to make a bet. See further below on 'illocutions'.

8 Formerly I used 'performatory': but 'performative' is to be preferred as shorter, less ugly, more tractable, and more traditional in formation.

9 I owe this observation to Professor H. L. A. Hart.

10 But I do not mean to rule out all the offstage performers—the lights men, the stage manager, even the prompter; I am objecting only to certain officious understudies, who would duplicate the play.

11 We deliberately avoid distinguishing these, precisely because the distinction is not in point.

# 7

# PERFORMANCE AS METAPHOR

### *Bert O. States*

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*Performance* is clearly one of those terms that Raymond Williams calls "keywords," or words (e.g., *realism, naturalism, mimesis, structure*) whose meanings are "inextricably bound up with the problems [they are] being used to discuss."[1] Find a word that is suddenly emerging from normal semantic practice (a word you are hearing, say, a dozen times a week), and you can bet that it is a proto-keyword spreading on the winds of metaphor. And in this process the word's standard dictionary meanings seem to fall into a dormancy while the new "key" meaning, not yet clear, gets tested and extended far and wide, revised, qualified, and finally settles into the vocabulary as if it had always meant what it now means.[2] Keywords are usually two-edged in that they belong to the fields of both ideology and methodology: they are at once an attitude and a tool.[3]

It goes without saying that the field of theatre studies is rapidly being reshaped by the principle of performance, abetted by the rise of multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity and gender studies. So far the major task has been to coax out the various manifestations of performance, to find, so to speak, our neighbors in places we haven't bothered to look for them before. By and large this coaxing has had the character of a colonization, since a keyword, seconded by ideology, never stops ramifying itself until it has claimed as much territory as possible. This is not a complaint; it is simply the way keywords behave.

The political aspect of this revolution is not my concern here. I want to address a semantic problem that seems to me to have surfaced in performance theory. I am referring to what in philosophy is called a limit-problem, or one in which the inquirer turns out to be part of the problem. For example, two common limit-problems are the problem of the subject and the problem of the world. No observer (subject) can fully observe or confront the self or the world because we can never stand outside what it is that we are trying to encompass and understand. In the broadest sense, the limit-problem of performance is that we are all, in a manner of speaking, performers. If nothing else, as Judith Butler reminds us, we perform our gender.[4] Even the attempt to investigate the nature of performance turns out to be something of a performance, in at least one definition of the word.

More particularly, there is our habit of using words—especially key-words—in a metaphorical way and then forgetting they are metaphors. One danger is that of reading metaphor as if it were a two-way street, instead of the one-way street it usually is, in which case the vehicle and the tenor can easily become confused. To take an example from John Searle, the metaphor "Richard is a gorilla" does not work the other way around, where gorilla becomes the tenor (or subject) and Richard the vehicle for telling us what the gorilla is *like*. The metaphor, as Searle says, "is just about Richard; it is not literally about gorillas at all,"[5] only about the "truth conditions" (Searle's term) under which we perceive gorillas.

Another difficulty with metaphorical analogy is that since the vehicle never specifies the intended meaning or application, one is free to call the similarities as one sees them, and it is easy to find similarities that apply in one case but do not apply in another. This leads to increasing instability in one's working definition and it is particularly acute in performance theory because quite often something is called a performance for one reason (it is intentional behavior or it draws a crowd) and something else for another (the unintentional playing of a role, as on *Candid Camera*), and so on through all the qualities of the phenomenon. And one can move through culture identifying all sorts of performances and performative modes, but one has lost the common denominator that binds them together into what we might call Performance, with a Platonic capital P. The problem can be graphically represented by a sequence, inspired by Wittgenstein's theory of games, that Umberto Eco recently used to demonstrate the difficulty of defining fascism:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|
| abc | bcd | cde | def |

As we move from left to right similarity of feature gradually declines, until we reach 4 which shares two similarities with 3, one with 2, and none with 1. Still, as Eco points out, "owing to the uninterrupted series of decreasing similarities between one and four, there remains, by a sort of illusory transitivity, a family resemblance between four and one."[6] So too with performance, and presumably with any multi-featured concept in which we slide from one manifestation of the phenomenon to another (e.g., from theatre to ritual, from ritual to parade, from parade to protest, protest to terrorism, etc.). We can never really be certain when we are in the grip of "illusory transitivity," or finding family resemblances between things that gradually become more different than they are alike.[7] I want to emphasize that this problem is to some degree inherent in taxonomy itself. Words, alas, aren't things. Things, especially complex things like performance, don't obey our words for them;

they are subject to continual mutation and intermixture—which is another way of saying that they are continually open to metaphorical extension.

This is basically the problem I want to worry here. My procedure will be to look first at some instances of performance theory, by way of grounding our usage in current practice. As a convenient way of sampling the range, I have chosen my examples to include complementary approaches to the performance phenomenon. The first pairing (Erving Goffman and Victor Turner) are what Richard Schechner would call "outsider" theorists,[8] in the sense that they are professionally uninvolved in the arts and concerned with social performance at the largely unintentional level; the second pairing (Peggy Phelan and Schechner) are "insiders" in the sense that they are concerned professionally with deliberate artistic performance. This is much too simple a breakdown because there are close "anthropological" ties between Turner and Schechner, and Phelan and Goffman share at least an interest in the interaction between the self and others, Goffman from the sociological, Phelan from the psychoanalytic perspective. But all of this is incidental to my concern for an adequate cross-section of viewpoints among which the resonances, I hope, will become clearer as I go along. Finally, in the last section I will examine the relationship between artistic and scientific performance practices by way of isolating certain variables around which performance and performativity seem to circulate, irrespective of one's orientation. This is not my attempt at a definition because I am convinced that a definition of performance, as we have been pursuing one, is a semantic impossibility.

## I

First, however, it would be useful to consider the semantic evolution of the word itself, if only as a way of illustrating the problem. Performance is much like the term *culture*—the "original difficult word," as Raymond Williams puts it, in that it participates in "two areas that are often thought of as separate —*art* and *society*."[9] Like *culture, performance* began its semantic life as a relatively simple noun of process. Just as culture basically meant "the tending of something, basically crops or animals,"[10] performance—Williams doesn't deal with the word—simply meant carrying something out, a "working out of anything ordered or undertaken" (*OED*, 1 & 2). So while you were tending the crops (cultivation) you were also performing; moreover, it took a lot of performing of various sorts to turn cultivation into culture. In fact, the word performance didn't signify theatrical presentation until well into the seventeenth century, though there are ambiguous usages. For example, the Chorus in *Henry V* (1599): "Still be kind, and eke out our performance with your mind." But it is doubtful that even this use of the term referred to performance in any specifically theatrical sense. Shakespeare's use of the various forms of *perform* and *performance* (111 by my count) suggests that he made no distinction between performing work, performing an office, playing a role in politics, putting on a play, or (as Macbeth's Porter reminds us) making love or going to the bathroom. It all comes to the same act of undertaking to do something and then doing it. Even so, the evolution suggests a number of discrete, or at least semantically isolable, sectors of meaning: (1) any act or duty done, (2) a *notable* act, achievement, or exploit, (3) a literary or artistic "work," (4) the act of performing a piece of music, a play, or gymnastics, (5) finally, in the current usage (not yet in *OED*), a particular (postmodern) branch of aesthetics known as performance art.

What we learn from this evolution is that any word is subject to tropological drift and, more specifically, to what we might call the Pelican effect, whereby the mother-word feeds its errant offspring with its own blood (its prior meanings) and by this means, as Umberto Eco elsewhere suggests, "the field [is] restructured, semiosis rearranged, and metaphor (from the invention which it was) [is] turned into culture"[11]—that is, into current understanding. In fact, most words are potential metaphors, and many of them expand to include virtually everything in a given semantic or metonymic network. Frequently they even jump to heretofore incompatible networks with the irresponsibility of tornadoes.[12] Even so, the word carries its own semantic history (or bloodline) with it, however submerged by the new meaning, and this history can be invoked as a kind of "Salique Law," to return to *Henry V*, that will justify new conquests, if justification is needed. One can always claim that almost anything is a performance in sense #1 or sense #2 and then imply that a certain intentionality makes it a performance in sense #3 or #4. And with such a robust primary meaning as "anything ordered or undertaken," the word *performance*, like *culture*, was ideally positioned (as we say) to be used in almost any context. Hence, today the rapid advance of Performance Studies and Cultural Studies which are founded on extremely versatile, if not insatiable, terminologies. What isn't performance? What isn't culture?

My first example is Erving Goffman's classic, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), which is probably the best known metaphorical expansion of the term. It was quite natural for Goffman to study social and individual performance, as he called it, because that is a sociologist's business. Moreover, it was understandable that he would adopt the theatre vocabulary as the one most suited to what he was interested in observing, even though theatre itself was only one of the kinds of framed behavior he eventually addressed. On its broadest level, Goffman's interest was primarily in "the structure of experience individuals have at any moment of their social lives."[13] And the term performance was defined, in his first book, as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants."[14] So in an important sense Goffman was an outsider-theorist, as Richard Schechner aptly refers to him in another connection.[15] In other words, he could, in a manner of speaking, *get* outside the "thing" because he was never inside it and could see pretty much all of what he was studying; his question wasn't as lofty as "What is the world?" or

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"What is the self?" or even "What is performance?" He didn't really care: the term performance was strictly a metaphor for social behavior and Goffman's modest question was, simply, "What are the ways in which we repeat ourselves?" The theatre offered the ideal metaphor for his project because, as everyone knows, all the world's a stage—or, as Goffman points out, "the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify."[16] Theatre is, in a sense, the quintessential repetition of our self-repetitions, the *aesthetic* extension of everyday life, a mirror, you might say, that nature holds up to nature. One wouldn't be likely to use the novel or painting as the key metaphor of such a project because their imitations of human experience are conducted in a nonhuman medium. Theatre, on the other hand, is the art that is most like life as it is lived in the real world. Hence it was made to order for Goffman.[17]

I will return to Goffman in a moment, but this is a convenient place to fold in my second example of metaphorical expansion. I speak of Victor Turner's influential idea that social conflicts are structured like dramas: they occur in four phases, or "acts," moving from breach, to crisis, to redress, ending in (either) reintegration or schism.[18] This is a metaphor of sorts, and one that Turner has been criticized for applying to social life because it is taken from the field of art. But what happens if we reverse the tenor and the vehicle and say that dramas are structured like social conflicts? Unlike the Richard/gorilla metaphor, the reverse would remain true; but the utterance would no longer be a metaphor; it would be closer to tautology. Metaphorically, it makes no more sense to say that drama is like social conflict than it does to say that my love for X is *like* a strong emotion. The truth is that dramas are based primarily, though not always, on the conflictual forms of human experience, social or individual, and are therefore bound, inescapably, to follow Turner's model: that is, if there is a problem or breach between parties in a community, it is likely to reach a crisis (unless it just goes away), and something will come of that crisis; there will be attempts at arbitration, rapprochement and back-and-forthness, which will either succeed and resolve the breach (comedy) or the conflict will complicate itself into a complete division of the parties involved (tragedy, naturalism). How could it be otherwise? Of course, neither Turner nor I is suggesting that all social conflict (or drama) is identical. We are speaking strictly about causal structure in human experience. Turner's critics seem to feel that theatre's purification and refinement of the conflicts that go on in social life constitute a change in structure from what actually happens; but it seems to me that to the extent that plays are truthful about human conflict they are adapting its essential structure to their "four-act" forms, even if they come in two, three or five acts.[19]

Moreover, I'm not suggesting that Turner's model of the social drama is self-evident or worthless on this account or that his metaphor isn't a useful way to approach such breaches. For the metaphor was possible—one-way-wise—only because we had forgotten, or put aside, the idea that social conflict necessarily precedes dramas *about* social conflict and that the entire history of drama as a mimetic art, from *The Oresteia* to *Oleanna*, is that it reveals the patterns of human experience—chiefly (but not always) its conflicts. If social conflict had somehow taken a different structure, we can be sure that drama would have imitated it in its imitations.[20] Hence, a statement like "Dramas are constructed like social conflicts" may be true but it is metaphorically vacant. Yet that, in essence, is what Turner was saying, and of course it is close to the model we find in Aristotle's *Poetics*: drama moves from one state of fortune, through crisis, complication, and reversal, to another, and what drama imitates is "the kind of thing that *can* happen" in real life. I presume that behind this "*can* happen" is Aristotle's awareness that *that* kind of thing happens a lot.

So the value of Turner's model, like Goffman's, is that it allows us to escape a certain solipsism, or one-eyedness, by enlarging our field of reference. When Goffman says that people are like stage performers and Turner says that social conflicts are like plays, we are applying a model from one semantic network to a subject in another network whose characteristics we wish to elucidate by metaphorical comparison. Metaphor is what in science is called a "top-down strategy" or a "principle of least commitment" whereby one can, on the basis of a *suspicion* of likeness, initiate a direction of thought from which regularities and irregularities will display themselves and can be sorted out.[21] The metaphor, if it is a good one, will draw out some of the characteristics of the phenomenon but will leave others obscure or invisible that might well be picked up by still other metaphors seeking still different characteristics—our friend abc / bcd / cde / def again. And Goffman is very much aware that you can't get the whole phenomenon with one metaphor. When he arrives at the end of *The Presentation of Self*, he offers the following caveat:

> And now a final comment. In developing the conceptual framework employed in this report, some language of the stage was used. I spoke of performers and audiences; of routines and parts; of performances coming off or falling flat; of cues, stage settings and backstage; of dramaturgical needs, dramaturgical skills, and dramaturgical strategies. Now it should be admitted that this attempt to press a mere analogy so far was in part a rhetoric and a maneuver. . . .
>
> And so here the language and mask of the stage will be dropped. Scaffolds, after all, are to build other things with, and should be erected with an eye to taking them down.[22]

It should be said that Goffman's use of the theatre metaphor is consistently very loose. Being a performer, being "on-stage," in his usage means simply that one appears in a social "region" ("any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers to perception"[23]) where behavioral patterns are established, expected, and carried out, much like the rehearsal /performance pattern of theatre. Thus, for Goffman, the terms *stage, audience* and *performer* come to be very resilient, even to the point where performer and audience might collapse into the same entity (self-deception, someone who is "taken in by his own act,"[24] Laing's "false-self system," and so on). So the theatre always remains a metaphor. To come back to Searle's point, the metaphor was about social life, not about theatre at all. Theatre was just a hermeneutical tool ("a rhetoric and a maneuver") for deploying and isolating elements in the "drama" of social behavior.[25]

To sum up: I have linked Goffman and Turner as complementary outsider-theorists who have fruitfully applied the theatre/performance metaphor, respectively, to individual and to social life at large. Goffman's typical "performer" is the single person moving in a world infested with behavioral do's and don't's; Turner's performers are usually "disturbed social groups" caught in the agon of competing political claims. So the two stand (at least in the works I've discussed here) in a more or less microcosmic/macrocosmic relationship.

On the other extreme we have the insider-theorists, or people who are either theatre practitioners or theatre scholars, or, like Schechner, both: they come to performance study with a strong theatre orientation, and are therefore not so much making simple metaphorical connections as *metonymical* ones—that is, they are interested in extending the performance concept into contiguous fields of application (adjacent art forms, rituals, politics, and ceremonies of various kinds). This is where the limit-problem finally becomes a real factor; for unlike Goffman, and Turner the insider-theorist's mission is now to define performance itself (not social behavior), and normally in the most basic possible terms. I'm not suggesting that every insider-theorist tries to do this; I'm only interested in what happens when one confronts the phenomenon of performance as something *to be defined*. This seems to me where the most energy is being expended right now.

One senses that the shift to performance study was brought about historically as the terms *theatre* and *theatricality* undergo a demotion in centrality (or at least a critique) and the term performance emerges as the master concept. (Witness the astonishing number of books and articles with the term *Performance* in the title in the last five years.) I suspect this happened, roughly in the late sixties,[26] about the time when Susan Sontag was writing that what supplies the energy for all crises in the arts "is the very unification of numerous, quite disparate activities into a single genus. . . . From then on, any of the activities therein subsumed becomes a profoundly *problematic* activity, all of whose procedures and, ultimately, whose very right to exist can be called into question."[27] Things never got quite this bad in the theatrical arts, but in the wake of widely disparate activities (social, behavioral, and artistic alike) being "subsumed" under the "genus" of *performance* the term *theatre* gradually underwent a loss in validity. It was seen as being at least temporarily worn out; it carried with it too many traditional and overfamiliar institutional trappings. Theatre meant: a text performed "up there" by actors, with emphasis on *the thing* performed ("the play's the thing"), paid admission, a "general" audience, in short, a timeless roar-of-the-grease-paint aura that obscured the real nature of performance—*the act of performing itself*. Just as "the world worlds" in Heidegger's phenomenology, so performance *performs.*

Thus, Peggy Phelan, my first case in point, begins her essay on "The Ontology of Performance" by saying that "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance." Performance "becomes itself through disappearance."[28] Or, as Richard Schechner (my next case) puts the idea, "Performances are always actually performed."[29] Thus, Goffman's metaphor takes a (J. L.) Austinian swerve and theatre becomes again (or still) only one of the many things that get performed.[30]

This is not by any means to say that *theatre* is a dead term in insider performance theory. But one of the agendas of insider-theory, as I understand it, is to chronicle and parallel theatre's attempt to liberate itself from "invisible" acting and the plot-character emphasis of most plays into other forms of self- or communal expression. It is interesting that Austin, who is an often-quoted "outsider" in this insider-movement, excludes utterances spoken by an actor on stage from his performative category because language in the theatre is "not used seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use."[31] So too performance art, to take the extreme instance, would exclude traditional theatre from its performative category for much the same reason: theatre does not tell the truth about what it is or what it is *doing*, and in addition is apt to be parasitic on a text that compounds this very falsehood. Performances may well go on in the theatre but they are *transitive* in nature, performances *of* something in which the actor, as Sartre says, is "totally and publicly devoured by the imaginary."[32] If, as Tom Stoppard has put it, "extraversion is a performance art," then we may say that theatre was its introverted cousin.[33]

For example, Phelan's definition of performance (quoted above) occurs in a book devoted to the examination of "photographs, paintings, films, theatre, political protests, and performance art," chiefly of the last ten years.[34] I want briefly to look at her notion of presence as the ontological foundation of performance because it seems to me not simply a characteristic of performance art but the most persistent consideration in any discussion of performance in general. Not only is performance what becomes itself by appearing and (then) disappearing, it is centered, she says, on "the interaction between the art object and the spectator [which] is, essentially, performative."[35] As I see it, these aren't really separate things: performance's appearance-disappearance act can only take place as a consequence of this interaction: without a spectator the work would degenerate into pure existence (paper, paint on canvas, sound, substance, artifact, bodies). This condition would obtain not only for performance art but for all artistic performance, regardless of the medium, though it will be necessary to qualify what we mean by the term spectator (which can, in some cases, refer to the performer). Indeed, one might claim that the statement, "Performance's only life is in the present,"[36] is another tautology, since any "life" a performance achieves can only occur in the present, and there is no such thing as a present unless there is a "spectator" (or a consciousness) there to experience it. In other words, the same logic applies as well to laughter, dreaming, reading, a dinner party, or any durational experience which, having passed, ceases *being* itself and assumes the ontological status of memory.

So the criterion of presentness doesn't really distinguish performance (not to mention performance art) from other forms of experience, and I assume Phelan would have to agree. The real question would be: under what conditions is presence brought about? She goes on to say that "Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance." Any attempt to save a performance with a "documenting camera [can only be] a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present."[37] Here a difficulty emerges, for me, though it may rest on an improper understanding of what Phelan means by "representations *of* representations" or words like "saved" or "documented." I can see how attempts to document theatre or "live" performances (on film or written accounts) catch only a "memory," rather than the performance itself. I am less convinced that performance *entirely* disappears in such cases. But the idea becomes highly problematical in other kinds of performance and performance art—e.g., painting, sculpture and photography which don't have the same temporal and ontological "life" as theatrical performance.

For instance, elsewhere in the book Phelan treats Mapplethorpe's and Cindy Sherman's photographs as examples of performance art. Her discussions are "documented" by photographs which appear in the book. At what point, if any, do these photos become "something other than performance" since when something "turns into that document—a photograph, a stage design, a video tape—[it] ceases to be performance art"?[38] Sherman's own performance seems then to be reduced to a reproduction from which Phelan claims only the memory of a performance can possibly arise. But where did (or does) the original performance occur? Might it have been in the photographer's act of photographing the subject? It is left unclear. Still, Phelan presumably experienced a Sherman performance precisely by interacting with the photos that are only evidences of a performative "moment"; otherwise, how could she have written about Sherman's performance? Yet her discussion of the nature of Sherman's performance is quite convincing. I read her text on Sherman, check it against the photos and I can see the performative quality, this manipulation of feminine "disguises" to a certain end. And I can close the book, put it on my shelf, come back to it later, and there is this performative quality leaking out of the photos again. In fact, the more times I see the photographs the better I understand them and what Phelan has said about their performative quality. And surely this understanding couldn't be improved if I were looking at a better or more "authentic" set of photos than one finds in Phelan's book (say, Sherman's personal "originals"), because as Walter Benjamin pointed out long ago, "to ask for the 'authentic' print [of a photograph] makes no sense."[39] So it would seem that the performance of the photograph can only occur by means of reproduction, that photography is the quintessential art *of* reproduction, and that it survives only in the encounter and re-encounter of the spectator. Performance, then, *is* recoverable in time, though it is obviously never the same performance, even for the same individual.

To be fair, I should add that in an earlier discussion Phelan suggests that the performative quality of photography *as* performance art rests in a "staged confrontation" taking place at the surface of the print ("The surface is all you've got," as Richard Avedon puts it); performance is "a manipulation" of imagery that goes beyond the camera's claim "to reproduce an authentic 'real' [and brings] the status of the real . . . under scrutiny."[40] So it isn't simply the ontological status of the photograph that makes it performative. The performance consists in the thematic manipulation of imagery to a non-reproductive end. The thing that remains unclear, however is whether any manipulation away from an (in)authentic "real" might constitute performance, or must it be the kind that attends performance art of the last decade or so? How, for example, would Sherman's or Mapplethorpe's manipulations differ from, say, Niepce's *Dinner Table Around* (1823), the first photograph, or Malevich's *White on White* (1918) which is (or *was*) a painting commenting on all previous (absent) painting, or Magritte's "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" which directs the viewer's attention to the paradox in the perception of graphic art (the pipe is there/not there)?[41]

At any rate, Phelan's notion of performance seems to come down to a thematic matter, rather than to an ontological one; not, that is, to a matter of *thing-ness* or the basic process of interaction between work and viewer that always takes place in art but to a specific kind of political commentary the work is making on its own medium. How otherwise would the ontology of Sherman's performance differ from my coming back again and again to experience the performance in a musical recording or in the painting that hangs in my living room? Nor do I see, otherwise, wherein it is different from the experience I have on reading or re-reading a novel. Granted, there are big differences between reading and viewing, but what have they to do with performance if performance's presence/disappearance is simply something that happens between an auditor/reader and a tangible "work" when it is examined in any given "present"? Indeed, Mikel Dufrenne insists that a reader (of a novel or poetry) *becomes* the performer of the work and can "penetrate its meaning only by imagining the performance in his own way—in short, by being a performer, if only vicariously and in imagination."[42] The reader, you might say, does to the text of a book what an actor does to the text of a play, except that the enactment takes place in a mental space.[43]

You can debate or reject this claim, of course, but it does stick tenaciously to the point that something is "essentially performative" when the spectator and the work interact, regardless of the medium. What then is the justification for the claim one frequently hears that performance should be restricted to the "performing arts" (theatre, dance, music) simply because they have squatter's rights on the term *performance* or because they present their performances only at a given time and place before an invited audience, as opposed to those arts which give their "performances" (painting, sculpture, books) as soon as someone appears and "interacts" with the work? I am not claiming that all these things should be considered as performances, only that before you can know what performance *is*, in the phenomenal sense, you will have to know why these arts *aren't* performances.

You might find all this so much caviling over hairs. But there is a real problem lurking in such limit-cases, and it is the problem of how far performance can go and remain performance, or at what point perform*ativity* begins to appear (i.e., Eco's "defness")—that is, something falling, "by a sort of illusory transitivity," within the shadow of true performance. In short: metaphorization. If you "deconstruct" performance at what precise point does it disappear? What is the without-which-not of performance? Or, to come back to Goffman and Turner, if you "reconstruct" or manipulate reality at what point, under what conditions, does it appear as performance? Or is there no such point? Perhaps performance is unquantifiable.

Reception is obviously an extremely complex process, and when we speak ontologically of aesthetic perception we cannot divide it into categories based on the kinds of media available and be done with it, if only because new media are arriving by the month. Some of these problems might be avoided if we think of performance as *a way of seeing*—not, that is, the thing seen or performed (from ritual to parade to play to photograph) but seeing that involves certain collaborative and contextual functions (between work and spectator) which are highly elastic. Performance, as Dufrenne puts it, involves the expectation that we are willing "to play the game" on which all aesthetic perception is based.[44] That is the position I want to take, at any rate, and one I think is consistent with Peggy Phelan's principle of "interaction," albeit without the political implications. But if that it true, she is evoking a principle that has a long history in aesthetics and does not define performance or performance art any more than it defines any other kind of art.

## II

I turn now to my final example, Richard Schechner, whom I see as complementary to Phelan in that both are working at different ends of the same "insider" scale. Phelan in *Unmarked* at least, stays pretty much within the realm of recent political art; whereas Schechner, like Turner, has a much broader focus. I am tempted to say that Schechner is interested in almost anything in the world that is done more than once. Whereas the aesthetic of presence dominates Phelan's approach, the aesthetic of repetition dominates Schechner's contention that "restored [or twice-behaved] behavior is the main characteristic of performance."[45] To put it another way, Phelan views performance essentially from a spectator standpoint, Schechner from the performer standpoint. Finally, Schechner has made the most concerted effort of any theorist to understand the ramifications of performance by pushing it into practices that seem to offer the slightest analogical attraction.

As of this writing, Schechner's principle of restored behavior has almost achieved the status of a received idea. "Performance means: never for the first time. It means: for the second to the *n*th time. . . . Put in personal (actor) terms, restored behavior is 'me behaving as if I am someone else' or as if I am 'beside myself,' or 'not myself,' as when in trance"[46]:

> Restored behavior is living behavior treated as a film director treats a strip of film. These strips of behavior can be rearranged or reconstructed; they are independent of the causal systems (social, psychological, technological) that brought them into existence. They have a life of their own. . . .[47]

Moreover, the behavior that is performed "exist[s] separate from the performers who 'do' these behaviors" and therefore the behavior "can be stored, transmitted, manipulated, transformed." The actual work of restoration is "carried on in rehearsals and/or in the transmission of behavior from master to novice."[48] Above all, "Performances," once again, "are always actually performed."[49] I assume this means before an audience, though Schechner adds that some kinds of workshops (i.e., Grotowski's "paratheater") might qualify as performances, even though there is no public presentation.[50] Most rehearsals apparently wouldn't qualify as performances but are only a part of the restorative process. Still, in 1990 Schechner writes that the whole performance sequence (training, workshop, rehearsal, warmup, performance, cooldown, and aftermath) "is identical to what I call 'restored behavior,' 'twice-behaved behavior,' behavior that can be repeated, that is, rehearsed. . . . Ritual process is performance."[51] So rehearsals rest rather ambiguously within the domain of performance. They are apparently not performances in themselves but the "building blocks" out of which the behavior is restored and performances gradually emerge. There is a strong emphasis on process in Schechner's theory and on qualities such as "immediacy, ephemerality, peculiarity, and ever-changingness."[52]

What isn't a performance then? I take it Schechner wouldn't admit a great deal of the behavior Goffman covers in his books, though it isn't clear where he would draw the line. Certainly, he would not admit things like marital, office, or teammate behavior, at least under "normal" circumstances. Indeed, he sees Goffman as dealing essentially with "the single behaved behaviors of ordinary living [that] are made into the twice-behaved behaviors of art, ritual, and the other performative genres"[53] by means of the rehearsal process. As far as other arts are concerned, "Neither painting, sculpting, nor writing shows actual behavior as it is being behaved,"[54] and hence, I gather, these arts could not be included in the category of performance, if only because performance "is behavior itself"[55] and paintings and novels don't behave, as least in Schechner's view of behavior. They are, rather, what we might call a record of past or hypothetical or symbolic behavior. This is probably the main respect in which he is at odds with Phelan.

Performance, however, would include such things as the restoration of events "from some other place or past—the Plimoth Plantation restoration in Massachusetts, Doris Humphery's restoration of Shaker dances, a 'living newspaper' or a diorama at the American Museum of Natural History. Strictly speaking," he adds, "dioramas are restored environments, not behaviors." So it isn't clear whether they're in or out. But, he adds, "increasingly action is being added to the environments. . . . Some zoos . . . try their best to make their displays genuine replicas of the wild. . . ."[56] So I assume, given the range of his examples, that action is indispensable to performance and is therefore a characteristic of behavior in his definition—action meaning, I assume, direct human (or animal) behavior of some sort.

I am not sure how Schechner would classify films, though he refers to them frequently, and in his Performance Event-Time-Space chart, he does include feature films, TV Soaps, and TV commercials as performative events.[57] But the criteria for inclusion on the chart are "events called performances in this or that culture" and "events treated 'as performance' by scholars,"[58] and I'm not sure Schechner himself would call all of them performances in the terms of his original essay on "Restoration of Behavior" in *Between Theater and Anthropology* (1985). So I'm tempted to conclude that films, however artistic or powerful, would not constitute performances in Schechner's usage, unless we are to think in such odd terms as "the restoration of a restoration of behavior," and even then the behavior represented is as past as the behavior of the characters in a novel (which is only imagined by the reader).

In any case, the film problem is much too complex to settle here. I want to concentrate on one of the more interesting boundary cases of performance in this latter regard of restored events. Parks offer a good testing ground because they are midway between theatre, on one hand, and something strictly "public," recreational, or educational, on the other. I will center mainly on the wild animal park at San Diego, which Schechner discusses briefly; but he apparently puts it in the category of performative behavior, however tentatively, because the wild behavior of the animals, as it would normally occur on the plains of Africa, is "restored" in the fields of California. Or partially restored: for no predation is permitted out of deference to the patrons who would be horrified by animals eating other animals; but otherwise, the animals behave naturally, enclosed behind fences that separate the various species. What is it, however, that has been restored? What makes the animals such an interesting test case is that nothing has been done to their behavior beyond depriving them of their natural diet and fencing them in. The animals don't have a choice *not* to "be themselves," as actors do; as Schechner says, "they repeat themselves [like] the cycles of the moon."[59] So, unlike the actors at Plimoth or the Humphery dancers, *they* aren't restoring their behavior any more than I am restoring last night's behavior when I sit down to eat my own un-predated dinner tonight.

Schechner, of course, would say that the park frame constitutes the site and act of restoration, hence the performance. In Schechner's theory there are two kinds of framing: (1) when a performance generates its own frame self-consciously, as in traditional theatre, and (2) when the frame is imposed from the outside by an agency of some kind.[60] The animal park, then, would be an example of the latter: the park itself frames the behavior of the unknowing animals into a performative mode, just as (he says elsewhere) "documentary film imposes an acting frame around a nonacting circumstance."[61] The animals do not know they are "on candid camera," they know nothing about this framing beyond a possible nostalgia for more open spaces. It is this framework, then, that makes the wild animals performatively different, say, from the pastured cows one might see in the open fields en route to the park.

But now I wonder what might happen if the cattle farmer down the road were to get envious and put up a Tame Animal Park sign in front of his pasture, serve delicious steak dishes (even better than those up the road), and provide monorail or horse transportation for any curious visitors who might want to observe cows at closer hand. For lots of reasons, there would be few customers for a Tame Animal Park; but I am interested in how framing devices create the sense of restored behavior—and hence a performance—that is somehow separated from normal empirical behavior. Therefore, it seems legitimate to take our framing device—our portable proscenium arch, you might say—and put it around all sorts of behaving things and see what happens to them; and I can't imagine anything more unpromising than a field of cows. I think cow farms would fail (fish hatcheries would be much more exotic) if only because of the factor of familiarity.[62] One might as well put frames around the telephone poles along the road, though, come to think of it, having seen what Christo's umbrellas did to the Tehachapi mountains along Interstate 5 at Gorman, I am not sure where one should draw the line. Surely if someone were to follow Christo's example and paint all the cows bright yellow, people would come for miles around, as they did to see the yellow umbrellas, and cow behavior would be restored to some sort of "presence," even in Schechner's sense of restoration or Phelan's sense of appearance/disappearance.

My feeling is that a field of yellow cows would constitute as much of a performance as wild animals grazing in California fields. What would make it a performance—or, to be more exacting, *a performative event*—is the manipulation or mediation of empirical reality toward what is surely an artistic statement being made about reality. If Robert Whitman's warehouse in *Light Touch* or the people eating their own dinner in their own apartment in Hungary's Squat Theatre, or certain Happenings of the sixties, can be called performances, then my yellow cows must surely qualify. And I can only think that Schechner would have to agree. We are, after all, seeing behavior through a deliberate frame. In the case of the wild animal park it is the unexpectedness of seeing wild animals *here* in bucolic California that constitutes the interest of the performance, or much of it; in the case of the cows, it is the unexpectedness of seeing *yellow* cows. In either case the animals, as Schechner would say, are "not themselves, but not not themselves." In fact, after further thought, I think my yellow cows are even *more* of a performance than Schechner's wild animals, if only because they have undergone a manipulation, not unlike that of actors who disguise themselves with make-up.

But now, let us suppose that instead of painting the cows yellow, which is an insensitive thing to do, we take a further step: we arrange with the Edison company to paint all the telephone poles yellow. Is this a performance? Here is the same framing device, but we can't exactly claim that the behavior of the poles has been restored because the poles aren't really doing anything to begin with. However, if we expand our definition of behavior to something more Heideggerian like "the thing's way of being before us," we might make a good case for having restored, or deconcealed, their behavior. At least we have rescued them from their everyday inconspicuousness, just as we did with the cows. In essence, we have said, "Notice that telephone poles can be quite striking when we bring out their performative qualities—their measured intervals, their way of diminishing in size as they fall away from the eye, their steady symmetrical shapes, their 'equipmental' qualities,[63] and so on." But we have departed from Schechner on two counts: not only have we altered his conception of behavior but we have altered his sense of actual performance in the temporal sense. For performance is now as permanent and as passive as it is in sculpture and painting. In fact, there is no performance being "held" from 9 A.M. to 5 P.M.; there is just an avenue of yellow telephone poles, and within a week motorists who use this road every day won't notice them any more than they would notice that the farmer had painted his barn yellow—or his cows.

On the other hand, the same could be said for the wild animals and the yellow cows: even though the animals' performance is staged only during certain hours, like theatre performances, their performance never begins or ends; it is the visitor who creates the duration-time of performance, which lasts as long as s/he remains in the park spectating. It is, as Phelan might say, the "interaction" that makes the performance, not simply the original act of putting up a sign saying "Open from 9 to 5, daily. Try our delicious wildebeest burgers." And an interaction is what takes place—a performance—when spectator and work come together. So the only respect in which we seem to have changed Schechner's theory is that we have broadened his conception of behavior to include inanimate things. And if he were willing to admit inanimate things into the category of performance (I don't think he would), then there seems no good reason to disqualify arts like painting, sculpture, music, or film, not to mention the performances in The Garden of the Gods in Colorado where people flock daily to see rock formations pretending to be animals and human beings (the "Kissing Camels," "Weeping Indian," "Three Graces").

I hope it is clear that I'm not trying to label all these things as performances, but to see why and under what conditions we are comfortable in using the word. I am trying to tap some well-springs of feeling that I suspect in a subterranian way are connected with the reasons we go to the theatre—or, for that matter, to the wild animal park, or even the fish hatchery, or to the zoo—or even look at the performance of a sunset. I have no idea how Schechner would respond to my painted cows or telephone poles. It seems to me that he and I are coming at performance from two different directions. And the most obvious ground of difference is that I have a wider conception of behavior than Schechner. Still, I find myself resisting the idea that animal parks are performances in the same way that deliberate art is a performance. *Something* is missing. Anyway, it seems odd to admit animal parks to the category of performance because the animals are alive in their restored enclosure and to reject art museums because the paintings aren't alive in theirs.

Schechner's notion of restored behavior seems to me an almost unassailable criterion for performance, even if one wishes (as I do) to extend the range of the behavior that gets restored. Put simply: something is always restored in performance, even if the restoration comes through a simple framing device. My main problem with the principle of restored behavior concerns the term *twice-behaved*. By *twice-behaved* Schechner means behavior that can be repeated in successive performances ("never for the first time [but] for the second to the *n*th time"). I am not sure how this concept would apply to an execution or to a hostage crisis and such "one-time" performances that keep cropping up on Schechner's charts, but I will stick to undisputed performance events. The notion of twice-behaved behavior dialectically posits the notion of once-behaved behavior, and that must surely be taken as a metaphor when applied to human experience. I can make the point best by coming back to Schechner's comment on Goffman which occurs in an essay in which Schechner is discussing restored behavior as a movement through a rehearsal process in which

> the single behaved behaviors of ordinary living are made into the twice-behaved behaviors of art, ritual, and the other performative genres. I'm aware of the opinion of Goffman and others that "ordinary living" includes a lot of performing. Insofar as it does, the [rehearsal

> process] model applies. Maybe it is that art and ritual are more than "twice-behaved." Or maybe ordinary living is more artful than ordinarily supposed.[64]

Here I sense that Schechner, despite all his respect for Goffman, is slightly uneasy with Goffman's appropriation of the word performance and its possible relation to his own definition of performance: put simply, Goffman's "performances" don't restore anything, they simply occur. At any rate, as I read the passage, Schechner is assuming that to the extent that ordinary life is *like* performance, it must therefore be like art, meaning (I suspect) theatre art. What gets submerged here, however, is the originary fact that theatre is patterned on life, rather than life on theatre (as Goffman was suggesting in his metaphor), though this is putting it a little too one-sidedly. Indeed, the twice-behaved behaviors of theatre and "other performative genres" are normatively based on behavior in ordinary life that is itself *already twice-behaved*. The theatre rehearsal process, then, would to some degree be aimed at perfecting a sense of ordinary life's *essential* behavior, or the "twice-behaved" nature of ordinary life—things we do not *once* but *n* number of times. For example, we may safely assume that Hamlet's behavior—or more correctly, "Hamletic" behavior—was already "twice-behaved" before Shakespeare and Burbage created Hamlet, and the characterization would have been meaningless unless it was based on behavior the audience recognized in ordinary life. For, as Roger Schank puts it, the brain "is . . . a processor that only understands what it has already understood."[65] So the term "single behaved behavior" refers to something that doesn't exist in human experience, or at least in the experience that theatre, in its turn, strives to restore.

For example, I sometimes do an imitation of myself in the classroom to illustrate a certain aspect of impersonation. I do not change my style or way of behaving, but I tell my students that I will now do an imitation of Bert States and then, after an appropriate pause (as a framing device), I go on being myself for twenty seconds or so. Then I bow and take a curtain call. It always gets a laugh (and usually applause), though I don't think it is because I do a nifty piece of acting. I think the students' reaction comes from the peculiar idea of someone deliberately imitating himself (as opposed to imitating John Wayne or Carol Channing) and the realization that all behavior is a form of self-imitation, since you can't really help being yourself. It all depends on your perspective on what you see. If I hadn't announced to the class that I was doing an imitation of myself—if I hadn't, so to speak, *painted myself yellow*—there would be no evidence that a performance was taking place—apart, that is, from my performance as a teacher. But in framing it, my imitation apparently qualified as a performance in every sense, however brief it may have been as a "strip of behavior." One could certainly say that I had restored the behavior of Bert States, if by that we mean that I caused the students to *see* that all term long Bert States had been twice-behaving himself.

Perhaps this is an unusual case, but I don't think so. It suggests that framing and performance are, at the very least, overlapping, if not conterminous principles. Framing is simply the way in which the art work sets itself up, or is set up, to be performed, in Dufrenne's sense of offering a sensuous presentation to the spectator and in Phelan's sense of producing an interaction between itself and an auditor. We might say that framing and presence are the two slopes of the keystone that holds up the arch of performance. And since almost anything can be framed, almost anything can be painted or impersonated and hence become susceptible to performance. Moreover, there is the possibility that the framing might be done by the spectator. For example, you can point to someone and tell your friend, "Look at that man trying to juggle all those packages," and lo and behold, you have a kind of performance that you have created, or at least *released*, from its empirical invisibility. It is hard to look at the man simply as another man juggling packages; he now becomes "a man juggling packages," or more Platonically, Man Juggling Packages, a garden-variety archetype, something you have seen, without seeing it, a hundred times. We have, to use another of Goffman's terms, Idealized his behavior, or as the phenomenologist would say, we have "bracketed" it. This is not a performance in any artistic (or other) sense; it represents a "first step" in the direction of performance, that *incipience* in certain human activities that gave rise to the word *performativity* which is a term with a built-in metaphorical capability. This is the perspective from which the artist views the world in order to wrest from it its twice-behavedness. An artist is someone who says, "This is the way people behave *n* number of times," and knows how to put the *n* into expressive form.

I am suggesting only that any specialized vocabulary or set of terms does not exhaust the phenomenon it is intended to describe (performance, theatre, art), but simply "fixes" it from one possible angle of intentionality or expressiveness; for the phenomenon is always nameless and multiform before a vocabulary traps it in one of its manifestations. This is one reason that we can never define a phenomenon like performance: its constitution is not the same as that of a machine, a disease or a molecule of water. It is a concept with "vague boundaries," as Wittgenstein says,[66] that is permeable to new meanings. By the year 2010, the perfection of virtual reality alone will have added unheard of dimensions to the field of performance. We can only seek the *essential nature* of performability, not a taxonomy of performable objects or behaviors. Thus one might perform the same act (of performance) to many different intentional ends, as I want to suggest below, though the structure of performance remains relatively constant.

To sum up the point: I realize that the term behavior is not the same in and out of art and that twice-behaved, in Schechner's meaning, implies a conscious and deliberate artistic control and choice of behavior. But what is this control/choice process if not one of perfecting something "already understood" that has not yet passed into the frame of art? It is the getting of it into art, out of its natural, excessive, and unremarkable twice-behavedness in daily life, that constitutes the transformation of art. What isn't twice-behaved behavior (in my sense) can't be restored artistically (in Schechner's), or wouldn't be worth restoring, even if you could find an example of it, because no one would know what it was. This may put a different spin on what Schechner means by twice-behaved; but it helps us to keep in mind that performance depends for its liveliness on three phases: it begins in the natural (or twice-behaved) behavior of Goffman's and Turner's "raw" society or nature, gets refined in Schechner's composition or rehearsal process, and it is completed in Phelan's interaction of the work and the spectator who "already understands" what the work is about, having lived it in one way or another.[67]

## III

I want to turn finally to a boldly argued book by a philosopher, Robert P. Crease, who has recently applied the concept of performance to the "theatre" of scientific experimentation. Departing from Husserl's phenomenology, Dewey's pragmatism, and Heidegger's hermeneutics (and the fact that theatre and theory spring from the same Greek root) Crease defines scientific experiments as

> unique events in the world undertaken for the purpose of allowing something to be *seen*. What comes to be seen is not something unique and peculiar to that event, but something that can also be seen in similar performances in other contexts. . . . Scientific performances are addressed to specific communities and are responses to issues raised within those communities. But properly preparing and viewing the performances requires a detached attitude, one interested in seeing what is happening for its own sake rather than for some practical end. The outcomes of the detached seeing of such performances, however, can be a deepened and enriched understanding of the world and our engagement with it.[68]

Crease is well aware of the differences between scientific performance and theatre performance, but the performative act, he argues, is the same in either case, if we look beyond the clichés we hear about how far apart scientists and artists are in their procedures and goals. This is his definition of a performance:

> Performance is first of all an execution of an action in the world which is a *presentation* of a phenomenon; that action is related to a *representation* (for example, a text, script, scenario, or book), using a semiotic system (such as a language, a scheme of notation, a mathematical system); finally, a performance springs from and is presented to a suitably prepared local (historically and culturally bound)

> community which *recognizes* new phenomena in it. The field develops through an interaction of all three.[69]

I can't do justice here to a discussion that is two hundred pages in length and far more complex than Goffman's casual use of the theatre metaphor to describe ordinary behavior. Indeed, Crease isn't invoking theatre as a metaphor for what goes on in science: theatre and science stand in a mutual relationship in which the same specified features appear, mutatis mutandis. Chiefly, both aim "at achieving the presence of a phenomenon under one of its profiles."[70] What can this mean, specifically, in terms of the performative arts? What is the phenomenon that comes forth? To keep our vocabulary from proliferating, we might sum it up in a term I take from Richard Schechner: transformation. In theatrical presentation something is always transformed; it is simultaneously "not itself" and "not not itself." Other well-known terms for transformation are "making strange," "estrangement," Shklovsky's "defamiliarization," Heidegger's "deconcealment," and more recently Wolfgang Iser's "fictionalization,"[71] all of which involve transformations. As audience, we go to theatre to witness a transformation of the things of reality (or fantasy) and presumably the actor performs in order to undergo a transformation, or to become a twice-*not*ted self. So theatre, and as I will argue, artistic performance at large, offers us the pleasure of transformation. And I think this is a fundamental pleasure at the very core of mind and memory. "Memory [itself]," as Gerald Edelman writes, "is transformational rather than replicative."[72] Hence, the endless ability of "the brain to confront novelty, to generalize upon it, and to adapt in unforeseen fashions."[73] All perception, all memory, is creative, which is to say adapted to the specifications of the organism, and performative art-making (of all kinds) is one of the extensions of this principle into the collective life of the community.[74]

I want also to mention Crease's division of performance into four categories: failed, mechanical repetition, standardized, and artistic.[75] In a failed performance the phenomenon does not appear (as in an inadequate interpretation of a play or an experiment which does not produce the expected result). A mechanical performance presents the same events over and over (an experimental "run"; film, player piano). A standardized performance simply fulfills the standards of the tradition (Kuhn's "normal" science; summer stock, a business-as-usual play in which the roles, as reviewers say, could well have been "phoned in"). Most interesting of all is Crease's conception of artistic performance which

> coaxes into being something which has not previously appeared. It is beyond the standardized program; it is action at the limit of the already controlled and understood; it is risk. The artistry of experimentation involves bringing a phenomenon into material presence in a way which requires more than passive forms of preparation, yet in

> a way so that one nevertheless has confidence that one recognizes the phenomenon for what it is. Artistic objects "impose" themselves—they announce their presence as being completely or incompletely realized—but this imposition is not independent of the judgments and actions of the artist.[76]

This changes our normal understanding of *artistic* in a refreshing way. We, in the arts, tend to use the word *artistic* as a generic way of distinguishing what we do from what scholars or scientists do, and we tend to use it in a self-congratulatory way, when we are not using it defensively in a university system that often pays lip service to art. Thus if you are painting or writing a play or a novel you are doing "artistic" work. And this is certainly a legitimate use of the term. What it obscures, however, is another aspect of art that isn't restricted to what "artists" (painters, dancers, actors, etc.) do, but refers to any display or application of human skill (*OED* 1). In Crease's sense we might better define a lot of things that go by the name of art as "failed" or "standardized" or "mechanical" performances, that have nothing to do with art in his sense of the term *artistic*. In any case, scientists perform artistic work too, and this doesn't mean that they use metaphors and analogies (though they do), and above all it doesn't mean that the word artistic is being used metaphorically. The truly great scientific discoveries and experiments are artistic productions in the sense that they are "actions at the limit of the already controlled and understood." They are "risks" that succeed in making the phenomenon appear. And the fact that they aim to produce results that are repeatable and quantifiable shouldn't lead us to think that the process leading to the quantification isn't based on the imaginative construction of models. The very same kind of thinking that went into the Sistine Chapel or the plays of Shakespeare was occurring in the performances by Einstein, Copernicus, Galton, Cavendish, Gödel, and Charles Darwin, who were artists of extraordinary vision and imagination. Artistic, or creative, thinking has nothing to do with the nature of the result or the discovery that is made: it is a modus operandi.[77] What an artistic experimental performance produces may be a proof of how a certain phenomenon behaves in the field of physical matter; but how does this differ from a Cézanne painting or a John Gielgud performance that offers proof of something "true" about rocks and trees and human nature? So we might put beside our concept of performance as "restored behavior" this close variation from Crease: "Each artistic performance, rather than repeating or echoing, is a creation that pushes forward to produce what is *repeated*."[78]

Thus, to come back to Hamlet, we may say that even if there had been no Shakespeare, and therefore no *Hamlet*, there is still the "something" *out there* in human empirical behavior that finally got represented in the behavior of Hamlet, the character. This is the field of "invariance" Shakespeare tapped into by means of his own pungent "semiotic" system, the same (or a similar) field of invariance that Mallarmé in the nineteenth century would call Hamletism and Jules de Gaultier, tracking a variant variation, referred to (after Flaubert) as "Bovarysme." So performance is always preceded by, and built on, an "invariant" field of twice-behaved behavior; somewhere, at all times, one of the profiles of human behavior Shakespeare embodied in his creation of Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear, Lady Macbeth, Rosalind, et al., is detectable in the world, if one had the wit (or the artistry) to see it.[79] And a poet who did see it out there, or deep inside, could presumably recreate it whether there were a Shakespearean precedent or not (though obviously not in the Shakespearean version). This comes near the foundation of Crease's enlightening argument: this is the mode of thinking that performers in science and performers in "the performing arts" share in common.

There is one other matter that Crease clarifies very well, and this is the business of the presumed division between performer and audience. Departing from Gadamer's essay on play in *Truth and Method*, Crease notes that when an experimental performance ("enacted by the equipment") causes the phenomenon of, say, electrons to appear, it is present equally to the scientist (the playwright-producer-director) who designed the performance and "to those who merely look on." So too with theatre, ritual and other performative ceremonies (including athletic events): "true performance of whatever sort absorbs players and audience in one comprehensive event, an event dominated by the appearance of a phenomenon."[80] Or, as Gadamer puts the idea, "Artistic presentation, by its nature, exists for someone, even if there is no one there who listens or watches only."[81] And finally, with particular relation to the theatre, I might cite Herbert Blau's massive study of *The Audience* which, among many other of its interests, chronicles theatre's continual attempts to return the spectator to "the center of the stage."[82]

It seems short-sighted, then, to insist that there be an audience separate from the performers if there is to be a performance. Surely the chamber music quartet (cited by Gadamer) illustrates this idea perfectly. When a quartet gets together to play there are often only four people in the room and they are the musicians. It does no good to say that each member of the quartet becomes an audience when (and only when) his or her instrument isn't playing and the musician "only" listens. The work is being performed and the performers are there to hear and feel it, and to insist that the two variables be different entities seems a misunderstanding of the pleasurable purpose of performance.

The notion that a performance must have this sort of audience seems to derive from two sources: (1) the historical fact, and hence semantic expectation, that performances usually have (separate) audiences, being intended primarily for them; and (2) the idea that a performance, in order to be such, should have a witness, an ear in the forest, so to speak, to hear the tree fall. These two sources are not really separable in their influence; and the upshot is that it seems peculiar to call something a performance that was heard only by the performer.

But if we put aside this notion, all the conditions of performance are satisfied by the quartet situation wherein music is played in order to give pleasure to the players. Nor should the fact that there are four players, rather than one, make the slightest difference. When Franz Liszt sat down at the piano, after dinner, to play some Chopin for himself, wasn't he performing Chopin for Franz Liszt to the same end that he might have performed it for friends? One can assume that he wanted to hear the music, though this does not imply that he also didn't enjoy playing the music. Was he performing? And was there really a difference between performing and listening? If he was performing Chopin—and I think he was—then I was performing Shakespeare in my car last week (quality of performance is irrelevant), which I frequently do, not because I'm so good at it but because the language moves me. Anyway, I don't hear my own miserable rendition: I hear an "ideal" or "imaginary" Bert States reciting it (to borrow Garrick's words), just as it is an ideal Bert States who sings so beautifully in the acoustical enhancement of the shower. In other words, I hear a kind of composite of all the great performances I remember in my mind's ear. One might say that I disappear as performer and reappear as hearer of the sweet "unheard melodies" that of course would escape my wife's more discriminating ear, were she nearby.[83]

It could be argued that this kind of thinking leaves us no room to separate true performance from, say, rehearsal—or anything else in creation, for that matter. But I don't think this is the case. The string quartet isn't rehearsing; it is performing for itself; though it is likely that the group at some point may have rehearsed the music it plays in its private performance. The rehearsal atmosphere, on the other hand, is one of trial and error, seeking, interrupting, finding in general the best way *to perform*. And this is different from performing a given work from beginning to end, for oneself or for others. In short, "the artistry is artistry," as Crease says, "*in the service of* the appearing of the phenomenon," not in the service of perfecting the technique of the performer. There is no doubt some of the latter going on in all "final" performance, and some of the former going on in rehearsal; it is the attitude of the performer toward the artistry that I am concerned with here.

So I'm suggesting that a theory of performance has to begin at the ontological floor where the human desire to participate in performative transformations begins. This is the point where there is not yet a differentiation between performer and audience; there is only an abiding interest in the spectacular possibilities of the world (the voice, sound, physical material, behavior) which one uncovers in perception and at once feels the pleasure of the discovery.[84] Surely all artists respond to their work as an audience in the very act of creating it. Surely the act of painting a landscape is not exhausted in the transformation of what the painter sees "out there," but includes a reciprocal degree of spectation. So we may say that art (in which I include science) is its own reward, whatever other things it may achieve. Here is what we might call the kernel or gene of performativity from which all divided forms of artistic performance spring: the collapse of means and ends into each other, the simultaneity of producing something and responding to it in the same behavioral act. All artistic performance is grounded in this pleasure and performance thereafter goes its cultural way toward endless forms of differentiation and intentionality whereby others (now called performers) stand apart and perform for us (called audiences) the "heard melodies" of themselves and others.

If we ignore this pleasurable base from which performance springs, however, then any differentiation of species of performance is apt to lead to a confusion of denominators. This is the problem with trying to account for Goffman's world of social performance in the same terms that one is trying to account for the forms of artistic performance. I think Schechner is right to suspect that Goffman is dealing with an altogether different kind of performing beast. On balance, some of the things Schechner apparently considers as performances—hostage crises, terrorist activities, Ph.D. orals, and wild animal parks—seem to me as far from being performances on one extreme (excluding my yellow cows, of course) as Goffman's everyday social behavior is on the other. I frankly don't know where to "put" them, if we must put them anywhere; I'm inclined to think we might solve the problem in the way the Eskimos solved the problem of snow by giving it fourteen or so different names. But I think Schechner is being no less metaphorical than Goffman in treating such events as performances—which is to say, and quite rightly, they are *like* performances in somewhat the way that a marching band is like a centipede. They are to performance what "def" is to "abc"; that is, they have some of the same "family resemblances," but they are marching to altogether different tunes.

## Notes

1 Williams, Raymond, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford, 1976), 13.

2 It is hard for a new meaning of a word to find its way into the dictionary, and some never do. In one sense, the dictionary is a reliable guide to meaning, but in another its definitions are perpetually out of date because new "street meanings" are continually evolving. The operative definition of a word—I am referring mainly to keywords and their derivatives—amounts to how it is used at a particular "moment" in culture, not what it means in the dictionary. In a sense, the dictionary tells us only what a word has meant (most of which it still means). Whereas the street meaning is always in the "experimental" or metaphorical stage of evolution. The infamous Seagull effect of Chaos theory would suggest that words like *theatre, theatricality*, and *performance* do not mean the same thing this month as they meant last month, though the change may be as subtle as the change in the continental drift. This is possible because the very recurrence of a word in new contexts constantly expands its semantic base. This process is aggravated, however, in the case of words like theatre, performance, text and so on because they are so hyper-active as metaphors. (See Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* [Bloomington: Indiana, 1984], 67–89 on the

evolutionary aspect of metaphor.) Moreover, one of the problems with certain words, keywords especially, is that they cease to be words at all at some point, at least "neutral" words, and become symbols of institutions and institutional or revolutionary thinking. Words, in a sense, are like land and property: they are indifferent to their own disposal and dispersion but the cause of strong differentiations among their user/owners. For example, the poststructuralist assault on the terms *mimesis* and *representation* was manifestly waged over the idea that people believed mimesis implies imitation in the sense of a copy. No serious aesthetician would advance such a silly idea, but poststructuralists claimed that this was a widespread belief, saw only a narrow "naturalistic" meaning in the word, and lumped it in with other "received" no-no words like *the self, truth, meaning, identity, character, the author, humanism, reality, presence*, etc. that signified the old ideology. If mimesis is taken in its original Aristotelian (as opposed to Platonic) sense, the most radical performance artists are still committing the sin of mimesis insofar as they engage in performances in which they are "not themselves, but not not themselves." A convenient definition of mimesis occurs in Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1985): "The concept of mimesis . . . did not mean a copy so much as the appearance of what is represented. Without the mimesis of the work the world is not there as it is there in the work, and without reproduction the work is not there" (121–22).

3 *Deconstruction* is the most spectacular recent example: the word had been lying there since the nineteenth century ("Deconstruct: to take to pieces"); but it never had a place it could call a home, much less a cause to celebrate, until the idea occurred to us, in the advanced stages of modern skepticism, that things weren't really *taken* to pieces but were "always already" in pieces to begin with.

4 Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40 (1988): 519–31.

5 John R. Searle, "Metaphor," in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 102.

6 Umberto Eco, "Ur-Fascism," *New York Review of Books*, 42 (June 22, 1995), 14.

7 Wittgenstein's celebrated treatment of this problem of concepts with "blurred edges," particularly games, occurs in *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York, Macmillan, 1968), sections 66–71, or pp. 31–34.

8 Richard Schechner, *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*, ed. Richard Schechner and Willa Appel (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 28.

9 Williams, *Keywords*, 12.

10 Ibid., 77.

11 Eco, *Role of the Reader*, 87.

12 What encourages this jumping, among other things, is the diverse power of the word's suffixes: *-ing*, *-ance*, and *-ative*. Someone who wouldn't include sculpture and painting among the perform*ing* arts could scarcely deny their admittance to perform*ance* art, where both seem to flourish. Moreover, many activities outside the arts have a perform*ative* quality, in a metaphorical way, and once it is pointed out one soon begins to speak of their perform*ance*. So there is no hope at getting a clean shot at a core meaning. We can hope only to understand the logic behind its proliferation as a keyword.

13 Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 13.

14 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 15.

15 Schechner, *By Means of Performance*, 28.

16 Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 72.

17 Bruce Wilshire offers a critique of Goffman's theory in *Role Playing and Identity: The Limits of Theatre As Metaphor* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982), 274–81.

18 Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 68–69.

19 One of the things that marks a poor play is its "unrealistic" depiction of its conflict: it poses either weak extremes (breaches), convenient developments to the crisis, or easy solutions—that is, solutions that in real social life would scarcely occur, given the odds. The sudden unexpected arrival of a rich uncle might be a good example, though under some circumstances the rich uncle is part of the form (sentimental drama), hence part of what we expect.

20 Richard Schechner would probably disagree with this "one-way" judgment. For example, referring to Turner's social drama he says: "Artistic action creates the rhetorical and/or symbolic possibilities for social drama to 'find itself,' and the events of ordinary life provide the raw stuff and conflicts reconstructed in art works" (*Between Theater and Anthropology* [Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1985], 116, 11n.). And in his previous book, *Essays in Performance Theory: 1970–76* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1977), he applies Turner's social drama theory to the 1975 imbroglio of President Gerald Ford's dismissal of the cabinet members and then to Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* (140–44), finding that both follow Turner's social drama pattern perfectly. First, I don't disagree with Schechner's sense of a two-way street in the least. It is quite true that social action uses the rhetorical and symbolic language of artistic works (not to mention the rhetoric of religion, military strategy, and perhaps even science and domestic life); but this is far from a structural adaptation. Second, my point is that social drama came first; it invariably follows the same pattern (as Schechner says, "it has always been this way in politics, from the village level on up" [143]), and drama modeled itself directly on this pattern. There was simply no other choice, and I would be surprised if the "dramatic conflicts" that take place in the psychical, physical, and animal worlds, if we cut them at the right joints, didn't follow a similar pattern. Particularly enlightening on this subject is Rudolf Arnheim's discussion of the struggle between the catabolic and the anabolic forces in the field of entropy (he calls this "the structural theme") in *Entropy and Art: An Essay on Order and Disorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

21 See Zenon W. Pylyshyn, "Metaphorical Imprecision and the 'Top-Down' Research Strategy," in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 429.

22 *Presentation of Self*, 254.

23 Ibid., 106.

24 Ibid., 80–81.

25 On this matter of the theatre metaphor as interpretative tool, see Mária Minich Brewer: "Theatre provides, on the one hand, a vast integrative reference for interpretation and, on the other, it narrows the field to the place of the desiring subject within those interpretive frames" ("Performing Theory," *Theatre Journal* 37 [1985], 17).

26 Philip Auslander discusses the beginnings of performance art in *Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 35–55. See also Michael Vanden Heuvel, *Performing Drama/Dramatizing Performance: Alternative Theater and the Dramatic Text* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1991), chiefly pp. 1–66.

27 Susan Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), 4.

28 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), 146.

29 Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, 41.

30 I refer of course to Austin's famous term "performative utterance" in which "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action" (*How To Do Things With Words* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975], 6).

31 Ibid., 22.

32 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Sartre on Theater*, trans. Frank Jellinek (New York: Pantheon, 1976), 162.

33 Tom Stoppard, *Tom Stoppard in Conversation*, ed. Paul Delaney (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 264.

A useful way to differentiate theatre's "invisible" acting and staging from the visible presentation of performance art is offered in Richard A. Lanham's "*At* and *Through*: The Opaque Style and Its Uses," in *Literacy and the Survival of Humanism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). Lanham proposes a distinction between the *opaque* style and the *transparent* style, which works like a "simple *At/Through Switch*" (58). The *transparent* style (invisible theatre) is the style of pure signification, or of the signified (meaning); the *opaque* style is the style of the phenomenon itself, of the signifier (presence). Needless to say, there are no pure examples and the "simple" At/Through switch turns out to be quite complex.

34 Phelan, *Unmarked*, 4.

35 Ibid., 147.

36 Ibid., 146.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 31.

39 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 224.

40 Phelan, *Unmarked*, 36–37.

41 Phelan certainly has a valid point in claiming that performance consists in its commentary on its own medium. Here is one huge respect in which *performance* as used in the term *performance art* signifies something different from its meaning under normative circumstances (say, in theatre or concert performance). Performance art was, and to a great degree still is, aimed at deconstructing the normal assumptions of traditional performance (see Michael Vanden Heuvel, *Performing Drama/Dramatizing Performance: Alternative Theater and the Dramatic Text* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 8ff.). Understanding performance art outside the context of "normal" theatre and art would be as fruitless as trying to understand the Declaration of Independence outside the context of British imperialism. Thus the true performance of performance art occurs between whatever form it takes and the background presuppositions whose gravitational pull it sought to escape. Performance, in one sense at least, wasn't confined in the performance itself (as when Olivier plays Othello), but in a "betwixt" ontology, somewhat as the "ontology" of crossed sticks depends on the events at Calvary and all that followed. Even so, I see nothing essentially original about performance art, by which I mean only that it isn't doing anything different from what art has always done: waged an eternal struggle against the strangulations of its own repetitions. All of the topics Phelan takes up in her book are true performances (in my opinion) in the sense that each artist uses the medium as part of what the message is: Trisha's absence and the play with filmic space in Rainer's *The Man Who Envied Women*, the substitution of descriptions and photographs for the

paintings in Sophie Calle's Boston exhibition, Cindy Sherman's use of her own body as a disappearing act, and so on. In each case, it is the medium giving birth to new offspring, fed with its own blood. But I think this is what painting, photography, film, and theatre have always done. The true performative moment of art (in Phelan's sense), the moment before its retreat into becoming either classic or dead (or both), occurs in that cultural zone of time when it can be seen (or heard) as *reactive*, as poised between the present practice of art and the possibilities of future evolution. This is a highly ambiguous process, however, because normal art is always changing and the rebel art is always to some extent, repeating itself and thus giving rise to a set of ossifying characteristics. After this it enters the stream of what we know and what has therefore to be constantly redone, like Penelope's tapestry.

42 Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, trans. Edward S. Casey, et al. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 51.

Dufrenne's aesthetics, I should add, equates presentation of a work with performance (in French, *exécution*). Even the plastic arts, "in being perceived aesthetically, give 'performance' in the sense of offering sensuous presentations to the spectator" (Ed. note, 17n). Or, as Dufrenne puts the idea: "The work must offer itself to perception: it must be performed in order to pass, as it were, from a potential to an actual existence" (19). Hence, the reader, like the stage actor, becomes the performer of the written work. "[D]oes not every reader have to be a performer in order to make words pass from the abstract existence of the written sign to the concrete existence of the uttered sign, at least if the sign takes on its full meaning only when uttered?" (51–52). It should be said, however, that Dufrenne does not make this claim of the spectator of graphic art: perception of the work does not equal performance. The spectator only "collaborates" in the performance of painting, sensuously displayed by the (absent) author. The difference seems to be that in the presence of a painting we perceive the sensuous organization, in reading a novel we must imagine it for ourselves with the text's help (59).

43 Roman Ingarden's well-known term for this enactment of the text is "concretization," meaning that the reader "must perform a vivid representation in reading. And this means simply that the reader must productively experience intuitive aspects in the material of vivid representation and thereby bring the portrayed object to intuitive presence, to representational appearance" (*The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, trans. Ruth Ann Crowley and Kenneth R. Olson [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973], 56–57). Ingarden does not refer to this as performance, as Dufrenne does; even so, the same principle (and term) applies to the work of the actor who "concretizes" the text of the author.

44 Dufrenne, *Phenomenology*, 59.

45 See *Between Theater and Anthropology*, 1985, 35; *By Means of Performance*, 1990, 43; *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), 1.

46 Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, 36–37.

47 Ibid., 35.

48 Ibid., 36.

49 Ibid., 41.

50 Ibid., 51.

51 Schechner, *By Means of Performance*, 43.

52 Ibid., 25.

53 Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, 52.

54 Ibid., 36.

55 Ibid., 51.

56 Ibid., 42.

57 Schechner, *By Means of Performance*, 20–21. The term "performative event," very common in theory, is a real fudge, but it is almost impossible to avoid. What is the difference between a performance and a performative event? To adopt the performance lingo, we might say that a performative event is not exactly a performance but it is not exactly *not* a performance.

58 Ibid., 19.

59 Ibid., 37.

60 Schechner, *By Means of Performance*, 28.

61 Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, 97.

62 Of course, if you put a cow on the stage and made it part of the action of a play, that's another matter entirely. The familiarity of the animal disappears and is replaced by the shock of its appearance in an unaccustomed place. This, I take it, would be the source of the fascination with Hippo-drama in the nineteenth century.

63 This is Heidegger's term of course. See "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper, 1975), 32ff.

64 Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, 52.

65 Roger C. Schank, and Robert P. Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals and Understanding: An Inquiry into Human Knowledge Structures* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1977), 67.

66 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 34.

67 I am not saying something that Schechner doesn't realize. For instance, see his essay on the relation of social drama to aesthetic drama in *Essays in Performance Theory: 1970–76* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1977), 140–56. Indeed, with a few changes his diagram on Social Drama/Aesthetic Drama (144) might be adapted to my point. I do share Victor Turner's reservations that the diagram "suggests cyclical rather than linear movement" (*From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* [New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982], 74) between theatre and society; that is, it overemphasizes the respect in which theatre influences life. When Schechner suggests that Gerald Ford "takes techniques from the theatre" in order to conduct his cabinet shake-up to best public advantage (*Essays in Performance Theory*, 143–44), I would ask where the theatre learned these PR techniques if not from realpolitik itself. In other words, *anything the theatre knows was taught to it by reality*. Maybe people deliberately "theatricalize" themselves in dress, manner, or life-style according to popular theatre stereotypes (James Dean, Madonna), but where did the stereotypes originate?

68 Robert P. Crease, *The Play of Nature: Experimentation as Performance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 96.

69 Ibid., 100.

70 Ibid., 103.

71 Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 4.

72 Gerald Edelman, *Neural Darwinism: The Theory of Neuronal Group Selection* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 265.

73 Ibid., 329.

74 Again Edelman: "We must look at all acts of perception as acts of creativity. [Memory] is not a replicative recall of stored physical descriptors. It is an imaginative act, a form of dynamic recategorization with decoration by exemplars. Its very lack of repetitive precision . . . is the source of creative possibility for generalization

and pattern recognition" ("Neural Darwinism: Population Thinking and Higher Brain Function," in *How We Know*, ed. Michael Shafto [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985], 24).

75 Ibid., 109.

76 Ibid., 110.

77 The best sustained case for the thought-parallels between scientific and artistic discovery is made by Arthur Koestler in *The Act of Creation* (N.p.: Macmillan, 1969). "The logical pattern of the creative process is the same in humor, scientific discovery, and art; it consists in the discovery of hidden similarities" (27). This is more complex than it sounds in this reduced form. The thing we must bear in mind in studies like Crease's and Koestler's is not that they are arguing for an across-the-board identification between science and art, only that the mental process of discovery is the same, along with certain procedures. There is not an awful lot of difference, in short, between finding the right metaphors and designing the right experimental model (which, as Koestler points out, is always "a caricature of reality . . . based on selective emphasis on the relevant factors and omission of the rest" [72]—just what we do unconsciously when we interpret a metaphor.) So when we separate art and science as different pursuits of understanding, we ought to know precisely what we're separating and what is identical. To quote Nelson Goodman on the point: "Even if the ultimate product of science, unlike that of art, is a literal, verbal or mathematical, denotational theory, science and art proceed in much the same way with their searching and building" *(Ways of Worldmaking* [Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1978], 107).

78 Crease, *The Play of Nature*, 111.

79 Is this not exactly the main reason for "reviving" old out-of-fashion plays in which we (the stage director) suddenly detect a contemporary theme? Or, to reverse the order, why we do classics in updated locations (a Creole *Othello*, a Barbados *Winter's Tale*, etc.)?

80 *The Play of Nature*, 119.

81 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 99.

82 Herbert Blau, *The Audience* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 17; see also Vanden Heuvel, *Performing Drama*, 36; and Schmitt, "Casting the Audience."

83 On this same line, the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) defines performance as "The recitation of poetry either by its author, a professional performer, or any reader either alone or before an audience; the term normally implies the latter" (892).

84 The ur-forms of all performance would be the day dream and the nocturnal REM dream, the most private instances of "restored behavior."

# 16

# THEATRICAL AND TRANSGRESSIVE ENERGIES[1]

*Freddie Rokem*

Source: *Assaph: Studies in the Theatre* 15 (1999): 19–38.

> The theatre like the plague releases conflicts, disengages powers, liberates possibilities, and if these possibilities and these powers are dark, it is the fault not of the plague nor of the theatre, but of life.
>
> Antonin Artaud

Discourses on the theatre as well as performance in general frequently refer to the different kinds of energy created on stage and transmitted to the audience. This notion of 'energy' as a rule depicts how some form of uncompromising engagement on all levels of theatrical communication, mainly through the art of acting, is achieved. The number of texts on theatre and performance referring directly to the notion of 'energy', or drawing on concepts closely related to it, is even quite surprising. Usually, however, these concepts, and in particular the notion of 'energy', are employed without indexing them formally in any way; they simply appear as a central cord around which many discussions about the theatre are actually organized. The notion of 'energy' does not of course belong primarily to the world of theatre, but refers to how some kind of machinery or technical aid uses physical or chemical changes to produce a labor that has an effect; or to the ability of human intentions to perform actions with concrete results.

It was Aristotle who was the first to use *energeia* (vigor or force) or *enargeia* (vividness or shining forth) as rhetorical terms, signifying the actualization of that which had previously only existed potentially. The two terms very early overlapped, pointing at a visually powerful description that recreates something or someone, as several theorists say, 'before your very eyes'.[2] These terms became important also in legal contexts to designate rhetorical excellence. Implicitly, for Aristotle, energy also meant accumulated force. For us today the concepts 'perform' and 'performance' also imply some form of creation and expenditure of energy that are not simply the result of technological achievements, like in the 'performance' of my car or computer, but concern human actions in all fields, including theatre. 'Energy' is undoubtedly also a concept that carries strong ideological implications and it has been used to describe the causes of social changes and upheavals.

In discourses on theatre and performance the notion of 'energy' has perhaps been most frequently employed in the contexts of acting and directing. But it has also been used to discuss those energies that are present in dramatic texts from the distant past and which still make them relevant to us, centuries after these texts were first written and performed. The energies of acting can thus be seen as a theatrical or performative mode that makes it possible both to tell and show the spectators watching a performance something from and about that past, as supposedly preserved in these texts. The notion of 'energy' has also been employed for pointing out and defining different modes of communication and semiosis in the theatre. In addition to examining these discourses, I also attempt here to develop different theoretical notions on the basis of which certain metaphysical and ritual dimensions of theatrical energies can be examined. These in turn are also closely related to what we usually refer to as *catharsis*, the energies that can be experienced by spectators watching a performance. The widespread and quite different ways in which the notion of 'energy' has been employed in discourses on the theatre serve to indicate the complexity of this cultural practice. In such discourses, it is a concept floating around 'out there', and to date no attempt has been made to examine this notion more systematically, as a key concept for the theory of theatre and performance. Although Aristotle was the first to use terminology directly relating to energy in the field of rhetoric, already in Plato's dialogue *Ion*, which explores the art of the so-called *rhapsode* – the singer of the Homeric epics – there is an extensive discussion about the sources of his power and inspiration. Here Socrates explains to the young actor, bearing the same name as the dialogue itself, that

> The gift which you possess of speaking excellently about Homer is not an art but an inspiration; there is a divinity moving you, like that contained in the stone which Euripides called a magnet, but which is commonly known as the stone of Heraclea. This stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a similar power of attracting other rings; and sometimes you may see a number of pieces of irons and rings suspended from one another so as to form quite a long chain: and all of them derive their power of suspension from the original stone. In like manner the Muse first of all inspires men herself; and from these inspired persons a chain of other persons is suspended, who take the inspiration. For all good poets, epic as

> well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed.[3]

The power-fields of these 'magnetic energies' of Ion's performances are created by what Socrates terms *enthusiasmos*, a term still used in contemporary English with more or less the same connotations, and according to Plato they are subject to an *a priori* hierarchy, in which each link in the creative chain refers back to a divine source, thus creating an integrated totality. This understanding of the actor as someone who is inspired or 'charged' with divine or metaphysical powers has had a very profound influence on the discourses on acting, as they have developed in most cultures.

Plato's explicit aim, however, was to prevent a situation in which each link in the communicative chain preceding the performance, and in particular within the performance itself, is given some form of autonomy in which the actor can be seen as an independent source of this charismatic power and inspiration. The moment such an autonomy is accepted and mapped out – and Plato was no doubt aware that this is possible, otherwise he would not have banned poets and all other artists from his ideal state – each and every link in the creative chain of the theatre can become a source of independent energies. Artistic creativity, Plato claimed, contains a strong transgressive potential. And, furthermore, as he most certainly also recognised, such a transgressive potential will not always be totally confined within the more limited field of art itself, but can in different ways also influence the social and ideological spheres as well. However, even if such transgressive energies can at least potentially upset the existing social order – I believe that one of the reasons why art still interests us today is related to this possibility – they are nonetheless still deeply ambiguous. Pierre Klossowski, for example, reflecting on the ideas of the Marquis de Sade in the context of the French Revolution, even considered the very notion of 'transgression' itself to be radically paradoxical, because it

> seems absurd and puerile when it [transgression] does not succeed in resolving itself into a state of affairs in which it would no longer be necessary. But it belongs to the nature of transgression that it is never able to find such a state. Transgression is then something else than the pure explosion of energy accumulated thanks to an obstacle. It is an incessant recuperation of the possible itself – inasmuch as the existing state of things has eliminated the possibility of another form of existence.[4]

Only a Utopian situation would make the need for transgressions unnecessary. What we usually witness in situations of social and psychological change is rather, as Klossowski seems to imply, an 'explosion of **energy** accumulated thanks to an obstacle'. But even when such revolutionary energies are released in the social sphere they do not lead to any significant changes, particularly not of human nature.

Since the notion of 'energy' holds such an ambiguous and even paradoxical position in social discursive practices as well as those connected to the arts, it deserves to be carefully examined. What I wish to argue here is that the theatre has become a point of convergence or union for such differently constituted energies, which are generally conceived of as belonging to completely separate ontological spheres or fields. It is this form of violation of boundaries between spheres that was apparently most threatening for Plato, who argued for a transcendental metaphysics and could only accept that the aesthetic field too had but one, divine source. But it seems, rather, that the different forms of energies created and constituted by performances are somehow able to bring together a broad variety of such ontological spheres. It is even possible to argue that one of the basic constituent features of theatrical performances, what is generally termed their 'theatricality', is at least partially based on such a mingling of ontological spheres, which as a rule do not co-exist to the same extent in other contexts. The theatre itself is of course not just an indistinct blur, but designates borders between different ontological spheres such as between the aesthetic and the social, the fictional and the historical, the natural and the supernatural, the static and the dynamic, the naive and the metatheatrical. But the theatre also seeks to bring these spheres together; first to make them interact, at least for the duration of the performance itself, and in some cases even to unify them. The 'friction' such meetings give rise to is the source of the unique energies created by the theatre.

The notion of 'energy' in the context of performance thus serves both as a unifying and a separating or dividing force. The ability to bring many totally disparate ontological spheres together is no doubt one of the reasons why it has been so difficult to delineate theatre and performance as aesthetic phenomena, even if this is of course an issue that basically concerns all the arts. But the live presence of the human body, both on the stage as actors-performers (presenting characters) and in the auditorium as spectators, has made it much more complex to define the 'theatrical' than to delineate the 'fictional' in prose fiction, for example. Theatre, in addition to the complexities of the theatrical signs and in particular the presence of the human body, also has to confront the issues of fictionality. But the comprehensibility with which theatre simultaneously brings a vast number of different ontological spheres into play is of such a magnitude that the theatrical field has even become paradigmatic for human behaviour in different academic disciplines. However, theatre research, I believe, has not been able fully to take up the challenge of this paradigmatic aspect of its own field of research.

Theatre has been perceived as activating different kinds of energies from the textual, performative and metaphysical perspectives, as well as from the point of view of the spectators. The textual perspective is based on radically different ontological assumptions to the performative one, which as a rule integrates the human presence both on the stage as well as in the auditorium. The metaphysical dimensions of theatre are activated by quite different assumptions from the textual and performative ones, sometimes contradicting them, but frequently also supplementing or even reinforcing them. The fact that theatre at critical stages in its development has been closely associated with ritual and religious practices has no doubt influenced our perceptions of this form of art. And finally, it is the spectator who carries away the meanings of the theatrical performance, making us imagine or even believe that it is possible to change the world we live in by trying to activate the different psychological and social energies the performance has triggered. This response is caused by the kind of *catharsis* a particular performance has been able to trigger among the individual spectators.

This may perhaps sound somewhat too optimistic, because the complex interaction between performance and this historical world is, as Artaud – whom I quote in the motto to this article – quite clearly understood, also based on the fact that this world is permeated by destructive energies. The creative energies of the theatre can, however, in certain cases be seen as a kind of force that counteracts the destructive energies of history and its painful failures. The Second World War, in particular the *Shoah* and the use of the atom-bomb, both of which contain clearly distinct but almost unimaginable destructive energies, have profoundly affected our understanding of all expressions of culture, including the theatre. The notion of 'energy' in the theatre thus also raises the issue of to what extent performances are capable of creating and developing vital and creative energies that are not inherently destructive, and can therefore, at least ideally, also have a restorative function.

## Textual energies

In his book *Shakespearean Negotiations*, subtitled *The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, Stephen Greenblatt raised the seemingly obvious question of why Shakespeare's plays are still so relevant to readers and audiences of today. In answering this question Greenblatt makes an interesting move between a Foucaultian approach, focusing on the power hegemonies of a certain society, and a much more non-focalised understanding of the textual and performative energies with which Shakespeare's writings are imbued. Greenblatt relates the notion of 'energy' both to the power and the hegemony in the social sphere, as expressed in different public discourses and social practices at the time, and to the literal and metaphorical expressions of these practices in the dramatic texts from the same period.

On the one hand, and this is a position closely following Foucault, Greenblatt argues that Shakespeare's dramas, 'precipitated out of a sublime confrontation between a total artist and a totalizing society.'[5] In order to examine the complex interactions between the completely self-absorbed artist and the surrounding society, with its 'occult network linking all human, natural, and cosmic powers [which] generates vivid dreams of access to the linked powers and vests control of this access in a religious and state bureaucracy at whose pinnacle is the symbolic figure of the monarch,' Greenblatt introduces the notion of 'social energy'. This notion, he argues, will enable us to explain why the 'aesthetic power of a play like *King Lear*'[6] – in spite of the fact that it has been radically 'refigured' since the play was written almost four hundred years ago – still so strongly affects us today.

At the same time, however, and this enables a much less hegemonic strategy of reading, 'these refigurations do not cancel history, locking us into a perpetual present', but are, Greenblatt continues,

> the signs of the inescapability of a historical process, a structured negotiation and exchange, already evident in the initial moments of empowerment. That there is no direct, unmediated link between ourselves and Shakespeare's plays does not mean that there is no link at all. The 'life' that literary works seem to possess long both after the death of the author and the death of the culture for which the author wrote is the historical consequence, however transformed and refashioned, of the **social energy** initially encoded in those works.[7]

These social energies are, according to Greenblatt, embedded within a network of intertextual webs, which continue to reverberate within these individual plays long after they were written. He goes on to argue that the aesthetic modes of such social energies have been so powerfully 'encoded in certain works of art [that this energy] continues to generate the illusion of life for centuries.'[8] Greenblatt closely examines the contemporary textual evidence of certain specific social practices at the time of Shakespeare and how the texts about them can serve as such intertexts with the Shakespearean masterpieces with the aim 'to understand the negotiations through which works of art obtain and amplify such powerful energy.'[9]

The issue Greenblatt has been able to confront by examining these intertextual negotiations is also indirectly concerned with the transformation of the classical masterpieces into performances, and in particular with how the actors on the stage are able to communicate the social energies embedded in them to the spectators of today. Because of the living ongoing dialogue that every culture has with the past, such performances will ideally not merely become archaeological reconstructions or a theme park re-enactment of the text. This dialogue will, rather, create a tension between the performance and events depicted, which contain their own social energies based on the ability to perceive and interpret the distance both in time and space between the textual past and the performative present.

In today's Israeli culture the Hebrew Bible, i.e. the Old Testament, undoubtedly contains these kinds of social energies. Its text has served as the basis both for the Jewish religion and its traditional practices as well as being a central ideological platform for the Zionist movement and the establishment of the State of Israel. Hebrew theatre (before the foundation of the State) and Israeli theatre (after 1948) have constantly explored Biblical subjects in order to comment on the present, but also to say something about the past. A play like Hanoch Levin's *Job's Sorrows*, based on the *Book of Job*, situates the action of the play in the Roman period, critiquing the Israeli cults of suffering, self-pity and hero-worship. It presents a Job who is unwilling to accept the new Caesar as the ruler of the universe who has decreed that he is the only God. Job, who has denied the existence of God because he has lost all his family and possessions, has a vision of his father, who he believes is God, and since he no longer has anything to lose, he announces his belief in God. His punishment is to have his anus skewered by a spear.

Rina Yerushalmi's *Bible Project*, which consists of two performances based on a collage of Biblical texts also presents a critique of the more traditional readings of these texts in the Israeli context. The recital of some of the most familiar Biblical texts by a group of actors who do not play specific roles of Biblical figures, but rather are presented as a group and as individuals, creates a powerful verbal space with moving bodies. Secular audiences, who have studied most of these texts in school, strongly identify with these productions on the emotional as well as intellectual levels.

Both these productions, and several more, have taken the Bible as a point of departure for a radical refiguration of the traditional textual materials within a contemporary performance context. Besides their obvious intertextual relations to the one singular text, the Bible, which undoubtedly carries a strong mythological weight in contemporary Israeli culture, these productions are indicative of the current hierarchical power structures. They create what Greenblatt has termed 'a sublime confrontation between a total artist [or rather a totally absorbing text] and a totalizing society', struggling to overturn the Jewish orthodox hegemony over these classical texts. The two productions I have mentioned here were able to create subversive or transgressive energies by removing the canonised texts from their religious context, and situating them instead within a theatrical one. The very dialectics between the two contexts is in itself a source of theatrical energies.

## Representation and semiosis

Most theatrical performances depict situations in which the individual characters invest different efforts or energies in changing their private or social situation. But the themes represented on stage as a rule also interact on different levels with the aesthetic means of representation. Michael Goldman has described this correlation as a situation in which

> An actor is not simply a man presenting a careful behaviour of other men, or even of his own behaviour. His relation with what he imitates

> is never that of rough equivalency or representation. Acting is never simply mimetic; it appeals to us because of some other or more inclusive power. We feel an energy present in any good actor's performance that goes beyond the demonstration of what some 'real person' is like.[10]

Goldman goes on to describe this energy of the actor's art as 'a "terrific" energy, bearing in mind that word's root suggestion of the awesome and the fearful.'[11] This is clearly something that is also related to *catharsis*.

Goldman presents a position that has undoubtedly been strongly influenced by the School of New Criticism, arguing that there is always something in the drama itself, its plot or its characters, that enables the actors to realise these energy potentials of their art: structure is meaning. Most forceful in this respect are different forms of aggression. But, Goldman argues,

> The aggression of the plot is not the result of some dramatic law requiring struggle, debate, event, emphasis – all of which can be quite undramatic. It springs from other aggressions – the aggressions of impersonation and performance. The plot must offer the actor's aggressive energy (and the related aggressive energy of the audience) ample and interesting scope. The effort of the actor to act and the pleasures that acting generates are perceived as part of the action of the play, which forms their field.[12]

It is only, Goldman continues, when the energies of the acting become combined with those of the drama itself that the performance will actually take its 'real' course.

This multi-faceted collocation between the themes of the play and the means of theatrical representation through the acting on the stage clearly contains a meta-theatrical dimension, a mode of expression that is self-reflexive. It can perhaps even be viewed as a 'universal of performance' in Herbert Blau's sense of the term. The theatrical sign, at least as a Utopian potential, actually becomes a kind of 'life' in itself. For Blau, 'the theatrical ***gestus***, the signifying element of theater "can become a sign", as Foucault says, "only on condition that it manifests, in addition, the relation that links it to what it signifies [ . . . ]"'[13] The meta-theatrical link between the theatrical *gestus*, the specific sign-systems of the theatre, and what a performance signifies, serves as the basis for the theatrical energies in Blau's thinking. Or, as he has stated in a more recent publication: 'When we grow weary of the disorder of the world whose disorder spreads through our language so that we grow exhausted, we retreat to or look for energy in the apparent order of art, its ingrown autonomy.'[14] The issue as I hope will become even more clear later on, is how the relationships between the energies in the social field, the revolutionary or transgressive energies, and the energies that stem from what Blau terms the 'ingrown autonomy' of 'the apparent order of art' are constituted.

This issue, which stems from Plato's critique of the arts, has also quite strongly informed and influenced what we can term the 'semiotic project', the attempts among theatre scholars over approximately the last three decades, to expose and explicate the theatrical codes. One of the basic strategies of this project has been to emphasise the autonomy of the individual components of the 'theatrical text', and this has primarily been based on different principles of segmentation combined with the investigation of their communicative potentials in the synchronic/systemic context of individual performances. Gradually, however, these communicative potentials have in many cases also been formulated theoretically in terms that are closely related to the notion of 'energy'. I will briefly mention two such attempts here.

For Patrice Pavis, who has gradually moved in the direction of analysing the individual performance in terms of different vectors or power fields through which it is dynamically organised, developing on a temporal axis, the energies are an expression of the most ephemeral elements of the performance. Pavis has focused on the performance totality of the *mise-en-scène*, including such elements as the rhythm and kinetics of the performance, which, he argues, the available scientific language is not yet fully able to depict. In order to confront this apparent embarrassment, the point of departure Pavis has established is that '[t]heatrical production has become impregnated with theorisation. *Mise-en-scène* is becoming the self-reflexive discourse of the work of art, as well as the audience's desire to theorise.'[15] The energies of the performance, Pavis argues, have thus become transformed into the desire of the individual spectators to determine how a specific performance functions and is constructed. This desire is based on a curiosity to locate the creative processes through which the performance has been produced, which, ideally at least, are revealed by its meta-theatrical superstructures.

Erika Fischer-Lichte's semiotic project has a similar basis. But she has taken a much more direct recourse to psychoanalytic theory in order to answer the question of how it is 'possible for the different subjects participating in the production of a theatrical text to constitute themselves as subjects in the process of that production?'[16] In her theoretical deliberations Fischer-Lichte refers directly to Julia Kristeva, who offers a formulation of how the instinctual drives of an individual are articulated, and how (quoting Kristeva),

> Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body – always already involved in a semiotic process – by family and social structures.[17]

The basis for Fischer-Lichte's semiotic model of the theatre is the interface between the pre-linguistic, semiotic sphere, and the symbolic one, in the Lacanian sense even, through which the subject is constituted by letting some kind of (almost instinctual) energy flow through the body. This energy in turn becomes organised according to its own constitutional constraints in creating what Fischer-Lichte terms the 'body-text'. She focuses on the work of the actor and how his 'individual physique masters the text by making it an extension of itself', creating 'the text a second time – under his body's own specific conditions – both as something foreign to him and as something integral to his body.'[18] We must, therefore, she argues, '[c]oncentrate predominantly on the question how the praxis of individual interpretation is accomplished by the different subjects involved in the process of constituting the theatrical text?[19] And this is clearly a question of how different instinctual energies are channelled into social communication.

The question Pavis focuses on is the constitution of the *mise-en-scène* as an assembly of elements, which in various ways creates a meta-theatrical key to the performance. A theatrical performance is in some way always self-reflexive, drawing attention to the way it is made, and the energies created by a specific performance stem from the curiosity of the spectators to solve the riddles this specific performance poses. For Fischer-Lichte on the other hand the energies expressed by a specific production basically stem from the constitution of a 'subject-in-process' within the framework of a performance. This process has its source in the instinctual drives of the actors, but it certainly does not exclude the possibility that it can also directly affect the spectators. For both, however, the communication created by a performance remains within the spheres of the 'semiotic project' examining sign-systems, which by themselves, but primarily in alignment with each other, give rise to dynamic and constantly changing processes of interpretation.

## Performance energies

The notion of 'energy' has undoubtedly been most frequently used in the writings of theatre directors summarising their experiences of working with actors for specific performances or in different workshop contexts. These views have no doubt been formulated from a hegemonic position, summarising what these directors have been able to 'do' to the actors, releasing or liberating various kinds of performative energies from or through them while working with them or thinking about the work retrospectively. Examining the ways in which the notion of 'energy' has been employed in the writings of three contemporary directors (Richard Schechner, Eugenio Barba and Peter Brook) provides just a sample from the wealth of writings in this specific area, and enables the distinction between several interesting kinds of emphasis.

According to Schechner, who is the most academic of these directors, 'the sense of being taken over by a role, of being possessed by it in its "flow" or in the flow of the audience's appetite for illusion, *ludus*, *lila*: play,'[20] is of central importance. The transformation that takes place during the performance itself, he claims, is a kind of 'absorption into the center'. This, he adds is the point where 'the chief parallel between performance and ritual process' can be discerned.[21] Schechner presents what could be termed a more 'passive' view of the energies generated in and by a performance, arguing that the 'surrender to the flow of action is the ritual process' through which what he terms the 'restored behaviour' of acting originates.[22] Some of Schechner's formulations even point in a direction where it would be possible to draw the conclusion that acting is like a kind of sleepwalking activity.

Eugenio Barba, on the other hand, for whom 'energy' is a very central notion in his thinking about theatre, presents a much more activist understanding of the actor's energies. Stemming from what Barba terms the 'dilated body', the energies are like a kind of theatrical 'trickery', because '[t]here are certain performers who attract the spectator with an elementary energy which "seduces" without mediation. This occurs before the spectator has either deciphered individual actions or understood their meanings.'[23] The performer's presence holds a special force and attraction:

> The dilated body is above all a glowing body, in the scientific sense of the term: the particles which make up daily behaviour have been excited and produce more energy, they have undergone an increment of motion, they move further apart, attract and oppose each other with more force, in a restricted or expanded space.[24]

The metaphors Barba has employed are taken from a more scientific field than those of Schechner.

From a more practical perspective, the energy of the actor is most effectively produced by what Barba calls 'the negation principle'. This principle can be applied to the concrete work of the actors, both in training as well as during their work on the stage:

> There is a rule which performers know well: begin an action in the direction opposite to that to which the action will finally be directed. This rule recreates a condition essential to all those actions which in daily life demand a certain amount of energy: before striking a blow, one draws one's arm back; before jumping, one bends one's knees; before springing forward, one leans backwards: *reculer pour mieux sauter*.[25]

This principle can, as Barba himself has no doubt also seen, somewhat simplistically be transformed into a kind of magic 'trick' in which the actor uses 'the negation principle' to seduce the spectators rather than inviting them to participate emotionally or intellectually in the theatrical creation. At the same time, however, it is important to note that Barba conceives of theatrical energy as a visible tension between two directions of bodily movement, not primarily as a flow, as Schechner does.

Peter Brook has presented a more dialectical view of theatrical energies. He claimed that '[w]e know that the world of appearance is a crust [ . . . and] under the crust is the boiling matter we see if we peer into a volcano'. This leads him to the question: 'How can we tap this energy?'[26] In another interview Brook developed his quasi-scientific metaphors, first comparing the theatrical event with an 'explosion',[27] in which sometimes the exact same combination of elements will cause an explosion, while at other times nothing at all will happen. Brook then reflected on how the carbon-arc lamp, when the two electric poles meet, generates light. The crucial difference for the intensity of the light produced depends on the resistance to the flow of energies. For this reason Brook also sees the meeting between audience and actors as crucial:

> At the outset, these two elements are separated. The audience represents multiple sources of energy, as many as there are spectators, but these sources are not concentrated. In itself, the audience is just like the **carbon-arc lamp**: it has no intensity, each individual's energy is diffuse and dispersed. There is nothing inside any of these individuals which could make them sources of intensity in themselves. An event will only occur if each one of these individual instruments become attuned. Then all you need for something to happen is for a single vibration to pass through the auditorium – but it cannot be produced if the thousand harps that represent the audience are not tuned in the same way, to the same tension.
>
> The same thing occurs with the actors. The first step in a performance is a process of gathering and focusing the dispersed energies of the audience, which in turn reflect the dispersed energies of the actors.[28]

The goal in any theatrical event is to tune the different energy sources, those of the actors as well as those of the spectators, and to make them flow within the new collective that has been created. The aim is of course to make these energies visible and understandable for the spectators, to make them communicative on the aesthetic as well as on the emotional and the intellectual levels. According to Brook the actor constantly struggles between opposing principles:

> Acting is in many ways unique in its difficulties because the artist has to use the treacherous, changeable and mysterious material of himself as his medium. He is called upon to be completely involved while distanced – detached without detachment. He must be sincere, he must be insincere: he must practice how to be insincere with sincerity and how to lie truthfully.[29]

This paradoxical situation creates the basis for quite a different understanding of the energies on which the actor bases his/her art compared to Schechner and Barba. Instead of the unidirectional flow proposed by Schechner or the bidirectional conjuring movement of Barba, Brook sees the art of acting as an expression of forces or energies working simultaneously in different directions and on different levels. The interaction between revolutionary and theatrical energies, the energies that have changed the world and almost brought about its destruction and those that are hoped to become significant on the stage, creates a performance in which political and social changes can sometimes be both creatively imagined and perceived.

## Metaphysical energies

The question of in what sense theatre and performance reveal metaphysical energies is much more complex than the discursive practices examined so far. My aim here is not to define what such energies are. I am not sure this can be done. But since theatre as an art-form has always been considered in the context of different religious and ritual practices, and since these practices are supposedly also a source of energy and power, what I wish to examine very briefly here is in what sense do such practices intensify an individual theatrical performance? As I have argued above, theatre has the ability to make sudden leaps between different ontological spheres that as a rule are separated from each other, and to combine them in new and unexpected ways. The stage is actually the 'site' where such ontological systems are brought together, even within the fictional world itself. The ontological sphere, which frequently appears in theatrical performances and which is obviously connected to different religious belief-systems, is represented by the appearance of supernatural creatures. Even people who are deeply committed to a secular world-view – and today this seems to be the norm rather than an exception, at least among theatre-goers – are willing to accept that super-natural creatures can appear on the stage in performances.

Throughout the history of the theatre various stage-machineries and other theatrical conventions have been employed to enable the appearance of supernatural beings. The most obvious examples are the pagan gods in the Classical Greek theatre, God and the Devil on the medieval stages, and the appearance of ghosts of dead people in Elizabethan theatre. Even the non-appearance of Godot in Beckett's now classical *Waiting for Godot*, around which the entire 'action' of this play revolves, alludes directly to such a metaphysical dimension, which like so many other things in the world of Didi and Gogo no longer exists. Regardless of whether the appearance of such supernatural creatures is aimed at affirming the belief in them or is presented in an ironic light, as a critique of their 'existence', they are usually endowed with a kind of energy and authority that radically changes the given situation on stage. The appearance of the ghost of Hamlet's dead father, regardless of the beliefs of the spectators, is the supernatural force from whose appearance the whole play evolves.

The theatrical machineries and conventions through which such supernatural entities appear on stage in contemporary theatre are still saturated with traces from earlier historical periods, when there was a much greater acceptance of the belief-systems on which their 'existence' was based. While our enjoyment today of the *Oresteia* is probably not impaired by the fact that we do not believe in the Greek gods, our understanding of Aeschylus' trilogy is undoubtedly more limited than it was in the society for which it was composed. Even if we only have a very limited access to the belief-systems on which this play is based we are, however, still able to appreciate the use of theatrical conventions like the *deus ex machina*. The appearance of a god on stage, usually from above, in the central back-stage area, traditionally expresses the belief that the gods possess the power and ability to change the lives of humans in a positive manner. But even if the gods supposedly no longer possess this kind of power, the machineries through which they appeared on the stage are still frequently used on our own contemporary stages as a kind of 'memory-trace' of the power they apparently possessed in the past. This potential to change the human situation can even be seen as a kind of energy, which the theatrical traditions themselves have preserved, although the device itself can no longer claim its traditional potency. As I have shown in detail in another context, transformations or ironical elaborations of the *deus ex machina* have also frequently been employed in modern theatre, in plays such as August Strindberg's *The Dream Play* or in Bertolt Brecht's *Three Penny Opera* and *The Good Person of Sezuan*; while *Waiting for Godot* clearly shows that this traditional machinery does not work anymore.[30] In the modern theatre this convention is an expression of a metaphysical rupture and a void that can apparently not be filled.

We are now, I believe, at a stage when the actor can also gradually be redefined in metaphysical terms, as an individual human being imbued with otherworldly energies and forms of knowledge. This view of course has strong roots in different Oriental practices of the art of acting, which have become integrated in Western theatre through director-theoreticians such as Stanislavski, Brecht and Artaud. One of the most poignant contemporary expressions of such metaphysical understanding of the actor in a Western context can be found in Wim Wenders' film *Der Himmel über Berlin* (*Wings of Desire*, 1987) depicting the then still divided city, in which the actor is viewed as a fallen angel. Its sequel *So Weit und so Nahe* (*So Far and So Close*, 1993), which takes place in Berlin after the wall was dismantled and the two Germanies were unified, more or less preserves this initial metaphysical conception. The first film depicts the fall of the angel Damiel, because of his love for the trapeze artist, Marion. As a fallen angel, who is also an exceptional human being, he meets the actor Peter Falk, who confesses that he too is a former angel. This is undoubtedly also a form of *deus ex machina*. The second film shows how the fallen angels (the artists) and the angels who remain angels perform good deeds together. They are, however, not able to change the evils of the world in any radical way.

Traditionally the angel has been seen both as a servant of the divine powers as well as a figure of revolt against them. Through its fall, the angel accumulates a kind of spiritual power and knowledge, which for Wenders is directly connected with the art of acting and the ability to tell the story of the past. In the wake of Second World War the angel has become a witness of the tragic failures of history. Walter Benjamin's seminal formulations on history in his essay 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte' (Theses on the Philosophy of History) written in 1941, during the Second World War, presents such a position. According to Benjamin:

> to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers.[31]

The theatre, when it is good, could be seen as the arena or locus where such sparks of memory can both be created and perceived in the form of theatrical images. The memories from the past through which history can be performed appear during such moments of danger, when we have a sense that something from such a fearful past is repeating itself, that it is appearing again, just like the ghost of Hamlet's father. When this happens, Benjamin argues, it affects not only that past, as it is reformulated in the present, but can also have a deep effect on the spectators in the theatre.

In one of the more famous passages from his fragmentary essay on history, Benjamin has also presented a concrete image of such a memory – Paul Klee's painting 'Angelus Novus':

> A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But 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.[32]

This is the angel of history who is at the same time both historian and actor, caught by the destructive energies that it perceives as one single catastrophe. In its attempts to tap these creative energies, to awaken the dead, to resurrect them, (which is one of the things that the theatre can do), the angel is hurled into the gradually evolving future by the storm 'we call progress'. This is indeed a very complex image, which can be given a constantly growing number of interpretations. In Klee's painting, however, the angel is facing the viewer and we do not see its back. This means, if we interpret the painting in theatrical terms, that the viewer's back is turned on the past and s/he is looking into the future. This points at an implicit Utopian dimension, another way of reading and performing the failures of the past through the completion of history.

Benjamin also confirms such a Utopian possibility in his essay on the philosophy of history, claiming that

> in every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of Antichrist. Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that **even the dead** will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.[33]

The theatre constantly strives to reaffirm such impulses for liberation expressed by the actor who through his or her creative energies is able to stand up for the dead. This is at least one of the reasons why the theatre can have such an exciting and deep effect on us and can even, in some cases, become restorative.

## The energies of the spectator

The final issue I want to examine briefly here is that of how the energies that the spectator might experience during and as a result of a theatrical performance – what we usually call *catharsis*, usually referred to in English as purgation of the emotions of pity and fear – can be formulated. The wide range of discussions on catharsis that have been carried out since Aristotle undoubtedly points at the inherent difficulties of formulating the more general principles concerning the subjective reactions of spectators watching a specific performance. There seem to be no objective criteria for communicating and examining the feelings a performance elicits among its spectators. The emotions it triggers must rather lead to a mixture of conjectures and speculations.

One of the possible strategies to cope with this problematic issue is based on an attempt to distinguish performance devices, which are likely to create a strong emotional impact among the spectators. One such device is the participation of a spectator-witness in the performance itself. As I have previously pointed out,[34] because such an on-stage witness is a transgressive character, trying to gain information about the other characters in illicit ways, the witness frequently becomes a victim of some form of violence. Polonius, who is killed by Hamlet while eavesdropping behind the arras in Gertrude's closet, actually becomes the victim of his own transgression, while trying to find out the cause of Hamlet's madness. The 'transgression' of the actual spectators of the performance, however, who are in a sense also eavesdropping on the characters on the stage, remains unpunished. One of the reasons for this is that instead of 'punishing' the spectators for eavesdropping, performances as a rule contain situations in which the on-stage eavesdropper-witness becomes victimized as a sacrificial scapegoat. The eavesdropper is sacrificed instead of the spectator.

The cathartic process consists of the more or less unconscious negotiation a spectator makes with him/herself, from having identified with the eavesdropper at the moment he (and eavesdroppers are as a rule men) becomes exposed to some kind of threat. When the transgression of the eavesdropper on stage is punished, the spectators, who according to this scheme have felt both pity and fear, become ritually cleansed of these feelings. This cleansing carries a potential for creating emotional energies for the spectator, for not having been punished for his/her transgressive scopophilic activity. This process of identification with the eavesdropper, which is interrupted when the eavesdropper becomes victimised, also constitutes the basis for the theatrical ritual. The emotional process this implies can also bring all the other ontological fields of energy together, unifying them in what we could call the 'total experience' of a theatrical performance.

## Notes

1 This article is based on my lecture at the symposium on 'Revolution and Institutionalization in the Theatre', at the Department for Theatre Studies, Tel Aviv University, June 1999. It is a somewhat different and more expanded version of a chapter in my forthcoming book *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*, which will be published by the University of Iowa Press in November 2000.

2 See Richard Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991; 64–65.

3 Plato, 'Ion'. In *The Dialogues of Plato*, Vol. 1. Trans. B. Jowett. New York: Random House, 1937; 288–289.

4 Pierre Klossowski, *Sade my Neighbour*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. London: Quartet Books, 1992; 21 [emphasis mine, F.R.].

5 Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988; 2.

6 Greenblatt, ibid.; 2.

7 Greenblatt, ibid.; 6 (emphasis mine, F.R.).

8 Greenblatt, ibid.; 7.

9 Greenblatt, ibid.; 7.

10 Michael Goldman, *The Actor's Freedom: Toward a Theory of Drama*. New York: The Viking Press, 1975; 5.

11 Goldman, ibid.: 7.
12 Goldman, ibid.: 23–24.
13 Herbert Blau, *The Eye of Prey: Subversions of the Postmodern*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987; 165.
14 Herbert Blau, *To All Appearences: Ideology and Performance*, New York and London: Routledge, 1992; 56.
15 Patrice Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*. Trans. Loren Kruger. London and New York: Routledge, 1992; 39.
16 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Semiotics of Theater*. Trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992; 182.
17 Quoted by Fischer-Lichte, ibid.; 183.
18 Fischer-Lichte, ibid.; 183.
19 Fischer-Lichte, ibid.; 185.
20 Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985; 124.
21 Schechner, ibid.; 119.
22 Schechner, ibid.; 124.
23 Eugenio Barba, *The Secret Art of the Performer: A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*. London: Routledge, 1991; 54.
24 Barba, ibid.; 54.
25 Barba, ibid.; 57.
26 Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*. New York: Atheneum, 1982; 57.
27 Peter Brook, 'Any Event Stems from Combustion: Actors, Audiences and Theatrical Energy' (Interview with Jean Kalman). *New Theatre Quarterly*, VIII, May 1992; 107.
28 Brook, 1992, ibid.; 108.
29 Brook, 1982, ibid.; 117.
30 Freddie Rokem, 'A Walking Angel: On the Performative Functions of the Human Body', *Assaph: Studies in the Theatre*, 8, 1992; 113–126.
31 In Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969; 255.
32 Benjamin, ibid.; 257–8.
33 Benjamin, ibid.; 255.
34 Freddie Rokem, 'To hold as 'twere a mirror up to the spectator: "*Katharsis*" – A Performance Perspective'. *Assaph: Studies in Theatre*, 12, 1996; 101–109.

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# PERFORMANCE ART AND RITUAL

## Bodies in performance

### *Erika Fischer-Lichte*

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## 1. Discovering performativity

During the summer school at Black Mountain College in 1952, an 'untitled event' took place, initiated by John Cage. The participants included, besides Cage, the pianist David Tudor, the composer Jay Watts, the painter Robert Rauschenberg, the dancer Merce Cunningham and the poets Mary Caroline Richards and Charles Olsen. Preparations for the 'event' were minimal. Each performer was given a 'score' which consisted purely of 'time brackets' to indicate moments of action, inaction and silence that each performer was expected to fill. Thus, it was guaranteed that there would be no causal relationship between the different actions and 'anything that happened after that, happened in the observer himself'.[1] The audience was gathered from other participants at the summer school, members of the college staff and their families, and people from the surrounding countryside.

The seats for the spectators were set out in the dining hall of the college in front of each wall in the form of four triangles, whose tips pointed to the centre of the room without touching each other. Thus, a large free space was created in the centre of the room in which, as it happened, very little action took place. Spacious aisles between the triangles crossed the room diagonally. A white cup was placed on each seat. The spectators did not receive any explanation; some used the cups as ashtrays. From the ceiling were hung paintings by Robert Rauschenberg—his 'white paintings'.

Cage, in a black suit and tie, stood on a stepladder and read a text on 'the relation of music to Zen Buddhism' and excerpts from Master Eckhart. Later he performed a 'composition with a radio'. At the same time, Rauschenberg played old records on a wind-up gramophone with a trumpet while a listening dog sat beside it, and David Tudor played a 'prepared piano'. A little later, Tudor started to pour water from one bucket into another, while Olsen and Richards read from their poetry, either amongst the spectators, or standing on a ladder leaning against one of the walls. Cunningham and others danced through the aisles chased by the dog who, in the meantime, had turned mad.[2] Rauschenberg projected abstract slides (created by coloured gelatine sandwiched between the glass) and clips of film onto the paintings on the ceiling; the film clips showed first the school cook, and then, as they gradually moved from the ceiling down the walls, the setting sun. Jay Watt sat in a corner and played different instruments. At the end of the performance four boys, dressed in white, served coffee into the cups, regardless of whether the spectators had used them as ashtrays or not.

There can be no doubt that the 'untitled event' is to be regarded as a remarkable event in the theatre history of Western culture, as much of the relationship created between performers and spectators, as of the kind of interaction between the different arts.

At first glance, it may appear as though the spatial arrangement favoured a focusing of the centre. During the performance, however, it became clear that such central focus did not exist. The spectators were able to direct their attention to different actions taking place simultaneously, whether in different parts of the room, or joining and overlapping. Moreover, they were in such a position that wherever they looked, they always saw other spectators involved in the act of perceiving. In other words, the actions were not to be perceived in isolation from each other, nor were they unrelated to the other perceiving spectators, despite the fact that they were not causally related to each other, and the perspective on other spectators was not determined or controlled.

On the other hand, by placing a cup on each seat, one element was introduced that challenged the spectators to act without, however, prescribing how. They could pick it up, handle it, put it on the floor, throw it to another spectator, hide it in their bags, use it as an ashtray. Whatever the case, the cup challenged the spectators to act at the beginning of the performance as well as at the end (after the boys had poured the coffee) without forcing them to do anything in particular.

In the performance, different arts were involved: music, painting, film, dance, poetry. They were not united into a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*—rather, it seems that their unrelated coexistence closely approximated Wagner's nightmare, 'of, for example, a reading of a Goethe novel and the performance of a Beethoven symphony taking place in an art gallery amongst various statues',[3] nor was their use motivated, caused or justified by a common goal or function; they were only co-ordinated by the 'time brackets'. None the less, correspondence did occur in the particular style of their appearance. They all privileged the performative mode: the music was played, the poetry recited, the film shown, painting was performed in so far as Rauschenberg changed his white paintings by projecting slides onto them, 'painting them over', and dance is always realized as an action—or movement. The 'union of the arts', the transgression of the borders or the dissolution of the borderlines separating one art from another, was accomplished here because all were realized in a performative mode. Thus the performative function was foregrounded, either by radically reducing the referential function (for instance, in the unrelatedness of the actions, which could not be connected into a story or a meaningful 'symbolic' configuration; or by the refusal to give the 'untitled' event a title), or by emphatically stressing the performative function (for instance, by the arrangement of actions or by the emphasis put on the fact that it was an 'untitled *event*'.)

Thus, one can conclude that the historical relevance of the 'untitled event' is founded on its discovery of the performative. That is not to say that European culture has not been performative before the 1950s. Quite the contrary: going back through the centuries we find that from the Middle Ages to the end of the eighteenth century, European culture can most adequately be described as a predominantly performative culture. Even in the eighteenth century, when alphabetization and literacy grew among the middle class, reading was seldom performed as a silent act in isolation from others, but rather as reading aloud to others in different kinds of circles. Therefore it is not an exaggeration to state that European culture, at least until the end of the eighteenth century (and in many areas throughout the nineteenth century, too) consisted largely of different genres of cultural performance.

The term 'cultural performance' was coined by the American anthropologist Milton Singer. In the 1950s Singer used the term to describe 'particular instances of cultural organization, for instance, weddings, temple festivals, recitatives, plays, dances, musical concerts, and so on'.[4] According to Singer, a culture articulates its self-understanding and self-image in cultural performances which it presents and exposes to its members as well as to outsiders. 'For the outsider, these can conveniently be taken as the most concrete observable units of the cultural structure, for each performance has a definitely limited time span, a beginning and end, an organized programme of activity, a set of performers, an audience and a place and occasion of performance.'[5]

Whereas until the 1950s, a consensus existed among Western scholars that culture is produced and manifested in its artefacts (texts and monuments), which, accordingly have been taken as the proper objects of study in the humanities, Singer drew attention to the fact that culture is also produced and manifested in performances. He established the performative as a constitutive function of culture and provided another convincing argument for the importance of the performative mode in culture.

Culture as a predominantly material culture, consisting of and formed by documents and monuments, had become a prevailing concept in the nineteenth century, although, even then, the notion was vigorously attacked—as, for instance, by Friedrich Nietzsche. None the less, it was this notion which greatly influenced, if not determined, the development not only of the humanities, but also of other cultural domains. In theatre, for example, the performative art *par excellence*, the Meininger foregrounded the literary text of the drama, on the one hand—which after many years of adaptation was then no longer open to revision—and the preservable elements of the performance such as the set and the costumes, on the other. Culture, according to nineteenth-century common belief, was manifested by and resulted in artefacts which could be preserved and handed down to the next generation.

It was against this that avant-gardist movements such as the futurists, dadaists and surrealists directed their fierce attacks, proclaiming the destruction of the museums and hailing velocity and ephemerality as the true culture creating forces of the future. In this respect, the Futurist *serate* and the Dadaist *soirées* can be seen as 'forerunners' to Cage's 'untitled event'. But while the futurists and dadaists focused on the destructive forces of their performances in order to shock the audiences—'épater le bourgeois'—*and* to destroy bourgeois culture, Cage's event emphasized the new possibilities opening up not only for the artists but also for the audiences. The performative mode here was applied as a means of 'liberating' the spectators in their act of perceiving and creating meaning.

In the 1950s, performativity was not only reclaimed by the arts. In anthropology the notion of cultural performance was recognized, in literary theory Roland Barthes focused on the creativity of *l'écriture* instead of the static text (as in *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, published in 1953) and in philosophy John L. Austin defined what he chose to call 'the speech act'. Austin developed a philosophy of language, which he presented at the William James Lectures at Harvard University in 1955 under the title: 'How To Do Things With Words'. He put forward the pioneering, if not revolutionary idea that linguistic utterances do not only serve to describe a procedure or to state a fact but contended that the mere uttering of them simultaneously performs an act as, for example, the act of describing, stating, promising, congratulating, cursing, and so on. What speakers of language have always known intuitively and practised accordingly was, for the first time, articulated in a philosophy of language: language not only serves a referential function, but also a performative one.

That which Austin's theory of speech act accomplished with regard to the knowledge of language, Cage's 'untitled event' realized for theatre. Suddenly, that which theatre artists and spectators had known intuitively and practised for ages became evident: theatre not only fulfils a referential function, but a performative one, too. Whereas, at the beginning of the 1950s, the Western dramatic theatre emphasized the psychological motivation for actions, plot construction, scenic arrangements, but ignored the performative function of theatre, the 'untitled event' foregrounded the performative function, recalling its permanent existence in theatre and bringing it back into view.

To achieve this, performance art set itself in opposition not only to the contemporary art market, that insisted on the production of objects, or artefacts as commodities, but also to contemporary theatre. Whereas the contemporary stage usually signified another space—Willy Loman's living room, for instance, or the road where Didi and Gogo are waiting for Godot—the dining hall in Black Mountain College did not signify any other space. One might speculate on whether the specific arrangements of the four triangles formed by the spectators' seats pointed to a figure of the Yijing and could be interpreted accordingly. But this is quite another matter. First, there was no particular segment in the room delineated for the performers to which a particular meaning could be attributed; second, any meaning derived from the Yijing would have to be related to the whole room and, third, reference to the Yijing does not provide any clue to the meaning of the actions. The space was a real space, and it did not signify another (fictional) space. Rather, it seems that it provoked a kind of oscillating reception. The spectator who tried to make sense of the event and its single elements/actions, became aware that her/his usually applied patterns of constituting meaning did not fit. The usual patterns were not discarded as useless, however, but rather held in abeyance, called up, present, and yet somehow inapplicable. Trying to apply them did not provide answers, but led to further questioning. The dining hall was the dining hall—to which the cup as well as the film clip showing the school's cook alluded—and, at the same time, it was refunctionalized: during the time the untitled event took place, it was another space, neither the dining hall nor a particular fictional space. None the less, the spectator was not prevented from perceiving it as a particular fictional space, if that occurred to her/him, nor from asking the question: 'What does this space signify or mean?' In this case, the spectator might have concluded, at the end of the performance, that it did not mean anything (in the sense of a referent attributed by the event). Space and its perception underwent a metamorphosis, a transformation, as did the search for possible meanings of its single elements like the empty centre, the aisles, and the step ladders.

Similar conclusions can be drawn concerning the sense of time in the performance and the performers. The time of the performance was the real time of its being performed. It did not signify another time of the day, another year or epoch, nor a time in which a fictitious character performs a particular action. It was the time that passed during the performance, structured by the action, inaction and silences as indicated by the 'time brackets' of the score, and not necessarily another, fictional time.

Whereas in the theatre of the 1950s, the actors used their bodies to signify fictional characters, to perform actions that are supposed to signify actions by these characters, and uttered words which signified the characters' speeches, the performers of the 'untitled event' employed their bodies in order to perform particular actions: to play a gramophone, different instruments or a 'prepared piano', to dance through the aisles, climb a ladder, or operate the projector, and so on. When the performers spoke, they either recited their own texts or they made it clear that they were reading from texts by other authors. In this way, questions concerning fictional characters, their histories, actions, or psychological motivations could not arise: real people performed real actions in a real space in a real time. What was at stake was the performance of actions—not the relation of actions to a fictional character in a fictional story in a fictional world, or to one another, so that a 'meaningful whole' might come into existence.

Even the role of the spectator was redefined. Since the referential function lost its priority, the spectators did not need to search for given meanings or struggle to decipher possible messages formulated in the performance. Instead, they were in a position to view the actions performed before their eyes and ears as raw material, and let their eyes wander between the simultaneously performed actions; they were allowed not to search for any meaning, or to accord whatever meaning occurred to them to single actions. Thus, looking on was redefined as an activity, a doing, according to their particular patterns of perception, their associations and memories as well as on the discourses in which they participated.

At the beginning of the 1950s, the artefact in Western culture was held to be the absolute constitutive factor of any art. Dramatic theatre proceeded from a literary text, music composed or interpreted scores, poetry created texts and the fine arts produced works. Various hermeneutic processes of interpretation proceeded from such artefacts, and returned to them in order to substantiate or justify different interpretations. The artefact dominated the performance process to such an extent that its production (writing, composing, painting, sculpting), or its transformation into a performance (in theatre and concert) as well as of the performance itself and its reception, had almost entirely slipped out of sight.

The 'untitled event' dissolved the artefact into performance. Texts were recited, music was played, paintings were 'painted over'—the artefacts became the actions. Thus, the borders between the different arts shifted. Poetry, music, and the fine arts ceased to function merely as poetry, music, or fine arts—they were simultaneously realized as performance art. They all changed into theatre. Not only did the 'untitled event' redefine theatre by focusing on its performative function; it also redefined the other arts. These were realized and described as *performance*. But, as mentioned before, the different arts did not 'unite' in a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but into theatre, the performative art *par excellence*.

Thus, the 'untitled event' not only blurred the borderlines between theatre and the other arts, but also those between theatre and other kinds of 'cultural performance'. A theatre performance is to be regarded as a particular genre of cultural performance which, by realizing the features identified by Singer, partly differs from other genres of cultural performance as, for instance, ritual, political ceremony, festival, games, competition, lectures, concerts, poetry readings, film shows, and so on, and partly overlaps with them.

The 'untitled event' was realized as a theatre performance in the course of which lectures, poetry readings, a film show, a slide-show, concerts, *tableaux* actions, or psychological motivations could not arise: real people performed real actions in a real space in a real time. What was at stake was the performance of actions—not the relation of actions to a fictional character in a fictional story in a fictional world, or to one another, so that a 'meaningful whole' might come into existence.

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The 'untitled event' was realized as a theatre performance in the course of which lectures, poetry readings, a film show, a slide-show, concerts, *tableaux* *vivants* (dog and gramophone, 'His Master's Voice'), dance and a kind of ritual or feast (in the sharing of the coffee) took place. However, these cultural performances were not *re-presented* as in dramatic theatre, opera, or classical ballet; rather, the performance *was* the realization, or the realization *was* the performance. Since, in this instance, theatre occurred as a non-causal, non-linear sequence of discrete actions, represented before an audience, its difference from other genres of cultural performance became insignificant. Performativity turned out to be the most important characteristic of theatre, art, culture. Theatre, art and culture, thus, were redefined as performance.

From today's viewpoint, the 'untitled event' of 1952 appears to have been a revolutionary event in Western culture. The trend towards performativity which has gradually grown since the 1960s in theatre, the other arts and in culture in general, was unmistakably articulated and uncompromisingly realized in the 'untitled event'. One could state that Cage's 'untitled event' and Austin's speech act theory heralded the era of a new performative culture and were its first momentous manifestations.

For such a performative culture, theatre understood as performative art *par excellence*—as realized in performance art—could serve as a model.

If theatre is understood as the paradigm of performative art and, in this sense as the model of performative culture, what, since the 1960s, has it contributed to the development of such a new performative culture? This issue will be addressed by drawing on some examples from so-called performance art.

Many performances consist of the performance of everyday practices. For instance, in the piece *Cycle for Water Buckets*, first performed in 1962, the FLUXUS artist Tomas Schmit, knelt in a circle formed by ten to thirty buckets or bottles, one of which was filled with water. Clockwise, he poured its contents from bucket to bucket—until all the water was spilled or evaporated. By taking the action out of all possible context, the search for its intention, purpose, consequence or meaning was doomed to be as unsuccessful or, at least to remain as undecided as in the case of the elements in the 'untitled event'. The focus lay on the very process by which the action was performed. The spectators witnessed how Schmit poured water from bucket to bucket, and since the context in which such an activity could be performed in everyday life was lacking, one could not attribute a meaning to it—as, for example, preparing to clean the floor, extinguishing a fire, filling a trough, cleaning a bucket/bottle, demonstrating a safe hand, and so on: Schmit's action could mean all this, something else or just what it was: pouring water from one bucket/bottle into the next.

Other performances allude to or draw on different genres of cultural performance: rituals, festivals, services of all kinds, carnival, circus performances, shows at a fairground, story-telling, ballad singing, concerts, sports, games, and so on. In such cultural performances, culture always was (and is) defined and realized as performative. That is not to say that artefacts are not used or do not play a prominent role. Quite the contrary, in many cultural performances some kind of artefacts are needed, some are even essential for the realization of the performance. However, they only function or are able to display their special power as elements of a performative process, and not as artefacts. Therefore the use of artefacts in a cultural performance by no means entails a reduction of its performativity.

Since cultural performances emphasize the performative character of culture, it seems wise to proceed from performances that refer in one way or another to a genre of cultural performance when embarking on an investigation of theatre's contribution to the development of a new performative culture. In view of the great variety of possible genres of cultural performances referred to by performance artists, however, I shall restrict my explorations to performances which, in one way or another, have taken recourse to a particularly basic genre, namely the performance of rituals.

## 2. Performing ritual or the ritualization of performance?

### *Second action of Nitsch's 'orgy mystery theatre'*

> The walls of the main room are covered in white hessian splashed with paint, blood and bloody water. on a meat hook, at the end of a rope hanging from the ceiling, hangs a slaughtered, bloody, skinned lamb (head down). a white cloth is spread out on the gallery floor, beneath the lamb, and on it lie the blood-soaked intestines. the lamb is swung across the room. the walls, the floor and the spectators are splashed with blood. blood is poured out of buckets over the lamb's innards and the floor of the gallery. the actor tosses raw eggs against the walls and onto the floor and chews a tea-rose. the bloody lambskin hangs on the blood spattered hessian wall. more blood is splashed over it.[6]

The action lasted thirty minutes and was accompanied by music by the Greek composer Logothetis: loud noises were created by the composer as he drove his hand, in rubbing and pressing movements, over the taut skin of a drum.

The action was performed by Hermann Nitsch on 16 March 1963 in the Dvorak gallery in Vienna. It was his second 'action'. Nitsch had trained as a graphic designer and developed the later so-called 'action art' by way of 'action painting', in which he poured red colour on a canvas in the presence of onlookers. After initial attempts at concrete poetry and drama, Nitsch's second action already contains almost all the elements constitutive of his 'Orgy Mystery Theatre', which are constantly repeated regardless of whether the performance lasts thirty minutes, fifteen hours (as his seventh action, which took place on 16 January 1965 in his apartment and studio) or six days (as the play planned for the Prinzendorf Schloß).

All the elements used by Nitsch in a performance are characterized by two main features. They are all highly symbolic and they provoke a strong sensual impression. Nitsch himself has listed a number of symbolic associations that can be presupposed for any of the elements. Concerning the entrails he specifies: 'slaughter house, sacred killing, slaughter, animal sacrifice, human sacrifice, primitive sacrifice, hunt, war, surgical operation'. Amongst possible sensual impressions he mentions: 'blood-warm, blood-soaked, malleable, resilient, stuffed to bursting, to puncture, to crush, a stream of excrement, the intensive odour of raw meat and excrement'. To the element 'blood' Nitsch assigns symbolic associations: 'red wine, Eucharist, the blood of Christ, sacrifice, human sacrifice, animal sacrifice, slaughter, primitive sacrifice, sacred killing, life juices', and sensual impressions: 'body-warm, warm from the slaughter, blood-soaked, wet, bright, blood-red liquid, to be splattered, poured, paddled in, salty taste, wounding, killing, a white dress smeared with blood, menstrual blood, the stench of blood'. With regard to 'flesh' Nitsch names the following symbolic associations: 'bread, Eucharist, the transformation of bread into the body of Christ (flesh), sacrifice, animal sacrifice, human sacrifice, sacred killing, slaughter, wounding, killing, war, hunt'. The corresponding sensual impressions he cites are: 'body-warm, warm from the slaughter, blood-soaked, wet, raw, bright blood red, malleable, resilient, the taste of raw meat, wounding, killing, the stench of raw meat'.[7] The 'tea-rose', according to Nitsch, provokes the symbolic associations 'erotic flower (lust), rosary (Madonna), queen of the flowers' and releases the sensual impressions 'scent of tea-roses, the taste of tea-rose petals, the voluptuous opulence of tea-roses, the tea-rose stamen, the pollen of the tea-rose'.[8]

It is striking that most of the symbolic associations Nitsch assigns to the constitutive elements of his actions point either to archaic/mythic or to Christian/Catholic rituals. They are intended to operate as links between the action/performance taking place here and now (in the early 1960s) and certain kinds of ritual which still operated in the context of Western culture (in Vienna in the early 1960s) such as the rituals of the Catholic church or those which we imagine as having taken place—or which still do take place—in ancient Greece and other cultures. This does not necessarily imply that the spectators shared the symbolic associations proposed by Nitsch. But, at the very least, we can assume that as members of the Viennese culture of the 1960s, they disposed of a universe of discourse which was open to the possibility of such associations.[9]

In any case, not only the symbolic associations but also the sensual impressions were accessible to performers and spectators alike. In Nitsch's actions/performances, the spectators were involved, even acted as performers. They were splashed with blood, excrement, dish-water and other liquids and were given the opportunity to do the splashing themselves, to gut the lamb, to consume the meat and the wine.

The sensual impressions and the symbolic associations triggered by the different elements of the performance, however, were ordered and structured through reference to one dominant element: the lamb. In Western Christian culture, the lamb symbolizes Christ and his sacrifice. Therefore, the lamb, as the focal centre of almost all of Nitsch's performances, opens up a dimension which strengthens the allusion to Christian rituals to which the possible symbolic actions may refer. Nitsch labels it the 'mythical leitmotif of the orgy mystery theatre (mythical expression of the collective need to abreact) the transformation'.

> communion: TAKE, EAT, THIS IS MY BODY, BROKEN FOR YOU FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS . . .
>
> DRINK YE ALL OF THIS, FOR THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE NEW COVENANT; SHED FOR YOU AND FOR MANY . . .
>
> the crucifixion of jesus christ
>
> the tearing apart of dionysus
>
> the blinding of oedipus
>
> ritual castration
>
> the killing of orpheus
>
> the killing of adonis
>
> the castration of attis
>
> ritual regicide
>
> killing and consuming the totemic beast
>
> the primitive excesses of sado-masochism
>
> consuming food: meat and wine in sumptuous measure[10]

The rituals to which Nitsch refers are scapegoat-rituals, exorcisms, cleansing and/or transforming rituals. Like all rituals they do not only signify a particular action, they also perform it: the referential function indicated by the symbols used in the process of ritual is closely linked to, even dominated by, the performative function. The ritual is able to achieve the desired effect to which the symbols (objects and/or actions) allude—as cleansing the community, healing an individual, transforming a group of individuals, and so on—only because it is performed in a particular way.

By equating his performances with ancient Greek and Catholic rituals the artist claims that by performing his actions he performs a particular kind of ritual.

Such a claim seems problematic in many respects, for it ignores basic differences between rituals that operate within a community and the actions performed by the artist. When, for instance the Holy Communion to which Nitsch refers, is performed as a ritual, this procedure is certified as a ritual, because an authorized person executes the actions in a particular context and under particular conditions and because the congregation is convinced that he is entitled to perform the actions. In this respect the ritual is comparable to a speech act. It can only succeed when it is performed in a particular space, at a particular time, in a particular way by a person who is entitled to perform it. If someone other than the priest sprinkles water on somebody's forehead and utters the words: 'Ego te baptisto in nomine Patris et Fili et Spiritus Sancti', he has by no means performed a christening—at best, a joke. Benveniste makes the point succinctly:

> De toute manière, un énoncé performatif n'a de réalité que s'il est authentifié comme *acte*. Hors des circonstances qui le rendent performatif, un tel énoncé n'est plus rien. N'importe qui peut crier sur la place publique: 'Je décrète la mobilisation générale.' Ne pouvant être *acte* faute de l'autorité requise, un tel propos n'est plus que *parole*; il se réduit à une clameur inane, enfantillage ou démence. Un énoncé performatif qui n'est pas acte n'existe pas. Il n'a d'existence que comme acte d'autorité. Or, les actes d'autorité sont toujours et d'abord des énonciations proférées par ceux à qui appartient le droit de les énoncer.[11]

Applied to rituals, it means that they will only work when performed by an authorized person. Thus, s/he is part of the particular framing which the ritual needs in order to succeed:[12] the frame may include a particular occasion, place, time, setting, specific actions; in any case, it will be put up by persons who are entitled to perform these actions. Therefore, when an artist like Nitsch proclaims that he is performing a ritual by performing particular actions, the question arises as to what entitles him to perform a ritual—whether in his own eyes or in the eyes of participants/spectators?

Another question concerns the relationship between the performed actions and their possible meaning. If we assume that the action he performs succeeds in causing exactly that effect which it signifies, we have to explain how sign and signified merge. In the rituals to which Nitsch alludes, this occurs either because of the presence of divine or cosmic/magic forces/energy released by the ritual. What, in Nitsch's performance, operates as a substitute for such forces? What can initiate the merging of signifier and signified?

Before investigating these questions—and in order to broaden and strengthen the ground from which to proceed—I will first briefly describe two other performances which, in one way or another, also refer to ritual: Joseph Beuys's action *Coyote: I like America and America likes me* which took place in May 1973 in the René Block Gallery in New York, and Marina Abramović's performance *The lips of Thomas* given at the Krinzinger gallery in Innsbruck in 1975.[13] Both performances were very different from Nitsch's performance as well as from each other, and both referred to ritual in very different ways.

## *Coyote: I like America and America likes me*

Beuys started his action during the flight to the United States, before even reaching the American continent. He closed his eyes in order not to see anything. At J. F. Kennedy Airport, completely wrapped up in felt, he was taken to the gallery by an ambulance. He left the same way. During his seven-day stay he did not see anything of America other than a long, bright room with three windows in the René Block Gallery—which he shared with a wild coyote for a full week.

The room was divided by a wire screen which separated Beuys and the coyote from the spectators. At the far corner, straw was put down for the coyote. Beuys brought along with him two long felt cloths, a walking stick, gloves, a torch and fifty issues of the *Wall Street Journal* (to which, each day, the latest issue was added). He presented them to the coyote to sniff at and urinate on.

Beuys placed the two felt cloths in the centre of the room. One he arranged as a heap in which he hid the lit torch so that only its glow could be perceived. The issues of the *Wall Street Journal* were piled up in two stacks behind the wire screen to the front of the room. With the brown walking stick hooked over his arm, he approached the other felt cloth, put on the gloves and covered himself completely with the felt; all that could be seen was the staff sticking out. Beuys created the image of a shepherd who underwent a series of transformations thanks to the position of his staff: squatting down in an upright position, he held it up, swung it horizontally, pointed it to the floor. In response to the movements of the coyote, the figure turned on its own axis. Then, unexpectedly it would drop sideways to the floor where it remained stretched out. Then, all of a sudden Beuys would jump up, letting the felt slip down and hitting the triangle which hung around his neck three times. When the last sound had died away, he turned on a tape recorder placed before the bars, so that for twenty seconds the noise of running turbines was heard. When silence returned, he took off his gloves and threw them to the coyote which mauled them. Beuys went to the issues of the *Wall Street Journal* which the coyote had scattered and torn, and rearranged them into piles. Afterwards he lay down on the straw to smoke a cigarette. Whenever he did this, the coyote would move towards him.

At other times, the coyote preferred to lie on the heap of felt. It looked in the same direction as the light of the torch and avoided a position where the spectators would be behind its back. Often it restlessly paced the room, ran to a window and stared out. Then it would return to the papers and chew them, drag them through the room or shit on them.

The coyote kept a certain distance from the figure in felt. Occasionally it circled him sniffing and excitedly jumping at the stick, it bit the felt and shred it into pieces. When the figure lay stretched out on the floor the coyote sniffed and prodded him, pawed or sat down beside him and tried to crawl under the felt. Mostly, however, it stayed away, fixing the figure with its eyes. Only when Beuys smoked his cigarette on the straw did it approach him. Having finished his cigarette, Beuys got to his feet, rearranged the felt and covered himself again.

When a week had passed, Beuys very slowly scattered the straw all over the room, hugged the coyote good-bye and left the gallery by the same route he had arrived.

In contrast to Nitsch, Beuys mainly used everyday objects—such as the papers, cigarettes, torch, straw, felt, walking stick, gloves—and performed everyday actions—such as arranging the papers, smoking a cigarette, switching on a tape recorder. Accordingly, neither the objects nor the actions implied any allusion whatsoever to ritual. Moreover, it is difficult, if not impossible, to ascribe to the objects and actions symbolic associations shared by artist and spectators. However, the elements were accorded a symbolic value by the artist, not in the sense of fixed symbols but of 'vehicles of experience, transmitters and communicators [ . . . ]. They represent hidden effects and can be made conceivable and transparent.'[14]

This is particularly true of the materials and objects. For instance, Beuys established a relationship between the possible implications of the felt and his former actions when he states: 'the way in which felt operates in my action, with double meaning, as isolator and warmer, also extends to imply isolation from America and the provision of heat for the coyote'.[15] He used the torch as 'image of energy': 'First, the torch houses the energy in concentration, then, the energy disperses throughout the course of the day until the battery has to be renewed.'[16] The torch was hidden in the felt because it was not to be presented as a technical object: 'It should be a source of light, a hearth, a disappearing sun glowing out from under this grey heap.'[17] The brown gloves which Beuys threw to the coyote after each turn represented 'my hands [ . . . ], the freedom given mankind through the hands. They are free to do all kinds of things, an infinite range of utensils are at their disposal . . . The hands are universal.'[18] Beuys showed the manifold meanings of the bent walking stick for the first time in his action *Eurasia* (1965): it represented the streams of energy that float in EURASIA from east to west and west to east. The *Wall Street Journal*, on the other hand, embodies 'the calcified death-stare of CAPITAL thinking (in the sense of being forced to capitulate to the power of money and position) [ . . . ] Time is the measure of the symptoms of the fact that CAPITAL has long been the only artistic concept. That, too, is an aspect of the United States.'[19] Even the two sounds produced in the performances, the hitting of the triangle and the noise of the turbines, were accorded such meanings. The noise of the turbines was 'the echo of the ruling technology: energy which is never harnessed', while the sound of the triangle is reminiscent of 'the unity and the one' and is conceived of 'as a stream of consciousness directed at the coyote'.[20]

In terms of Nitsch's performance, the symbolic associations assigned to various elements by the artist are not necessarily shared by his spectators, although a kind of communion was ultimately possible, since the elements of his performance belong to a general universe of discourse. In Beuys's performance, this assumption cannot be made. Rather, it is most likely that the American visitors did not share the associations suggested by Beuys at all and, accordingly, made quite different associations when perceiving the objects.

However, there are two aspects which overcome such objections and point to the special status of the performance. First, the objects were not linked to the meanings explained by Beuys in the sense of fixed symbols. Rather they were thought to be able to unfold and realize their potential meanings and effects only in the context of the event that constituted the performance: the meeting of Beuys and the coyote.

Second, a certain mythical dimension was accorded to both partners. Beuys designed and staged himself as a shepherd-like figure, alluding to the Good Shepherd, on one hand, and to a shaman, on the other—that is to say, to a figure which possesses divine and/or cosmic/magic forces. As his partner in the performance he chose a coyote which represents one of the mightiest Indian deities. The coyote is said to be blessed with the power of transformation, able to move between physical and spiritual states. The arrival of the white man changed the status of the coyote. Its inventiveness and adaptability admired and revered by the Indians as subversive power was denounced as cunning by the white man. Thus, it became the 'mean coyote' which could be hunted and killed as a scapegoat. Accordingly, Beuys's performance touched on a 'traumatic moment' of American history: 'We should settle our score with the coyote. Only then can this wound be healed.'[21] Beuys undertook the action in order to reach this goal. It was performed as an 'energy dialogue'[22] between man and animal, aimed at triggering the spiritual forces necessary for 'healing this wound' in the performer. He acted as a kind of shaman who performs a healing ritual that will save the community by restoring the destroyed—cosmic—order.

Although the participants/spectators were not in a position to share the possible meanings accorded the objects by the performer it was assumed that they would benefit from the shaman's actions as he conjured up or exorcized the hidden potential meanings and effects of the objects employed, thus releasing the 'healing forces', i.e., the spiritual forces within himself which enabled him to act as a representative of a community—at least in his own view. That is to say in terms of Beuys's performance, the questions formulated above become even more pressing.

### *The lips of Thomas*

The third example radicalizes and, thus, brings into focus an aspect that was similarly constitutive of the two other performances, namely the use and treatment of the performer's body. In her performance, *The lips of Thomas*, Marina Abramović abused her own body for two hours in various ways.

Abramović started by undressing totally and everything she did was performed naked. She then sat down at a table covered with a white cloth and set with a bottle of red wine, a glass of honey, a crystal glass, a silver spoon and a whip. Slowly she ate the honey with the silver spoon, poured the red wine into the crystal glass and drank it. After swallowing the wine, she broke the crystal glass in her right hand, hurting herself. She got up, went to the back wall where, at the beginning of the performance, she had fastened a picture of herself and framed it by drawing a five-pointed star around it. She then took a razor blade and cut a five-pointed star into the skin of her belly. Then she seized the whip, knelt down under her picture, her back to the audience, and started to flog herself violently on the back. After this, she lay down, arms stretched out, on ice cubes laid out in a cross. A radiator hung from the ceiling was directed towards her belly. Through its heat, the slashed wounds of the star began to bleed copiously again. Abramović remained on the cross of ice for thirty minutes until some spectators spontaneously removed the ice and thus broke off the performance.

No doubt, the most striking aspect of this performance was the self-mutilation. However, the objects Marina Abramović employed in order to execute the self-mutilation also allow for a variety of symbolic associations. The five-pointed star, for instance, may be interpreted in various mythical, metaphysical, cultural-historical and political contexts (even as a fixed symbol of a socialist Yugoslavia). The same holds true for other objects: the whip may point to Christian flagellants, to flogging as punishment and torture or to sadomasochistic sexual practices; the cross of ice may be related to the crucifixion of Christ—but also to icy prison cells or to winter and to death. Eating and drinking at a table using a silver spoon and a crystal glass may be perceived as an everyday action in a bourgeois surrounding but may equally allude to the Last Supper.

Whatever symbolic associations were triggered by the objects, they were not caused by objects in isolation—the objects as such—but because they were used as instruments of self-mutilation. The actions which Marina Abramović performed with these objects structured the performance in a way that its similarity to a scapegoat ritual (or a ritual of initiation), in which the performer played the victim, became obvious. By undergoing a series of clearly perceivable physical transformations such as the intake of certain substances, mutilations by the incision of the star, flogging, bleeding and freezing, in short, by undergoing such an ordeal, the naked performer acquired a new identity. None the less, it is difficult to classify the performance as a ritual—either a scapegoat ritual or a rite of initiation—, for such rites not only suppose a consensus among members of a community concerning the symbolic meaning of the objects employed but such violations and mutilations—conceived of as constitutive elements of the rite—are usually inflicted on the victim by members of the community empowered so to do. Here, it was the performer who inflicted the pain on herself and the spectators were the ones to end the ordeal by removing the ice.

As in the case of the performances by Nitsch and Beuys, though in other respects very different, Abramović's performance alluded to a particular genre of ritual without actually realizing it.

All these artists introduced or used ritual structures in their performances. They followed, for instance, the three phases of a rite identified by van Gennep.[23] They started with a clearly marked separation phase: Nitsch, by arranging the environment and by putting on a white garment; Beuys, by letting himself be wrapped in felt at the airport; Abramović, by setting the environment and by undressing. The actions described above constitute the transformation phase. The final incorporation phase was indicated by the shared meal at the end of Nitsch's ritual/performance, by the wrapping up of the figure in Beuys's, and by the spontaneous actions of some spectators in Abramović's performance.

It does appear that the structure and the process of these three performances derive from rituals. I hesitate, however, to class them as rituals despite the claims and interpretations of the artists themselves, as my initial question remains unanswered: 'What entitles an artist to perform a ritual not only in his/her own eyes but also in the judgement of the other participants, namely, the spectators?'

## 3. The body in performance

In each of the performances which I have described, the artist used her/his body in a striking manner. Nitsch polluted his body with blood and excrement; he put his hands deep into the entrails of the lamb and thus, almost literally, carried out the lamb's disembowelment himself. He exposed his body to various sensations through contact with blood, wine, paint, dish-water, urine, excrement; and he inflicted violence on the carcass of the lamb with his own hands. Nitsch's body was the locus of performance. By using different materials and objects, he not only changed them but also transformed his own body.

In Beuys's performance the performer's body obviously served a different purpose. By living in the company of a wild coyote for seven days and nights, Beuys created a particular situation. On the one hand, he exposed his body to the risk of being attacked, bitten or perilously hurt by the coyote. On the other, he employed his body to communicate with the animal. The energy of this 'dialogue' proceeded from and was received by his body. The spiritual forces which were meant to bring about the 'healing' were to be released in and out of his body. And this body, in turn, did not remain unchanged amidst all these risks and dangers even if it was ultimately unharmed. The seven days and nights shared with the coyote left their imprint.

Abramović abused her body, literally cut into her own flesh, inflicted injuries on it that caused pain and left lasting traces. But she did not articulate her pains by screaming. She simply performed self-mutilating actions and presented her bleeding, suffering body to the spectators. She exposed the process of hurt and its visible traces, but not her pain—this had to be sensed by the spectators. But obviously this sense became so strong and unbearable that they interfered and put an end to the performer's tortures.

In these actions the performers put their bodies at risk through transformations, threats and injuries which legitimized the performance. Since the performer put her/his body in danger, the construction of her/his own 'fiction'—the mythical dismemberment of a god, the dialogue with a coyote, the acquisition of a new identity—was substantiated and, in this sense, transformed into 'reality'. It was precisely the defiled, endangered, violated body that entitled the performer to perform such actions *as if* the performance were a ritual.

This condition clearly marks the principal difference between an acknowledged ritual and an artist's performance. Traditional rituals originate in collective constructions—such as myths, legends and other traditions; to perform a ritual is to re-substantiate them and to reaffirm their effects. The artist's performances, on the contrary, proceed from subjective constructions. Here, it is only the defiled body of the artist, the endangered and still unharmed body, the body in pain, which is able to substantiate these constructions for the spectators. The performers' acting and suffering bodies, thus, gain the power of evidence of proof in the eyes of the spectators.

However, the spectators do not participate in a ritual as do the members of a Catholic congregation at Holy Communion, or the participants at a shamanist demon exorcism. For even if the particular use of the body may substantiate the performer's subjective constructions in the eyes of the spectators, it does not follow that they will 'believe' in these constructions, i.e., that they will be convinced that they are participating in the dismemberment of a god, in the healing of America's traumatic wound, in the birth of a new identity, or a sacrifice. At best, they will sense or even believe that the artist's use of the body manifests and reveals a new attitude towards the body: the attitude of 'being my body' instead of only having it, as Plessner put it.[24]

Even if the particular use of the body does not entitle the artist to perform ritual or transform the performance into ritual, it endows the human body with values long since forgotten and ignored in western culture—values that, at other times or in other cultures, were realized when such rituals were performed as those to which the artist's performance alludes.

If we conclude that the artist does not perform ritual, what happens to the relationship between the actions performed and/or the objects used and their possible meanings, to the relationship between the signifiers and the signified?

First, the spectators perceive how the artists perform the actions: pouring blood on a white canvas, tearing the entrails from the carcass of a lamb, wrapping himself in a long felt cloth, arranging papers, smoking a cigarette, drinking red wine, cutting a five-pointed star into her belly, and so on. And since the artists perform these actions not only themselves but as themselves, in their own name (not in order to represent actions of a given stage persona) the spectators will ascribe to them these obvious meanings: Nitsch tears entrails from a lamb's carcass, Beuys wraps himself into felt, Abramović cuts a five-pointed star into the skin of her belly. In this sense one could state a momentary merging of signifier and signified. But all these actions and objects contain an abundance of possibilities which trigger symbolic associations depending on the universe of discourse of each spectator. This semantic accretion prevents simple merging of signifier and signified. However, the performance does not structure the process of perception and meaning constitution in such a way that any symbolic associations are emphasized and foregrounded. Therefore the semantic accretion may result in a similar process as the merging: it may draw the spectator's attention away from possible meanings of a gesture—that may mean anything—and focus on its materiality, back to the body of the performer. Such focus, at the same time, emphasizes that the action causes certain effects on the performer's body. When Nitsch tears the entrails from the lamb's carcass he is tainted by them; when Beuys wraps his body in felt, he makes it disappear and creates a particular image; when Abramović engraves a five-pointed star in her belly, it bleeds. Thus, despite the semantic accretion, the semantic dimension is devaluated as secondary, The spectator's attention, in this case, is not directed towards a possible meaning, but focuses first on the physical execution of an action, then on the effect it has on the performer's body.

While participants in a ritual may take recourse to the collective construction which enables them to assume that by performing the ritual exactly only those actions are caused which it signifies—the transformation of a wafer into Christ's body, the exorcism of the demon—because the merging of signifier and signified is based on collective construction, in the artist's performance they fall apart. Though the subjective construction may be substantiated in the eyes of a spectator because of the particular use of the body, none the less, the spectator will be able to relate signifier and signified to each other without considering this construction. The divine/cosmic/magic forces which the collective construction presupposes and whose working the 'correct' performance of the ritual will guarantee, are replaced in the artist's performance by her/his individual demonstration of her/his being a body and not only having a body (as the common basis of human culture) and the spectator's individual response to it—be it particular sensations, emotions, reflections or even the execution of certain actions (as in Nitsch's performance) or in preventing the performer from continuing her actions.

Thus, the performer's body, in many respects, appears to be the basic condition for the 'success' of the performance. The risks taken and the injuries substantiate the artist's subjective construction in the eyes of the spectators and, in this way, legitimate her/his performance. It is the artist's physical action which triggers sensations, emotions and impulses in the spectators to act themselves and which initiates reflections which will allow them to have the experience of being a body, not only having a body.

The reception process is characterized by features that are common to any process of theatrical communication and clearly distinguish it from reception processes in other art forms, which dispose of artefacts. An artefact allows the recipient to attribute ever new meanings to its various elements, to their combination and to the structure as a whole; and, whatever the meanings may be, it is possible for others to check them by direct reference to the artefact. In a performance, however, the process of meaning production in which a recipient may accord certain meanings to the actions of the performer is loosely connected to the fleeting moment of their physical execution by the performer. Any modification or revision of the meaning constituted during the performance can no longer refer to the actions themselves nor are others able to refer to them in order to check the meaning conveyed to them by a participant. All modifications, revisions and discussions will necessarily refer to the memory of the participants, i.e., any process of meaning constitution taken up or continued after the performance is over will be performed as a process of recollection. The subjective construction which the performer tends to substantiate through the performance is thus brought into relation to and followed by the various subjective constructions which the spectators articulate as they recall the performance. For them, the only point of reference is their own memory engraved in their own bodies.

Thus, we can conclude that the artist's individual transformation of the genre 'ritual' as realized in the performance has considerably shifted the cultural focus. It brings back into view an insight which has long been forgotten and repressed in western culture—even if never completely: that the basis of any cultural production is the human body[25] and that this body creates culture by performing actions. Here, the focus does not centre on artefacts created by such actions privileged by western culture in general and the humanities in particular; rather, attention is attracted to the very moment at which the actions are performed.

This moment, in its ephemeral presence, is accorded a time dimension because of its reference to subjective constructions. It is preceded by the subjective construction of the artist who has designed the actions, and it flows into the subjective construction of the spectators who later, in the process of recollection, attribute different meanings to them. While during the performance, for a fleeting moment, signifier and signified seem to merge, before and after it, in the subjective constructions of the performers and the spectators, they irretrievably fall apart. In this respect, one might even discover a potential utopia in the performance.

Thus, physical performance and its recollection appear to be the principal modes of cultural production and it is only the moment of physical performance that is endowed with the power to transform subjective construction into sensually perceivable realizations which, in turn, become the point of departure for other subjective constructions. However, a theory of culture that would proceed from the moment of performance, taking this as its pivot, is still to be developed.

Regarding the process of reception, the artists' performances described here fundamentally question the traditional concept of aesthetic distance. When the spectators' bodies are splashed with blood, when the audience becomes eyewitness to actions by which the artist exposes her/his body to risks and inflicts on it severe injuries, how will they be able to keep an aesthetic distance? In such performances, is it still valid to hold aesthetic distance as the 'adequate' attitude of reception? A theory of aesthetic perception taking into consideration the body in pain has still to be developed. For it is highly questionable as to whether the aesthetics of the sublime already deal with this aspect satisfactorily. And such a theory seems all the more desirable, since theatre, from the 1960s and 1970s, increasingly employs the performer's body in a way which literally puts it at risk and violates it, whether in the performance of individual artists or of theatre groups.

In the 1960s and 1970s the Viennese artist Rudolf Schwarzkogler, for instance, abused his body with cables and bandages (1960); Chris Burden had himself locked up in a locker measuring 2′ × 2′ × 3′ for five days, nourished only from a water bottle placed in a locker above (1971); in the same year, in a performance entitled *Shooting Piece*, Burden was shot through his left arm by his friend; Gina Pane was cut on the back, face and hands and, lying on an iron bed, scorched and burned her body by candles placed underneath.[26] In the 1990s, Sieglinde Kallnbach walked on fire and trickled hot wax onto her skin;[27] in *The Reincarnation of the Holy Orlan*,[28] the French performance artist Orlan, underwent cosmetic surgery to shape her face according to a computer-synthesized ideal that combined the features of women in famous paintings—such as Boticelli's *Venus*, Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, Boucher's *Europe*, *Diane* from the Fontainebleau school, Gérôme's *Psyché*. The operation was directly transmitted from the surgical theatre to a New York gallery.

Since the 1980s, performers increasingly use the body in violent ways, both in dance and theatre groups. Injuries and pains are inflicted on the performer's bodies as, for instance, in the theatres of Jan Fabre, Einar Schleef, Reza Abdoh, Lalala Human Steps or Fuera dels Baus. In productions of Harry Kupfer, Frank Castorf, Leander Haussmann and others, singers and actors are thrown about and made to fall dangerously.

If the endangered, scorched, pierced or otherwise injured body is the focus of attention, the question arises as to how this affects aesthetic perception. As Elaine Scarry has shown, pain cannot be communicated:

> So, for the person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiably present is it that 'having pain' may come to be thought of as the most vibrant

> example of what it is 'to have certainty', while for the other person it is so elusive that 'hearing about pain' may exist as the primary model of what it is 'to have doubt'. Thus pain comes unsharably into our midst as at once that which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed.[29]

To perceive pain can only mean to perceive one's own pain, never the pain of another. The spectators perceive the action by which the performer hurts her/himself but not the pain which s/he suffers. They are only in a position to assume that s/he feels pain. Thus, a kind of paradoxical situation presents itself. The fleeting instant at which an action is performed and, thus, signifier and signified seem to merge, is experienced by the spectator at the very moment when perception and meaning fall apart and the signified irretrievably separates from the signifier. While the action of hurting her/himself is perceived, the pain which it causes can only be imagined. A gap opens up for the spectator between what is performed *on* the performer's body, and what happens *in* the performer's body, a gap that seems to be bridgeable only by way of imagination. While the performer makes her/his body the scene of violent actions, the spectator is forced to move the scene into her/his imagination.

The 'real presence' of performance is questioned not only by the subjective constructions of the artists and the spectators, but also by the performer's pain. For her/his pain can only gain presence for the spectators in their own imaginations and not in the performance of the action by which the performer hurts her/himself.

Thus, the performance, in a way, turns into a scapegoat ritual. The performer exposes her/his body to risks and injuries against which the spectators aim to protect their bodies; the performer causes her/himself the pains which the spectators seek to avoid. The performer, in this sense, suffers in place of the spectators. S/he saves them from their own physical suffering. The 'sacrificial victim' at the torment and death of a martyr, or even at the execution of a repentant Christian up to the eighteenth century, held 'a magic power' and the onlookers hoped for 'the healing of certain diseases and similar miracles' from the tortured or executed sinner, from 'his blood, his limbs or the rope'.[30] While here it was the tortured and violated body of the sinner that seemed to promise and to guarantee the onlookers' own physical integrity, in the artists' performance, it is the imagination of the spectator which replaces the magic. Their imagination 'saves' them from the anxieties of violence and pain directed towards their own body by imagining the performer's pain and by attempting to sympathize with it and to sense it themselves.

The aesthetic perception, thus initiated, triggered and provoked by the performance can hardly be described as 'disinterested pleasure'. On the one hand, the spectators feel shocked and deny what they see; on the other, they are fascinated because someone violates him/herself voluntarily and because the action conjures up taboos of torture and physical punishment. Spectators are fascinated and shocked by their own curiosity since, according to cultural norms, they should feel disgust or horror. It is this ambiguity in the reception process to which the performance artist Rachel Rosenthal refers: 'In performance art, the audience, from its role as sadist, subtly becomes the victim. It is forced to endure the artist's plight empathetically, or examine its own responses of voyeurism and pleasure, or smugness and superiority. [ . . . ] In any case, the performer holds the reins. [ . . . ] The audience usually 'gives up, before the artist.'[31] Here, aesthetic perception may be described as a kind of perception which transforms the spectators into involved participants and, in this sense, into performers themselves by projecting the scene of the body onto the scene of the imagination—an imagination which, however, is tied to the body, or is even part of the body, i.e., a physical imagination that causes physical sensations. Therefore, the spectators usually 'give up' before the performer; their imaginations have replaced the performer's body with their own and, thus, penetrated into the realm of the incommunicable—to the pain of the other, which, now becomes manifest in a physical sensation, a physical impulse, in a physical response in the spectators.

As van Gennep has shown, rituals work in a community in order to secure a safe passage from a given status to a new one at moments of life or social crisis in an individual (such as birth, puberty, marriage, pregnancy, illness, changes in professional positions, death). The performances created by individual artists over the last thirty years alluding to or transforming rituals seek to secure and accelerate the passage of Western culture from the state of a prevailingly material culture to a new performative culture. This passage is also to be understood as a passage from the given order of knowledge, the given sign-concept, as well as semiotic processes, towards a new, yet undefined order of knowledge. The performances, thus, operate as the signature of a time of transition.

## Notes

1 John Cage, quoted in Roselee Goldberg, *Performance Art. From Futurism to the Present* (New York: Harry Abraham, Inc., Publishers, 1988), p. 176.

2 Rauschenberg's dog barked loudly throughout the performance, running after anyone moving in the hall. The dog had been a very popular performer in the nineteenth century, but not to everyone's taste. Rumour has it that Goethe resigned his directorship at the Weimar Court Theatre because in *Der Hund von Aubry* a live dog was desecrating the holiness of the stage.

3 Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, I–IX, Vol. IV (Leipzig: E. W. Fritzsch, 1887/8; 2nd edition), p. 3.

4 Milton Singer, ed., *Traditional India: Structure and Change* (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1959), p. xii.

5 Ibid. p. xii ff.

6 Hermann Nitsch, *Das Orgien Mysterien Theater. Die Partituren aller aufgeführten Aktionen 1960–1979*. Erster Band, 1.–32. Aktion. (Neapel/München/Wien: Edition Freiborg, 1979), p. 50.

7 Hermann Nitsch, 'Die Realisation des O. M. Theaters' (1973). In Hermann Nitsch, *Das Orgien Mysterien Theater. Manifeste. Aufsätze. Vorträge* (Salzburg/Wien: Residenz-Verlag, 1990), pp. 67–107 & pp. 103 ff.

8 Ibid. pp. 105 ff.

9 This is not the place to investigate the special traditions on which Nitsch draws —in particular the Viennese tradition. Concerning this question, see Ekkehard Stärk, *Hermann Nitsch, Das Orgien Mysterien Theater und die Hysterie der Griechen. Quellen und Traditionen zum Wiener Antikenbild seit 1850* (München: Fink-Verlag, 1987).

10 *Das Orgien Mysterien-Theater*, p. 87.

11 Émile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard 1966), p. 273: 'In any case, a performative statement can only achieve reality when it is confirmed as an action. Outside the circumstances which make it performative, such a statement is nothing more than a mere statement. Anyone can call out in the market square, 'I declare general mobilization'. But this statement cannot become action because it lacks authority, it is just speech; it is limited to an empty shout, childishness, or madness. A performative statement without action cannot exist. An authoritative action will always be derived from statements made by those who have the right to express them.'

12 Concerning the concept of frame, see Gregory Bateson, 'A theory of play and fantasy; a report on theoretical aspects of the project for study of the role of paradoxes of abstraction in communication', in: *APA Psychiatric Research Reports II*, 1955).

13 Marina Abramović is Yugoslav. But it would restrict her performance to, take it as a statement about Yugoslavia.

14 Joseph Beuys, in Carolin Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys Coyote.* 3rd edition, 1988 (München, first published in 1976), p. 13. (My description of the performance follows the description given by Tisdall).

15 Quoted in Tisdall, p. 14.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid. p. 15.

18 Ibid. p. 15 ff.

19 Ibid. p. 16.

20 Ibid. p. 15.

21 Cited in Tisdall, p. 10.

22 Tisdall, p. 13.

23 Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, translated by Monika Vizedom and Gabrielle Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

24 See Helmuth Plessner, *Anthropologie der Sinne. Gesammelte Schriften in drei Bänden* (Frankfurt am Main, 1980), and Helmuth Plessner, *Laughing and Crying. A Study of the limits of Human Behaviour* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1941, reprint 1970).

25 See also Thomas J. Csordas, ed., *Embodiment and Experience. The Existential Ground of Culture and Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

26 *The Conditioning*, Part I of 'Auto-Portrait' 1972.

27 Frankfurt am Main, 1991.

28 New York, 1990 ff.

29 Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Un-Making of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 4.

30 Richard von Dülmen, *Theater des Schreckens. Gerichtspraxis und Strafrituale in der frühen Neuzeit* (München: Beck Publishing House, 1988, 3rd ed.), p. 163.

31 Rachel Rosenthal, 'Performance and the Masochist Tradition'. In: *High Performance* (Winter 1981/2), p. 24.

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# PERFORMANCE

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*Edited by Philip Auslander*

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| 1998 | Joseph Roach | The future that worked | *Theater* 8(2): 19–26. | III | 64 |
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| 1999 | Ric Allsop | Performance writing | *Performing Arts Journal* 21(1): 76–80. | II | 28 |
| 1999 | Matthew Causey | The screen test of the double: the uncanny performer in the space of technology | *Theatre Journal* 51(4): 383–394. | IV | 88 |
| 1999 | Frances Harding | Presenting and re-presenting the self: from not-acting to acting in African performance | *TDR: The Journal of Performance Studies* 43(2): 118–135. | IV | 69 |
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**Chronological Table continued**

| *Date* | *Author* | *Title* | *Source* | *Vol.* | *Chap.* |
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| 1999 | Freddie Rokem | Theatrical and transgressive energies | *Assaph: Studies in the Theatre* 15: 19–38. | I | 16 |
| 1999 | Steve Tillis | The art of puppetry in the age of media production | *The Dream Review: Journal of Performance Studies* 43(3): 182–195. | IV | 87 |
| 1999 | Britta B. Wheeler | Negotiating deviance and normativity: performance art, boundary transgressions, and social change | Marilyn Corsianos and Kelly Amanda Train (eds), *Interrogating Social Justice: Politics, Culture, and Identity*, Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, pp. 155–179. | IV | 81 |
| 2000 | Kimberly W. Benston | Prologue: performing blackness | *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism*, London: Routledge, pp. 1–21. | IV | 71 |
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| 2002 | Janelle Reinelt | The politics of discourse: performativity meets theatricality | *Substance* 31(1–2). | I | 9 |