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SOCIAL PERFORMANCE

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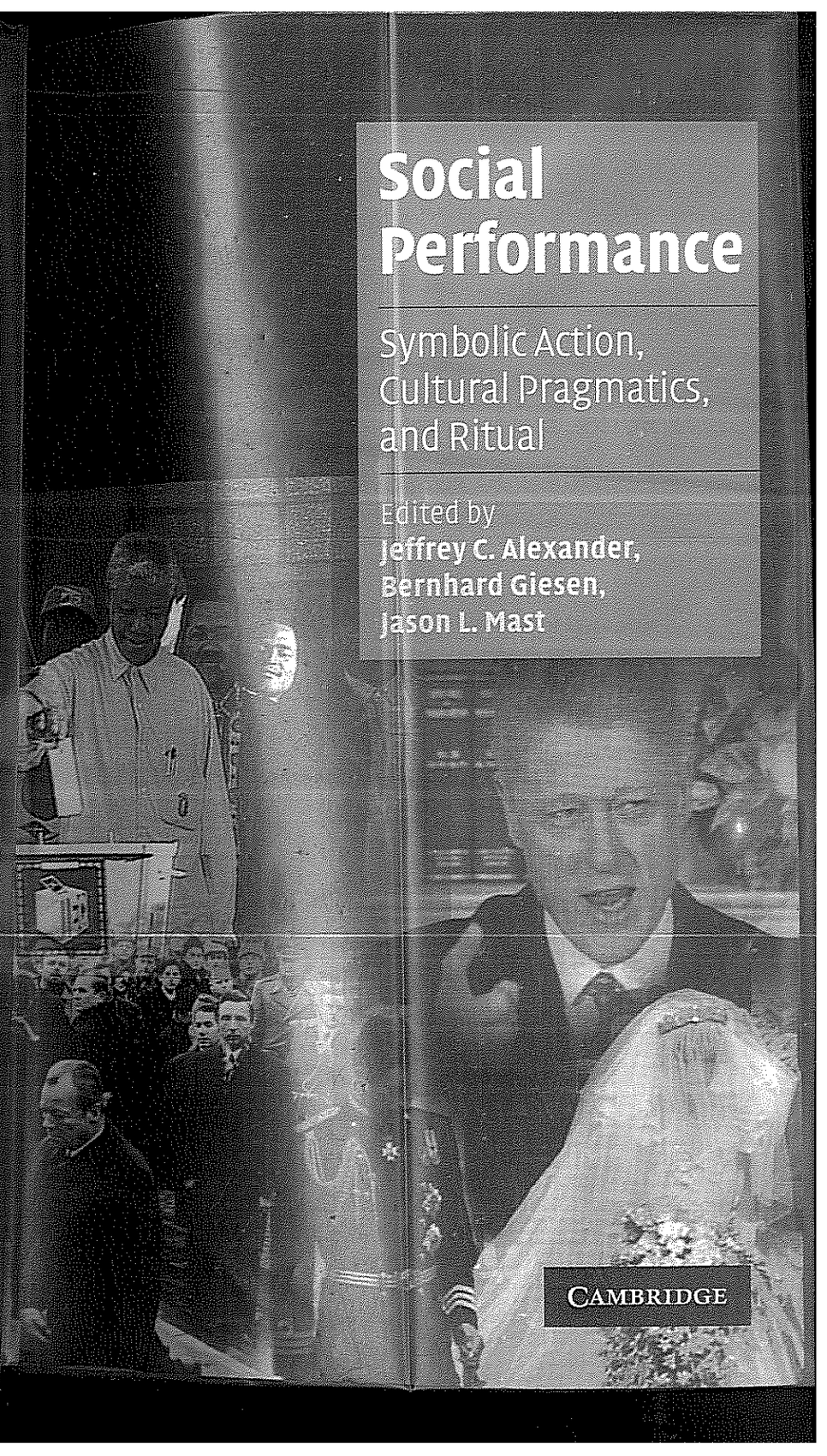
Social Performance

Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual

Edited by
Jeffrey C. Alexander,
Bernhard Giesen,
Jason L. Mast



CAMBRIDGE

Social Performance

This pathbreaking volume makes a powerful case for a new direction in cultural sociology and for social scientific analysis more generally. Taking a "cultural pragmatic" approach to meaning, the contributors suggest a new way of looking at the continuum that stretches between ritual and strategic action. They do so by developing, for the first time, a model of "social performance" that applies not only to micro- but to macro-sociology. This new model is relevant not only to contemporary analysis but to comparative and historical issues, and it is as sensitive to power as it is to cultural structures. The metaphor of performance has long been used by sociologists and humanists to explore not only the social world but literary texts, but this volume offers the first systematic and analytical framework that transforms the metaphor into a social theory and applies it to a series of fascinating large-scale social and cultural processes – from September 11 and the Clinton/Lewinsky Affair, to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Willy Brandt's famous "kneefall" before the Warsaw Memorial. Building on works by Austin and Derrida on the one side, and Durkheim, Goffman and Turner on the other, *Social Performance* offers a new perspective that will be of great interest to scholars and students alike in the social sciences, humanities, and theatre arts.

JEFFREY C. ALEXANDER is the Lillian Chavenson Saden Professor of Sociology and also Chair of the Sociology Department at Yale University. He is the author of *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology* (2003), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (with Eyerman, Giesen, Smelser, and Sztompka) (2004), and the editor (with Philip Smith) of *The Cambridge Companion to Durkheim* (2005).

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Cambridge Cultural Social Studies

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Jeffrey C. Alexander
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Life itself is a dramatically enacted thing.
Erving Goffman

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Introduction: symbolic action in theory and practice: the cultural pragmatics of symbolic action

Jeffrey C. Alexander and Jason L. Mast

The question of theory and practice permeates not only politics but culture, where the analogue for theory is the social-symbolic text, the bundle of everyday codes, narratives, and rhetorical configurings that are the objects of hermeneutic reconstruction. Emphasizing action over its theory, praxis theorists have blinded themselves to the deeply embedded textuality of every social action (Bourdieu 1984; Swidler 1986; Turner 2002). But a no less distorting myopia has affected the vision from the other side. The pure hermeneut (e.g., Dilthey 1976; Ricoeur 1976) tends to ignore the material problem of instantiating ideals in the real world. The truth, as Marx (1972: 145) wrote in his tenth thesis on Feuerbach, is that, while theory and practice are different, they are always necessarily intertwined.

Theory and practice are interwoven in everyday life, not only in social theory and social science. In the following chapters, we will see that powerful social actors understand the conceptual issues presented in this introduction in an intuitive, ethnographic, and practical way. In the intense and fateful efforts to impeach and to defend President Clinton (Mast, ch. 3), for instance, individuals, organizations, and parties moved "instinctively" to hook their actions into the background culture in a lively and compelling manner, working to create an impression of sincerity and authenticity rather than one of calculation and artificiality, to achieve verisimilitude. Social movements' public demonstrations (Eyerman, ch. 6) display a similar performative logic. Movement organizers, intensely aware of media organizations' control over the means of symbolic distribution, direct their participants to perform in ways that will communicate that they are worthy, committed, and determined to achieve acceptance and inclusion from the larger political community. And during South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy (Goodman, ch. 5), perpetrators' confessions and victims' agonistic retellings of disappeared relatives, displacement, and torture

before a Truth and Reconciliation Commission stimulated interest and identification amongst local and global audiences, and initiated a pervasive sense of national catharsis. These examples, and the others that follow, show how social actors, embedded in collective representations and working through symbolic and material means, implicitly orient towards others as if they were actors on a stage seeking identification with their experiences and understandings from their audiences.

Towards a cultural pragmatics

Kenneth Burke (1957 [1941]) introduced the notion of symbolic action. Clifford Geertz (1973a) made it famous. These thinkers wanted to draw attention to the specifically cultural character of activities, the manner in which they are expressive rather than instrumental, irrational rather than rational, more like theatrical performance than economic exchange. Drawing also from Burke, Erving Goffman (1956) introduced his own dramaturgical theory at about the same time. Because of the one-sidedly pragmatic emphases of symbolic interactionism, however, the specifically cultural dimension of this Goffmanian approach (Alexander 1987) to drama made hardly any dent on the sociological tradition, though it later entered into the emerging discipline of performance studies.

In the decades that have ensued since the enunciation of these seminal ideas, those who have taken the cultural turn have followed a different path. It has been meaning, not action, that has occupied central attention, and deservedly so. To show the importance of meaning, as compared to such traditional sociological ciphers as power, money, and status, it has been necessary to show that meaning is a structure, just as powerful as these others (Rambo and Chan 1990; Somers 1995). To take meaning seriously, not to dismiss it as an epiphenomenon, has been the challenge. The strong programs in contemporary cultural sociology (Alexander and Smith 1998; Alexander and Sherwood 2002; Smith 1998; Edles 1998; Jacobs 1996; Kane 1997; Somers 1995; Emirbayer and Goodwin 1996; Sewell 1985) have followed Ricoeur's philosophical demonstration that meaningful actions can be considered as texts, exploring codes and narratives, metaphors, metathemes, values, and rituals in such diverse institutional domains as religion, nation, class, race, family, gender, and sexuality. It has been vital to establish what makes meaning important, what makes some social facts meaningful at all.

In terms of Charles Morris's (1938) classic distinction, strong programs have focused on the syntactics and semantics of meaning, on the relations of signs to one another and to their referents. Ideas about symbolic action and dramaturgy gesture, by contrast, to the pragmatics of the cultural process, to the relations between cultural texts and the actors in everyday life. While the

latter considerations have by no means been entirely ignored by those who have sought to sustain a meaning-centered program in cultural sociology, they have largely been addressed either through relatively ad hoc empirical studies (Wagner-Pacifici 1986) or in terms of the metatheoretical debate over structure and agency (Sewell 1992; Kane 1991; Hays 1994; Alexander 1988, 2003a; Sahlins 1976). Metatheory is indispensable as an orienting device. It thinks out problems in a general manner and, in doing so, provides more specific, explanatory thinking with a direction to go. The challenge is to move downward on the scientific continuum, from the presuppositions of metatheory to the models and empirical generalizations upon which explanation depends. Metatheoretical thinking about structure and agency has provided hunches about how this should be done, and creative empirical studies show that it can be, but there remains a gaping hole between general concepts and empirical facts. Without providing systematic mediating concepts, even the most fruitful empirical efforts to bridge semantics and pragmatics (e.g., Sahlins 1981; Wagner-Pacifici 1986; Kane 1997) have an ad hoc character, and the more purely metatheoretical often produce awkward, even oxymoronic circumlocutions.[1]

Cultural practices are not simply speech acts. Around the same time Goffman was developing a pragmatic dramaturgy in sociology, John Austin (1975) introduced ordinary language philosophy to the idea that language could have a performative function and not only a constative one. Speaking aims to get things done, Austin denoted, not merely to make assertions and provide descriptions. In contrast to simply describing, the performative speech act has the capacity to realize its semantic contents; it is capable of constituting a social reality through its utterance. On the other hand it can fail. Given that a performative may or may not work, that it may or may not succeed in realizing its stated intention, Austin keenly observed, its appropriate evaluative standard is not truth and accuracy, but "felicitous" and "unfelicitous."

When Austin turned to investigating felicity's conditions, however, like Goffman he stressed only the speech act's interactional context, and failed to account for the cultural context out of which particular signs are drawn forth by a speaker. This philosophical innovation could have marked a turn to the aesthetic and to considerations of what makes actions exemplary (Arendt 1958; Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Ferrara 2001); instead, it led to an increasing focus on the interactional, the situational, and the practical (e.g., Goffman 1956; Searle 1961; Habermas 1984; Schegloff 1987). Austin's innovation, like Goffman's dramaturgy, had the effect of cutting off the practice of language from its texts.

Saussure would have agreed with Austin that *parole* (speech) must be studied independently of *langue* (language). However, he would have insisted on the "arbitrary nature of the sign," that, to consider its effectiveness, spoken language must be considered in its totality, as both *langue* and *parole*. A sign's meaning is

arbitrary, Saussure demonstrated,[2] in that "it actually has no natural connection with the signified" (1985: 38), i.e., the object it is understood to represent. Its meaning is arbitrary in relation to its referent in the real world, but it is also arbitrary in the sense that it is not determined by the intention or will of any individual speaker or listener. Rather, a sign's meaning derives from its relations – metaphorical, metonymic, synecdochic – to other signs in a system of sign relations, or language. The relations between signs in a cultural system are fixed by social convention; they are structures that social actors experience as natural, and unreflexively depend on to constitute their daily lives. Consequently, an accounting of felicity's conditions must attend to the cultural structures that render a performative intelligible, meaningful, and capable of being interpreted as felicitous or infelicitous, in addition to the mode and context in which the performative is enacted.

In this respect, Saussure's sometimes errant disciple, Jacques Derrida, has been a faithful son, and it is in Derrida's (1982a [1971]) response to Austin's speech act theory that post-structuralism begins to demonstrate a deep affinity with contemporary cultural pragmatics. Derrida criticized Austin for submerging the contribution of the cultural text to performative outcome. Austin "appears to consider solely the conventionality constituting the *circumstance* of the utterance [*énoncé*], its contextual surroundings," Derrida admonished, "and not a certain conventionality intrinsic to what constitutes the speech act [locution] itself, all that might be summarized rapidly under the problematic rubric of 'the arbitrary nature of the sign'" (1988: 15). In this way, Derrida sharply criticized Austin for ignoring the "citational" quality of even the most pragmatic writing and speech; that words used in talk cite the seemingly absent background cultural texts from which they derive their meanings. "Could a performative utterance succeed," Derrida asked, "if its formulation did not repeat a 'coded' or iterable utterance, or in other words, if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as conforming with an iterable model, if it were not then identifiable in some way as a 'citation'?" (1988: 18)

Because there can be no determinate, trans-contextual relation of signifier and referent, difference always involves *différance* (Derrida 1982b). Interpreting symbolic practice – culture in its "presence" – always entails a reference to culture in its "absence," that is, to an implied semiotic text. In other words, to be practical and effective in action – to have a successful performance – actors must be able to make the meanings of culture structures stick. Since meaning is the product of relations between signs in a discursive code or text, a dramaturgy that intends to take meaning seriously must account for the cultural codes and texts that structure the cognitive environments in which speech is given form.

Dramaturgy in the new century emerges from the confluence of hermeneutic, post-structural, and pragmatic theories of meaning's relation to social action. Cultural pragmatics grows out of this confluence, maintaining that cultural practice must be theorized independently of cultural symbolics, while, at the same time, remaining fundamentally interrelated with it. Cultural action puts texts into practice, but it cannot do so directly, without "passing go." A theory of practice must respect the relative autonomy of structures of meaning. Pragmatics and semantics are analytical, not concrete distinctions.

The real and the artificial

One of the challenges in theorizing contemporary cultural practice is the manner in which it seems to slide between artifice and authenticity. There is the deep pathos of Princess Diana's death and funeral, mediated, even in a certain sense generated by, highly constructed, commercially targeted televised productions, yet so genuine and compelling that the business of a great national collectivity came almost fully to rest. There are the Pentagon's faked anti-ballistic missile tests and its doctored action photographs of smart missiles during the Iraq war, both of which were taken as genuine in their respective times. There is the continuous and often nauseating flow of the staged-for-camera pseudo-event, which Daniel Boorstin (1962 [1961]) flushed out already in the 1960s. Right along beside them, there is the undeniable moral power generated by the equally "artificial" media event studied by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (1992) – Sadat's arrival in Jerusalem, the Pope's first visit to Poland, and John F. Kennedy's funeral.

Plays, movies, and television shows are staged "as if" they occur in real life, and in real time. To seem as if they are "live," to seem real, they are increasingly shot "on location." National armies intimidate one another by staging war games, completely artificial events whose intention not to produce a "real" effect is announced well before they occur but which often alter real balances of power. Revolutionary guerrilla groups, like the Zapatista rebels from Chiapas, Mexico, represent powerful grassroots movements that aim to displace vast material interests and often have the effect of getting real people killed. Yet the masses in such movements present their collective force via highly staged photo-marches, and their leaders, like subcommander Marcos, enter figuratively into the public sphere, as iconic representations of established cultural forms.

The effort at artificially creating the impression of liveness is not in any sense new. The Impressionist painters wanted to trump the artificiality of the French Academy by moving outside, to be closer to the nature they were representing, to paint *en plein air*. The Lincoln–Douglas debates were highly staged, and their "real influence" would have been extremely narrow were it not for the

hyperbolic expansiveness of the print media (Schudson 1998). The aristocracies and emerging middle classes of the Renaissance, the period marking the very birth of modernity, were highly style-conscious, employing facial make-up and hair shaping on both sides of the gender divide, and engaging, more generally, in strenuous efforts at "self-fashioning" (Greenblatt 1980). It was the greatest writer of the Renaissance, after all, who introduced into Western literature the very notion that "the whole world's a stage, and we merely actors upon it."

Despite a history of reflexive awareness of artificiality and constructedness, such postmodern commentators as Baudrillard (1983) announce, and denounce, the contemporary interplaying of reality with fiction as demarcating a new age, one in which pragmatics has displaced semantics, social referents have disappeared, and only signifiers powered by the interests and powers of the day remain. Such arguments represent a temptation, fueled by a kind of nostalgia, to treat the distinction between the real and artificial in an essentialist way. Cultural pragmatics holds that this vision of simulated hyper-textuality is not true, that the signified, no matter what its position in the manipulated field of cultural production, can never be separated from some set of signifiers (cf. Sherwood 1994).

The relation between authenticity and modes of presentation is, after all, historically and culturally specific.[3] During the Renaissance, for instance, the theatre, traditionally understood to be a house of spectacle, seduction, and idolatry, began to assume degrees of authenticity that had traditionally been reserved for the dramatic text, which was honored for its purity and incorruptibility. The relation between authenticity and the senses shifted during this time as well. With its close association with the aural eroding, authenticity became an attribute of the visual. The visual displaced the aural as the sense most closely associated with apprehending and discerning the authentic, the real, and the true. The aural, on the other hand, was increasingly presumed to "displace 'sense,'" and language to "dissolve into pure sound and leave reason behind" (Peters 2000: 163).

It is difficult to imagine a starker example of authenticity's cultural specificity than Donald Frischmann's (1994) description of the Tzotzil people's reaction to a live theatrical performance staged in their village of San Juan Chamula, in Chiapas, Mexico in 1991. Frischmann describes how, during the reenactment of an occurrence of domestic violence, the audience was taken by "a physical wave of emotion [that] swept through the entire crowd" nearly knocking audience members "down onto the floor." During a scene in which a confession is flogged out of two accused murderers the line separating theatrical production and audience completely disintegrated: "By this point in the play, the stage itself was full of curious and excited onlookers – children and men, surrounding the actors in an attempt to get a closer look at the stage events, which so curiously resembled episodes of *real life* out in the central plaza" (1994: 223, italics in original).

Cultural pragmatics emphasizes that authenticity is an interpretive category rather than an ontological state. The status of authenticity is arrived at, is contingent, and results from processes of social construction; it is not inseparable from a transcendental, ontological referent. If there is a normative repulsion to the fake or inauthentic, cultural pragmatics asserts that it must be treated in an analytical way, as a structuring code in the symbolic fabric actors depend on to interpret their lived realities.

Yes, we are "condemned" to live out our lives in an age of artifice, a world of mirrored, manipulated, and mediated representation. But the constructed character of symbols does not make them less real. A talented anthropologist and a clinical psychologist recently published a lengthy empirical account (Marvin and Ingle 1999) describing the flag of the United States, the "stars and stripes," as a totem for the American nation, a tribe whose members periodically engage in blood sacrifice so that the totem may continue to thrive. Such a direct equation of contemporary sacrality with pre-literate tribal life has its dangers, as we are about to suggest below, yet there is much in this account that rings powerfully true.

Nostalgia and counter-nostalgia: sacrality then and now

For those who continue to insist on the centrality of meaning in contemporary societies, and who see these meanings as in some necessary manner refractions of culture structures, the challenge is the same today as it has always been: How to deal with "modernity," an historical designation that now includes postmodernity as well? Why does it remain so difficult to conceptualize the cultural implications of the vast historical difference between earlier times and our own? One reason is that so much of contemporary theorizing about culture has seemed determined to elide it. The power–knowledge fusion that Foucault postulates at the center of the modern episteme is, in fact, much less characteristic of contemporary societies than it was of earlier, more traditional ones, where social structure and culture were relatively fused. The same is true for Bourdieu's habitus, a self that is mere nexus, the emotional residue of group position and social structure that much more clearly reflects the emotional situation of early societies than the autonomizing, reflexive, deeply ambivalent psychological processes of today.

Culture still remains powerful in an a priori manner, even in the most contemporary societies. Powers are still infused with sacralizing discourses, and modern and postmodern actors can strategize only by typifying in terms of

institutionally segmented binary codes. Secularization does not mean the loss of cultural meaning, the emergence of completely free-floating institutions, or the creation of purely self-referential individual actors (cf. Emirbayer and Mische 1998). There remains, in Kenneth Thompson's (1990) inimitable phrase, the "dialectic between sacralization and secularization." But action does not relate to culture in an unfolding sort of way. Secularization does mean differentiation rather than fusion, not only between culture, self, and social structure, but within culture itself.

Mannheim (1971 [1927]) pointed out that it has been the unwillingness to accept the implications of such differentiation that has always characterized conservative political theory, which from Burke (1790) to Oakeshott (1981 [1962]) to contemporary communitarians has given short shrift to cultural diversity and individual autonomy. What is perhaps less well understood is that such unwillingness has also undermined the genuine and important insights of interpretively oriented cultural social science.

For our modern predecessors who maintained that, despite modernization, meaning still matters, the tools developed for analyzing meaning in traditional and simple societies seemed often to be enough. For instance, late in his career Durkheim used descriptions of Australian aboriginal clans' ceremonial rites to theorize that rituals and "dramatic performances" embed and reproduce the cultural system in collective and individual actions (1995: 378). The Warramunga's ceremonial rites that honor a common ancestor, Durkheim argued, "serve no purpose other than to make the clan's mythical past present in people's minds" and thus to "revitalize the most essential elements of the collective consciousness" (1995: 379). Similarly, almost a decade after the close of World War Two, Shils and Young (1953) argued that Queen Elizabeth II's coronation signified nothing less than "an act of national communion," and W. Lloyd Warner (1959) argued that Memorial Day represented an annual ritual that reaffirmed collective sentiments and permitted organizations in conflict to "subordinate their ordinary opposition and cooperate in collectively expressing the larger unity of the total community" (279).

These arguments demonstrate a stunning symmetry with Durkheim's descriptions of the ritual process's effects on comparatively simple and homogeneous aboriginal clans. These thinkers jumped, each in his own creative way, directly from the late Durkheim to late modernity without making the necessary conceptual adjustments along the way. The effect was to treat the characteristics that distinguished modern from traditional societies as residual categories. It was in reaction to such insistence on social-cum-cultural integration that conflict theory made claims, long before postmodern constructivism, that public cultural performances were not affective but merely cognitive (Lukes 1975), that they sprang not from cultural texts but from artificial

scripts, that they were less rituals in which audiences voluntarily if vicariously participated than symbolic effects controlled and manipulated by elites (Birnbaum 1955).

The old-fashioned Durkheimians, like political conservatives, were motivated in some part by nostalgia for an earlier, simpler, and more cohesive age. Yet their critics have been moved by feelings of a not altogether different kind, by an anti-nostalgia that barely conceals their own deep yearning for the sacred life. In confronting the fragmentations of modern and postmodern life, political radicals have often been motivated by cultural conservatism. From Marx and Weber to the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972), from Arendt's (1951) mass society theory to Selznick's (1951, 1952), from Jameson (1991) to Baudrillard, left cultural critics have lodged the nostalgic claim that nothing can ever be the same again, that capitalism or industrial society or mass society or postmodernity has destroyed the possibility for meaning. The result has been that cultural history has been understood allegorically (cf. Clifford 1986, 1988). It is narrated as a process of disenchantment, as a fall from Eden, as declension from a once golden age of wholeness and holiness (Sherwood 1994). The assertion is that once representation is encased in some artificial substance, whether it is substantively or only formally rational, it becomes mechanical and unmeaningful.

The classical theoretical statement of this allegory remains Walter Benjamin's (1968 [1936]) "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," veneration (!) for which has only grown among postmodern critics of the artificiality of the present age. Benjamin held that the auratic quality of art, the aura that surrounded it and gave it a sacred and holy social status, was inherently diminished by art's reproducibility. Sacred aura is a function of distance. It cannot be maintained once mechanical reproduction allows contact to become intimate, frequent, and, as a result, mundane. Baudrillard's simulacrum marks merely one more installment in the theoretical allegory of disenchantment. A more recent postmodern theorist, Peggy Phelan (1993: 146), has applied this allegory in suggesting that, because the "only life" of performance is "in the present," it "cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations." Once performance is mechanically mediated, its meaningfulness is depleted. The argument here is pessimistic and Heideggerian. If ontology is defined in terms of *Dasein*, as "being there," then any artificial mediation will wipe it away. "To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction," Phelan predictably writes, "it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology."

We can escape from such Heideggerianism only by developing a more complex sociological theory of performance. It was Burke (1957, 1965) who first proposed to transform the straightforward action theory of Weber and Parsons,

the schema of means–ends–norms–conditions, which simultaneously mimicked and critiqued economic man. This meant taking "act" in a theatrical rather than a nominalist and mundane manner. It meant transforming "conditions" into the notion of a "scene" upon which an act could be displayed. With analytical transformations such as these, cultural traditions could be viewed not merely as regulating actions but as informing dramas, the performance of which could display exemplary motives, inspire catharsis, and allow working through (Burke 1959).

The implications of this extraordinary innovation were limited by Burke's purely literary ambitions and by the fact that he, too, betrayed nostalgia for a simpler society. Burke suggested (1965: 449, italics added), on the one hand, that "a drama is a mode of symbolic action so designed that an audience *might* be induced to 'act symbolically' in sympathy with it." On the other hand, he insisted that, "insofar as the drama *serves* this function it may be studied as a 'perfect mechanism' composed of parts moving in mutual adjustment to one another like clockwork." The idea is that, if audience sympathy is gained, then society really has functioned as a dramatic text, with true synchrony among its various parts. In other words, this theory of dramaturgy functions, not only as an analytical device, but also as an allegory for re-enchantment. The implication is that, if the theory is properly deployed, it will demonstrate for contemporaries how sacrality can be recaptured, that perhaps it has never disappeared, that the center will hold.

Such nostalgia for re-enchantment affected the most significant line of dramaturgical thinking to follow out from Burke. More than any other thinker, it was Victor Turner who demonstrated the most profound interest in modernizing ritual theory, with notions of ritual process, social dramas, liminality, and communitas, being the most famous results (Turner 1969; cf. Edles 1998). When he turned to dramaturgy, Turner (1974a, 1982) was able to carry this interest forward in a profoundly innovative manner, creating a theory of social dramas that deeply marked the social science of his day (Abrahams 1995; Wagner-Pacifici 1986). At the same time, however, Turner's intellectual evolution revealed a deep personal yearning for the more sacred life, which was demonstrated most forcefully in his descriptions of how ritual participants experience liminal moments and communitas (1969).

Turner used these terms to describe social relations and forms of symbolic action that are unique to the ritual process. Derived from the term *limen*, which is Latin for "threshold," Turner defines liminality as representing "the midpoint of transition in a status-sequence between two positions" (1974a: 237). All rituals include liminal phases, Turner argued, in which traditional status distinctions dissolve, normative social constraints abate, and a unique form of solidarity, or communitas, takes hold:

> Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure . . . and from beneath structure . . . It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or "holy," possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency. (1969: 128)

During liminal moments, Turner maintained, social distinctions are leveled and an egalitarian order, or "open society" (1974a: 112), is momentarily created amongst ritual participants. Liminal social conditions foster an atmosphere of communitas, in which ritual participants are brought closer to the existential and primordial, and distanced from dependence on the cognitive, which Turner associated with the structured, normative social order. In such moments, the "unused evolutionary potential in mankind which has not yet been externalized and fixed in structure" is released, and ritual participants are free to "enter into vital relations with other men" (1974a: 127–8). Turner's re-enchantment imagery is unmistakable. It combines Marxist, utopian formulations of post-revolutionary, radical equality on the one hand, with Nietzschian (2000 [1927]) formulations of Dionysian social action on the other. Through liminality we may return to an idealized state of simple humanity, a community of equals; the dissolution of structure will initiate the erosion of our socially constructed selves, thus allowing us to explore the potency of our "unused evolutionary potential."

When Turner turned explicitly to theorizing about highly differentiated societies, he moved from an analytical model based on ritual to one based on performance. The concept of liminality weathered this transition. Turner modified it, though, because he recognized that relationships between ritual producers and audiences in post-industrial contexts are more complicated and contingent than those he witnessed in tribal settings. Post-industrial actors demonstrate greater degrees of interpretive autonomy and more control over their solidary affiliations than the tribal members he had lived amongst. Thus, Turner introduced the concept "liminoid" to represent liminal-like moments and communitas-like sentiments that post-industrial actors experience in (ritual-like) social dramas in more individualized ways, and enter into more freely, as "more a matter of choice, not obligation" (1982: 55). Despite these insightful modifications, the spirit of liminality, and the nostalgic sentiments that shaped it, continued to permeate Turner's work. Indeed, both continue to exert a powerful sway in contemporary performance studies, as will be shown below.

If Turner moved from ritual to theatre, his colleague, drama theorist and avant-garde theatre producer Richard Schechner (1977, 1985, 1988), moved from theatre to ritual and back again. Turner's theoretical co-founder of contemporary performance studies, Schechner provided the first systematic insight

into the "mutual positive feedback relationship of social dramas and aesthetic performances" (2002: 68). His theorizing also provided a path for understanding failed cultural productions. Yet what he himself hankered after was a way to recreate the wholeness of what Peter Brook (1969) called "Holy Theatre." Schechner, even more than Turner, was animated as much by existential as analytical ambition, and his vision of performance studies was deeply shaped by the nostalgia for re-enchantment embedded in Turner's theorizing. Liminality, in Turner's theorizing, represented the pathway to re-enchantment. Liminality, for Schechner, is the cornerstone of performance studies:

> Performance Studies is "inter" – in between. It is intergenric, interdisciplinary, intercultural – and therefore inherently unstable. Performance studies resists or rejects definition. As a discipline, PS [sic] cannot be mapped effectively because it transgresses boundaries, it goes where it is not expected to be. It is inherently "in between" and therefore cannot be pinned down or located exactly. (Schechner 1998: 360)

For Schechner, performance studies is a set of performative acts that, if properly deployed, will catalyze liminality in the broader social arena, destabilize the normative structure, inspire criticism, and reacquaint mundane social actors with the primordial, vital, and existential dimensions of life. Put another way, for Schechner, performance studies is a vehicle for re-enchantment.

Clifford Geertz made a similar move from anthropology to theatricality, employing notions of staging and looking at symbolic action as dramatic representation. Yet it is striking how Geertz confined himself to studying performances inside firmly established and articulated ritual containers, from the Balinese cockfight (1973b), where "nothing happened" but an aesthetic affirmation of status structures, to the "theatre state" of nineteenth-century Bali (1980), where highly rigid authority structures were continuously reaffirmed in a priori, choreographed ways. In Geertz's dramaturgy, background collective representations and myths steal each scene. In the Balinese case, cultural scripts of masculinity, bloodlust, and status distinctions seem to literally exercise themselves through the social actions that constitute the cockfight event, leaving precious little room for the contingencies that accompany social actors' varying degrees of competency and complicity. The structural rigidity in Geertz's dramaturgy is doubly striking when juxtaposed to Turner's and Schechner's emphasis on liminality and the social and cultural dynamism that liminal social actors may initiate.

What characterizes this entire line of thinking, which has been so central to the development of contemporary cultural-sociological thought, is the failure to take advantage of the theoretical possibilities of understanding symbolic action as performance. Fully intertwining semantics and pragmatics can allow for the openness and contingency that is blocked by theoretical nostalgia for simpler and more coherent societies.

In an influential volume that capped the "Turner era," and segued to performance theory, John MacAloon (1984: 1) offered a description of cultural performance that exemplified both the achievements and the limitations to which we are pointing here. Turner's and Geertz's influence cannot be missed: MacAloon defined performance as an "occasion in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others." Through social performances we tell a story about ourselves to ourselves (Geertz 1973b), and, because performances precipitate degrees of liminality, they are capable of transforming social relations. The communitarian emphasis on holism, on cultural, social, and psychological integration, is palpable.

Taking off from Burke in a different direction, Goffman initiated a second, decidedly less nostalgic line of dramaturgical theory. Half persuaded by game theory and rational choice, Goffman adopted a more detached, purely analytical approach to the actor's theatrical preoccupations. He insisted on complete separation of cultural performance from cultural text, of actor from script. Rejecting out of hand the possibility that any genuine sympathy was on offer, either from actor or from audience, Goffman described performance as a "front" behind which actors gathered their egotistical resources and upon which they displayed the "standardized expressive equipment" necessary to gain results. Idealization was a performative, but not a motivational fact. In modern societies, according to Goffman, the aim was to convincingly portray one's own ideal values as isomorphic with those of another, despite the fact that such complementarity was rarely, if ever, the case.

This cool conceptual creativity contributed signally to understanding social performance, but the instrumental tone of Goffman's thinking severed, not only analytically but in principle, that is ontologically, the possibility of strong ties between psychological motivation, social performance, and cultural text. This opening towards a pure pragmatics of performance was taken up by Dell Hymes in linguistics, and by Richard Bauman in folklore and anthropology. Following also in Austin's emphasis on the performative, Bauman (1986) stressed the need for "highlighting the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content."

Earlier in anthropology, this line was elaborated in Milton Singer's (1959) explorations of the "cultural performances" in South Asian societies, which he described as the "most concrete observable units of the cultural structure," and which he broke down into such standard features as performers, audience,

time span, beginnings, endings, place, and occasion. This form of Goffmanian, analytical deconstruction has combined with nostalgic theories of liminality to feed forcefully into one of the two broad trends in contemporary performance studies. Explicitly praxis-oriented, this strain of performance theory emphasizes exclusively the pragmatic dimensions of resistance and subversion, while focusing in an exaggerated manner on questions of commodification, power, and the politics of representation (MacKenzie 2001; Conquergood 2002; Diamond 1996; Auslander 1997, 1999). Raising the ghost of Marx's Thesis XI and giving it a Foucauldian twist, this strand argues that an epistemology centered on thickly describing the world represents ethnocentric, "epistemic violence" (Conquergood 2002: 146; cf. Ricoeur 1971; Geertz 1973a). The point of practicing performance studies, they argue, is to *change* the world. Liminality, which represents ideal sites for contestation, and pragmatism, which romanticizes actor autonomy and individual self-determination, are its natural theoretical bedfellows.

This praxis approach is attracted to sites of contestation where performances of resistance and subversion are understood to flourish in the ceremonial and interactional practices of the marginalized, the enslaved, and the subaltern (Conquergood 1995, 2002). Rejecting the "culture as text" model, this approach argues that subaltern groups "create a culture of resistance," a "subjugated knowledge" that must be conceptualized not as a discourse but as "a repertoire of performance practices" (Conquergood 2002:150). As a repertoire of practices, culture is theorized as embodied and experiential, and thus wholly unrecognizable to members of the dominant culture.[4] Citationality in these works is limited to representing strategies that "reclaim, short-circuit, and resignify" the hegemonic code's "signed imperatives" (151). While members of the dominant culture are incapable of recognizing subaltern cultures, savvy agents of resistance are described as capable of creatively citing hegemonic codes in order to play upon and subvert them.

This theoretical constraining of citationality to intra-group representational processes has the effect of attributing to subaltern groups radical cultural autonomy. This would seem to lead ineluctably to the conclusion that such groups' identities are constituted wholly from within, and share no symbolic codes with the dominant culture. Yet for subaltern performances of resistance to occur, in which the dominant culture is creatively played upon and subverted, subversive performers must to some degree have internalized the hegemonic code. And to play upon it creatively and felicitously they must be able to *cite* the code in a deeply intuitive, understanding way. One must be able to communicate through the code as much as merely with or against it. Homi Bhabha expressed this succinctly, "mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (1994: 86). This approach interprets Foucault as a theorist of subjugated knowledges, Turner as a theorist of subversion,[5] and Butler as a philosopher of a Goffmanian world. It generalizes from empirical examples of resistance to a full-blown pragmatic and cognitivist view of the world.

Whether it is Marxist or Heideggerian, conservative or postmodern, Turnerian or Goffmanian, the blinders of these lines of dramaturgical thinking, while enormously instructive, have also had the effect of leading dramaturgical theory and cultural sociology astray. We will be able to develop a satisfying theory of cultural practice only if we can separate ourselves from both nostalgia and anti-nostalgia. Not only disenchantment but re-enchantment characterizes post-traditional societies (Sherwood 1994; Bauman 1993). If social action can continue to be understood by social actors and social interpreters as a meaningful text – and empirical evidence suggests overwhelmingly that this continues to be the case – then cultural practice must continue to be capable of capturing sacrality and of displaying it in successful symbolic performance. Disenchantment must be understood, in other words, not as the denial of some romanticized ontology, much less as proof that, in the post-metaphysical world of modernity, social actors live only in a deontological way (Habermas 1993). What disenchantment indicates, rather, is unconvincing cultural practice, failed symbolic performance.

An alternative form of dramaturgical theorizing is, however, also beginning to emerge. In contrast to the anti-nostalgic, praxis-oriented strand, a second line of inquiry in performance studies has resisted the allure of pragmatic promises of uber-agency while retaining an interest in liminality and the politics of identity. Aligned with Geertzian dramaturgy and Derridean citationality, this approach emphasizes the culturally structured scripts that social actors orient towards, and that they must act through, if only to subvert the script's normative power (Roach 1996; Taylor 1995). Such arguments show that even performances of resistance depend on and redeploy dominant, hegemonic codes.

Citationality is foregrounded when these empirical investigations hermeneutically reconstruct how past performances, performers, and imagined cultural identities manifest themselves in, or "ghost," performances in the present (Taylor 1995; Roach 1996, 2000; Carlson 2001). Alterity takes place within, not simply against, historically produced cultural contexts (Taylor 1995; Roach 1996). Performers in the present innovate, create, and struggle for social change through small but significant revisions of familiar scripts which are themselves carved from deeply rooted cultural texts – as actors in a production of Macbeth (Carlson 2001: 9), mourning musicians and pallbearers in a New Orleans jazz funeral (Roach 2000), or protesting mothers of Argentina's "disappeared" children (Taylor 1995). In these studies, the imagined past weighs heavily on the present, but actors are shown to be capable of lacing the coded past with significant, at times profoundly dramatic revisions.[6]

In a persuasive analysis of Argentina's "Dirty War," for instance, Diane Taylor concludes that rather than simply a repertoire of practices, culture must be understood as a relatively autonomous system of "*pre*texts" (1995: 300, original italics) from which scripts for practice emerge. Once embodied in actors, she argues, scripts become objects of cognition that are open to circumscribed, coded revisions. To protest the military junta's "disappearing" of the nation's young men, and the sexual violence it visited upon women, Argentine "mothers of the disappeared" – "Los Madres" – staged dramatic performances of resistance in the Plaza de Mayo, the political, financial, and symbolic center of Buenos Aires (Taylor 1995: 286). In their performances, the women of Los Madres enacted a script of Motherhood. Taylor views such self-casting as "highly problematic," suggesting it obscured differences among women and "limited the [Resistance's] arena of confrontation" (1995: 300). Why did the Madres make the "conscious political choice" to assume the Motherhood role, she asks? Why did they perform according to a script that relegated them to "the subordinate position of mediators between fathers and sons," when they could have "performed as women, wives, sisters, or human rights activists"? Her answer rejects the epistemology of pragmatic choice, liminality as existential freedom, and cognitive performativity:

> I have to conclude that the military and the Madres reenacted a collective fantasy [in which their] positions were, in a sense, already there as *pre*text or script. Their participation in the national tragedy depended little on their individual position as subjects. On the contrary: their very subjectivity was a product of their position in the drama. (Taylor 1995: 301, original italics)

The performative turn in sociology today

Since the late 1980s, the "strong program in cultural sociology" (Alexander 1996; Alexander and Smith 1993, 1998; Edles 1998; Jacobs 1996, 2000; Kane 1991, 1997; Magnuson 1997; Rambo and Chan 1990; Sherwood 1994; Smith 1991, 1996, 1998) has been demonstrating culture's determinative power and its relative autonomy from the social structure. These studies have corrected tendencies to treat culture as epiphenomenal or as a "tool kit" metaphor (Swidler 1986), as materialist and pragmatic writings suggest. At the turn of the century, cultural sociology takes a performative turn. Born of colloquia at the University of Konstanz in 2002/4, and at Yale University in 2003, the theory of cultural pragmatics (Alexander, ch. 1) interweaves meaning and action in a non-reductive way, allowing for culture structures while recognizing that it is only through the actions of concrete social actors that meaning's influence is realized. The essays comprising this volume represent the efforts of cultural sociologists to further develop cultural pragmatics by examining the theatrical

dimensions of social life. They examine the instantiation of culture, even while they resist subsuming meaning to practical pragmatics, on the one hand, or to interactional context, on the other.

In the first chapter, Alexander describes the historical and theoretical shifts that have precipitated the move to performance. The challenges facing turn-of-the-century social order, Alexander argues, stem from the problems of defusion and re-fusion. Ritual has performed the work of solidifying collective identity and embedding the cultural system in individual actions. As social forms of organization have grown more complex and cultural systems more differentiated, however, interaction- and collective-rituals have grown more contingent. The range of potential understandings that govern how social actors relate to ritual processes has dramatically expanded. Ritual producers and leaders no longer *are*, in a totalizing and ontological sense, the unproblematic, authoritative disseminators of meaning and order that they were in the past. The social actors who play ritual leaders have become defused from their roles, and audiences have become defused from ritual productions. Participation in, and acceptance of, ritual messages are more a matter of choice than obligation. The process by which culture gets embedded in action, in fact, more closely resembles the dynamics of theatrical production, criticism, and appreciation than it resembles old fashioned rituals. After establishing the rationale for this epistemological turn, Alexander outlines a theory of cultural pragmatics, and analyzes how the elements in his conceptual model – collective representations, actors, means of symbolic production, *mise-en-scène*, power, and audiences – interact to perform contemporary social realities.

The chapters that follow converse with this historical, theoretical, and conceptual formulation, and each raises and addresses questions of performativity in postmodern social life in a different way. The essay that concludes this volume, Bernhard Giesen's "Performing the sacred: A Durkheimian perspective on the performative turn in the social sciences," provides a major theoretical statement to be placed alongside Alexander's. We have placed these theoretical treatments at the beginning and end of the book in order not to obscure their subtle differences, and to allow their consequential nuances to drift to the fore. Functioning as theoretical bookends to this move to performance, Alexander's formulation of, and theoretical response to, the "problem of fusion" opens the volume, and Giesen's identification of the modes through which the sacred is performed in postmodern life closes it. The chapters between these bookends draw variously from both. We are confident that the conceptual affinities between them, and their differences, will be apparent in subtle ways.

Alexander's and Giesen's theories share fundamental presuppositions: meaning is central to social life; meaning systems demonstrate relative autonomy from the more material social realm; the mechanism that most powerfully

structures meaning is the binary opposition that distinguishes the sacred from the profane. Yet Alexander and Giesen approach the performativity of order from different directions. Starting from the "*problem* of fusion," Alexander brings the sacred's constructedness to the fore, and his theory of cultural pragmatics encourages us to investigate how the sacred gets contested and reconstituted through symbolically combative, social dramatic processes (see Alexander, ch. 2, this volume). Giesen accepts that social conditions have become defused; he emphasizes, however, that, despite the sacred's arbitrary nature in theory, it continues to exist in some particular form in each socio-historical moment, articulated via a particular set of values. We know this, Giesen argues, because we *feel the sacred* when we come into contact with it. Giesen offers an index of the modes that cultural performances take in contemporary social life, and provides a phenomenology of how the sacred is experienced in each.

The chapters between these bookends demonstrate, extend, and even contest elements of Alexander's and Giesen's theories. In his essay, "From the depths of despair: performance, counterperformance, and 'September 11,'" Alexander demonstrates how the cultural pragmatic model allows new insight into the socio-historical dynamics that have given rise to contemporary manifestations of the centuries-long conflict pitting the "Arab-Islamic world" against the "West." Understanding terrorism requires that we contextualize its gruesomely violent means and narrow, tactical instrumentality within the cultural frameworks that make such actions seem sensible, even holy, to its practitioners, on the one hand, and alien and barbaric to its victims, on the other. Doing so enables us to examine terrorist acts as meaning-laden symbolic performances enacted with particular goals and audiences in mind. The interpretations of such performances remain contingent and subject to "misreading," despite their directors' efforts, the tightness of scripts, and the quality of execution. The idea that even the most serious-minded action can create an unintended counterperformance highlights this interpretive contingency and its immensely realistic consequences.

In "The cultural pragmatics of event-ness: the Clinton / Lewinsky affair," Jason Mast shows how the cultural pragmatic framework helps explain how a beleaguered American president, adrift in waves of scandal, garnered historically enviable job approval ratings and widespread popular support, even while being investigated by the Office of Independent Council and impeached by the House of Representatives. President Clinton's impeachment in December 1998, Mast explains, was the melodramatic conclusion to a lengthy, emotionally charged, yet highly contingent social dramatic struggle. Clinton's first six years of tenure had been marked by a series of quasi-scandalous yet minor political occurrences that failed to rise to the level of crisis or generalization (Alexander 2003b [1988]). Mast shows how popular culture structures shaped and infused

the strategies through which motivated parties dramatized these occurrences into "Monicagate," a political event writ large.

In his chapter, "Social dramas, shipwrecks, and cockfights: conflict and complicity in social performance," Isaac Reed argues that three classic anthropological works, which have been read as paradigmatic statements delimiting how culture should be analytically situated vis-à-vis action, can more fruitfully be read, in light of the cultural pragmatic turn, as representing ideal types of social performance. Reed offers a detailed rereading of Turner's (1974b) social drama of Thomas Becket, Sahlins's Captain Cook shipwreck (1981), and Geertz's (1973b) Balinese cockfight essays. He then shows how, in each of these events, the cultural pragmatic elements that Alexander identifies (ch. 1) interacted in context-specific ways, structuring the principals' dramatic strategies and the kinds of social action audiences were expecting to witness. Reed explains how each particular constellation of cultural pragmatic elements established conflict or complicity, thus demonstrating how the cultural pragmatic approach enlarges our ability to theorize the many ways culture infuses social action and society.

We have framed cultural pragmatics as representing, in part, a theoretical response to the challenges that cultural and social differentiation pose to ritual theory. Tanya Goodman's chapter, "Performing a 'new' nation: the role of the TRC in South Africa," shows that emotionally charged, broadly inclusive rituals remain potent forms of social performance even at the turn of the twenty-first century. When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was created by South Africa's embattled political parties, it was charged with producing two seemingly contradictory performatives. It needed to symbolically produce a deep chasm that could separate the nation's racist past from an idealized democratic future. Yet the TRC also need to unify, or bridge, the deeply divided social relations institutionalized under Apartheid. Goodman examines the dramaturgy that allowed the TRC to accomplish both tasks – the way it cast each hearing's performance, selected staging and props, and oriented to multiple audiences and their potential reactions. The TRC's felicitous use of dramatic elements, Goodman argues, transformed what could have been highly contentious, if not openly violent, proceedings into substantively charged, cathartic rituals of reconciliation, which unfolded against the background of the universalist principles that had been embedded in the Commission's founding legislation.

In his chapter, "Performing opposition or, how social movements move," Ron Eyerman shows how performance theory and cultural pragmatics illuminate a series of issues that contemporary social movements literature overlooks, such as how and what social movements actually *represent*. The lens of performance, Eyerman argues, brings into focus the challenges social movements face in coupling their strategic goals with compelling expressive means. It also provides analytical tools for examining the interplay between movements' general

ethics and their specific choreographic practices. Striking a felicitous symmetry between goals, practices, and broad dramatic themes, Eyerman concludes, can move people emotionally, cognitively, morally, and physically; it can facilitate cathexis between movement participants and their causes, and stir empathy and identification in movement audiences.

In "Politics as theatre: an alternative view of the rationalities of power," David Apter sets out to answer two questions: how does the theatricality of politics shape consciousness, and how do politically dramatized meanings shape interpretive action? Apter's answers to these questions place him firmly in the theoretical terrain that Alexander and Giesen travel in their contributions to this volume. Apter's theory, however, represents a more explicitly critical approach to dissecting political theatricality; it is a dramaturgy of suspicion designed to reveal the dramatic techniques employed by those who would take, keep, and exercise power. Apter identifies the dramatic strategies that political "actor-agents" use to integrate and unify individuals into coherent audiences, and the devices they employ to magnify audience loyalties by simultaneously constructing outsiders as morally undeserving of inclusion. Actor-agents contrive heroic pasts, articulate glorious futures, and manipulate genres of intrigue to clarify, concentrate, and intensify public opinion. Apter's argument is bolstered by rich illustrations drawn from fieldwork conducted at different global sites, and from his deep familiarity with literary, theatrical, and political theory.

Valentin Rauer's essay, "Symbols in action: Willy Brandt's kneefall at the Warsaw Memorial," is the clearest representation of how Alexander's theory of cultural pragmatics and Giesen's theory of performing the sacred can inform and enhance one another. In the winter of 1970, West German Chancellor Willy Brandt triggered a decisive shift in German collective identity by falling to his knees before Poland's Warsaw Memorial, a dramatic gesture witnessed by European political leaders and international journalists. Drawing on Giesen's work, Rauer explains how Brandt, embedded in a particularly sacred time and space, actually performed and momentarily embodied the sacred in this single epiphanic gesture. Alexander's complex model of cultural pragmatics, Rauer goes on to show, helps us understand how this single gesture could lead to profound symbolic shifts in German understandings of the nation's past, present, and future.

Contemporary explorations into the theatrical dimensions of social life typically reference Austin's (1975 [1962]) critique of modern language philosophy and Goffman's (1956) drama-based conceptual architecture. In "The promise of performance and the problem of order," by contrast, Kay Junge returns to Hobbes, Hume, Rousseau, and Spencer. Junge queries their work from the perspective of performativity, how they were sensitive to the fragility of social order, the ambiguity of actors' promises, and the tensions between the social

interests of groups and their moral identities. In the latter part of his essay, Junge offers a radically different understanding of contract theory. He shows how Hobbes turned to the theatre for metaphors to explain how humanity has escaped chaos and managed to keep the state of nature at bay. Whereas Eyerman (ch. 6, this volume) explores the aesthetics of opposition and dissension, Junge shows that order and consent are matters of performativity as well. Junge concludes by arguing that retooling the contractarian tradition with a cultural pragmatic sensibility can lead to fresh understandings of how political authority is gained and legitimated.

In "Performance art," Giesen systematically reconstructs our understanding of this new artistic fashion. He constructs subgenres of performance art, identifying their productive strategies and representation elements, and comparing these dimensions to earlier movements in art history. According to Giesen, contemporary performance art can be conceived as an intentionally orchestrated, aesthetically stylized action that resists classification, crosses or blurs traditional boundaries, destroys conventions, and exists only momentarily before vanishing. Quintessentially postmodern, performance art is in part about aesthetic alienation. It aims to estrange and subvert the structures of meaning that bind a community and constitute its identity. In the process, however, performance art renders deeply felt cultural orientations visible and hints at their theoretical arbitrariness, thus suggesting that things could be otherwise. Through his analysis, Giesen identifies an aesthetic movement whose tentative and elusive identity is rooted in its practitioners' very rejection of the strategies of identification and classification. In a dialectic of identification and transcendence, performance artists compel the aesthetic sphere (and the political and moral) if not forward, then at least into ceaseless motion. By continually shifting their means of artistic production, and the boundaries between art, artist, and audiences, performance artists alter both the art world's and their audiences' orientations to deeply held meaning structures. By continually reflecting on, and creatively conversing with, the art world's grand narratives, the actions of performance artists parallel, in an expressive medium, the move that the contributors to this volume are making in the intellectual medium. Our message is that traditional, organic understandings of social performances, whether rituals or strategies, must give way to a denaturalized, analytically differentiated, and much more self-conscious understanding that allows us to see every dimension of performance as a possibly independent part.

Cultural pragmatics is a social scientific response to the conditions of a post-metaphysical world, in which institutional and cultural differentiation makes successful symbolic performance difficult to achieve. To develop a theory of cultural practice, we must take these historical limitations seriously. The chapters

that follow acknowledge that cultural life has radically shifted, both internally and in its relation to action and social structure. They also demonstrate that, despite these changes, culture can still be powerfully meaningful: it can possess and display coherence, and it can exert immense social effect. To understand how culture can be meaningful, but may not be, we must accept history but reject radical historicism. Life is different but not completely so. Rather than sweeping allegorical theory, we need allegorical deconstruction and analytic precision. We need to break the "whole" of symbolic action down into its component parts. Once we do so, we will see that cultural performance covers the same ground that it always has, but in a radically different way.

Notes

1. See, for instance, Sewell's (1992) theory of structure and agency. We do not in any way disagree with the metatheoretical formulation that text, situation, and agency all play a role in shaping social life. We believe, however, that arguments about this interplay must be much more specific and nuanced, and show how these elements actually interact. We also suggest that the generality of Sewell's formulation disguises the tension between the different formulations of structure and agency he brings together. Any framework that "combines" Giddens with Bourdieu, and the two with Sahlins and Geertz, without providing a new model, has great difficulties. Emirbayer's (1997; Emirbayer and Mische 1998) metatheoretical discussions are more coherent, and much more closely approximate the direction we take cultural pragmatics here; but Emirbayer performs a much more thoroughgoing critique of culturalism than he does of pragmatics. His failure to develop such a correspondingly forceful criticism of pragmatism – from the perspective of culture structure and citational meaning-making – makes his model vulnerable to the reinsertion of the structure–agency dualism.
2. Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* is a reconstruction of lectures he delivered at the University of Geneva between 1906 and 1911. First published in book form in 1913, the lectures appeared in an English translation in 1959.
3. The attribution of inauthenticity to a performance in public discourse often demonstrates a particular logic: that which is accused of being inauthentic and fake is represented as either threatening a just social order, on the one hand, or as (seductively) trapping people in an unjust one, on the other.
4. "Textocentric" academics (Conquergood 2002: 151), who practice a Geertzian approach to studying social life, are included in the group of ignorant members of the dominant culture.
5. "[Judith] Butler turns to Turner – *with a twist* . . . [She] twists Turner's theory of ritual into a theory of normative performance," McKenzie criticizes (in Phelan 1993: 222–3).
6. Where in her earlier and most influential contributions to performance theory, Judith Butler (1990) presented resistance to gender stereotyping in an exaggeratedly agent-centered manner, she has tried to escape from such an exclusively agent-centered understanding of "resistance" in her later essays (e.g. Butler 1993), emphasizing the kind of citational qualities of performance we are pointing to here.

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1

Cultural pragmatics: social performance between ritual and strategy

Jeffrey C. Alexander

From its very beginnings, the social study of culture has been polarized between structuralist theories that treat meaning as a text and investigate the patterning that provides relative autonomy and pragmatist theories that treat meaning as emerging from the contingencies of individual and collective action – so-called practices – and that analyze cultural patterns as reflections of power and material interest. In this chapter, I present a theory of cultural pragmatics that transcends this division, bringing meaning structures, contingency, power, and materiality together in a new way. My argument is that the materiality of practices should be replaced by the more multidimensional concept of performances. Drawing on the new field of performance studies, cultural pragmatics demonstrates how social performances, whether individual or collective, can be analogized systemically to theatrical ones. After defining the elements of social performance, I suggest that these elements have become "de-fused" as societies have become more complex. Performances are successful only insofar as they can "re-fuse" these increasingly disentangled elements. In a fused performance, audiences identify with actors, and cultural scripts achieve verisimilitude through effective *mise-en-scène*. Performances fail when this relinking process is incomplete: the elements of performance remain apart, and social action seems inauthentic and artificial, failing to persuade. Re-fusion, by contrast, allows actors to communicate the meanings of their actions successfully and thus to pursue their interests effectively.

Rituals are episodes of repeated and simplified cultural communication in which the direct partners to a social interaction, and those observing it, share a mutual belief in the descriptive and prescriptive validity of the communication's symbolic contents and accept the authenticity of one another's intentions. It is because of this shared understanding of intention and content, and in the intrinsic validity of the interaction, that rituals have their effect and affect. Ritual effectiveness energizes the participants and attaches them to each other,

increases their identification with the symbolic objects of communication, and intensifies the connection of the participants and the symbolic objects with the observing audience, the relevant "community" at large.

If there is one cultural quality that marks the earliest forms of human social organization, it is the centrality of rituals. From births to conjugal relationships, from peaceful foreign relations to the preparation for war, from the healing of the sick to the celebration of collective well-being, from transitions through the age structure to the assumption of new occupational and political roles, the affirmation of leadership and the celebration of anniversaries – in earlier forms of society such social processes tended to be marked by ritualized symbolic communication. If there is one cultural quality that differentiates more contemporary, large-scale, and complex social organizations from earlier forms, it is that the centrality of such ritual processes has been displaced. Contemporary societies revolve around open-ended conflicts between parties who do not necessarily share beliefs, frequently do not accept the validity of one another's intention, and often disagree even about the descriptions that people offer for acts.

Social observers, whether they are more scientific or more philosophical, have found innumerable ways to conceptualize this historical transformation, starting with such thoroughly discredited evolutionary contrasts as primitive/advanced or barbarian/civilized, and moving on to more legitimate but still overly binary distinctions such as traditional/modern, oral/literate, or simple/complex. One does not have to be an evolutionist or to accept the simplifying dichotomies of metahistory to see that a broad change has occurred. Max Weber pitted his contingent historical approach against every shred of evolutionary thinking, yet this decentering of ritual was precisely what he meant by the movement from charisma to routinization and from traditional to value and goal-rational society. Rather than being organized primarily through rituals that affirm metaphysical and consensual beliefs, contemporary societies have opened themselves to processes of negotiations and reflexivity about means and ends, with the result that conflict, disappointment, and feelings of bad faith are at least as common as integration, affirmation, and the energizing of the collective spirit.

Still, most of us who live in these more reflexive and fragmented societies are also aware that, for better and for worse, such processes of rationalization in fact have not completely won the day (Alexander 2003a). There is a continuing symbolic intensity based on repeated and simplified cognitive and moral frames (Goffman 1967, 1974) that continues to mark all sorts of individual and private relationships. More public and collective processes – from social movements (Eyerman and Jamison 1991) to wars (Smith 1993), revolutions (Apter and Saich 1994; Hunt 1984; Sewell 1980), and political

transitions (Giesen, this volume; Edles 1998), and even to the construction of scientific communities (Hagstrom 1965) – continue to depend on the simplifying structures of symbolic communications and on cultural interactions that rely on, and to some degree can generate, intuitive and unreflective trust (Sztompka 1999; Barber 1983). It might even be said that, in a differentiated, stratified, and reflexive society, a strategy's success depends on belief in the validity of the cultural contents of the strategist's symbolic communication and on accepting the authenticity and even the sincerity of another's strategic intentions. Virtually every kind of modern collectivity, moreover, seems to depend at one time or another on integrative processes that create some sense of shared identity (Giesen 1998; Spillman 1997; Ringmar 1996), even if these are forged, as they all too often are, in opposition to simplistic constructions of those who are putatively on the other side (Jacobs 2000; Ku 1999; Chan 1999).

At both the micro and the macro levels, both among individuals and between and within collectivities, our societies still seem to be permeated by symbolic, ritual-like activities. It is precisely this notion of "ritual-like," however, that indicates the puzzle we face. We are aware that very central processes in complex societies are symbolic, and that sometimes they are also integrative, at the group, inter-group, and even societal level. But we also clearly sense that these processes are not rituals in the traditional sense (cf. Lukes 1977). Even when they affirm validity and authenticity and produce integration, their effervescence is short-lived. If they have achieved simplicity, it is unlikely they will be repeated. If they are repeated, it is unlikely that the symbolic communication can ever be so simplified in the same way again.

This is the puzzle to which the present chapter is addressed. Is it possible to develop a theory that can explain how the integration of particular groups and sometimes even whole collectivities can be achieved through symbolic communications, while continuing to account for cultural complexity and contradiction, for institutional differentiation, contending social power, and segmentation? Can a theory give full credence to the continuing role of belief while acknowledging that unbelief and criticism are also the central hallmarks of our time?

In order to solve this puzzle, I will develop a systematic, macro-sociological model of social action as cultural performance. In so doing, I will enter not only into the historical origins of theatrical performance and dramaturgical theory (e.g. Turner 2002; Schechner 2002; Auslander 1997; Carlson 1996; Geertz 1980; Goffman 1974; Burke 1965; Austin 1957) but also into the history and theories of social performance.[1] This means looking at how, and why, symbolic action moved from ritual to theatre (Turner 1982) and why it so often moves back to "ritual-like" processes again (Schechner 1976).

The gist of my argument can be stated simply. The more simple the collective organization, the less its social and cultural parts are segmented and differentiated, the more the elements of social performances are *fused*. The more complex, segmented, and differentiated the collectivity, the more these elements of social performance become *de-fused*. To be effective in a society of increasing complexity, social performances must engage in a project of *re-fusion*. To the degree they achieve re-fusion, social performances become convincing and effective – more ritual-like. To the degree that social performances remain de-fused, they seem artificial and contrived, less like rituals than like performances in the pejorative sense. They are less effective as a result. Failed performances are those in which the actor, whether individual or collective, has been unable to sew back together the elements of performance to make them seem connected seamlessly. This performative failure makes it much more difficult for the actor to realize his or her intentions in a practical way.

This argument points immediately to the question of just what the elements of social performance are. I will elucidate these in the section immediately following. Then, with this analytical model of social performance safely in hand, I will turn back to the historical questions of what allowed earlier societies to more frequently make their performances into rituals and how later social developments created the ambiguous and slippery contexts for performative action in which we find ourselves today. Once this historical argument is established, I will come back to the model of performative success and failure and will elaborate its interdependent elements in more detail.

The elements of cultural performance

Cultural performance is the social process by which actors, individually or in concert, display for others the meaning of their social situation. This meaning may or may not be one to which they themselves subjectively adhere; it is the meaning that they, as social actors, consciously or unconsciously wish to have others believe. In order for their display to be effective, actors must offer a plausible performance, one that leads those to whom their actions and gestures are directed to accept their motives and explanations as a reasonable account (Scott and Lyman 1968; Garfinkel 1967). As Gerth and Mills (1964: 55) once put it, "Our gestures do not necessarily 'express' our prior feelings," but rather "they make available to others a sign." Successful performance depends on the ability to convince others that one's performance is true, with all the ambiguities that the notion of aesthetic truth implies. Once we understand cultural performance in this way, we can easily make out the basic elements that compose it.

Systems of collective representation: background symbols and foreground scripts

Marx ([1852] 1962: 247) observed that "just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed," social actors "anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries, and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honored disguise and this borrowed language." Marx is describing here the systems of collective representations that background every performative act.

Actors present themselves as being motivated by and towards existential, emotional, and moral concerns, the meanings of which are defined by patterns of signifiers whose referents are the social, physical, natural, and cosmological worlds within which actors and audiences live. One part of this symbolic reference provides the deep background of collective representations for social performance; another part composes the foreground, the scripts that are the immediate referent for action. These latter can be understood as constituting the performance's immediate referential text. As constructed by the performative imagination, background and foreground symbols are structured by codes that provide analogies and antipathies and by narratives that provide chronologies. In symbolizing actors' and audiences' worlds, these narratives and codes simultaneously condense and elaborate, and they employ a wide range of rhetorical devices, from metaphor to synecdoche, to configure social and emotional life in compelling and coherent ways. Systems of collective representations range from "time immemorial" myths to invented traditions created right on the spot, from oral traditions to scripts prepared by such specialists as playwrights, journalists, and speech writers.

Like any other text, these collective representations, whether background or foreground, can be evaluated for their dramatic effectiveness. I will say more about this later, but what is important at this point is to see that no matter how intrinsically effective, collective representations do not speak themselves. Boulton (1960: 3) once described theatre as "literature that walks and talks before our eyes." It is this need for walking and talking – and seeing and listening to the walking and talking – that makes the practical pragmatics of performance different from the cultural logic of texts. It is at this conjuncture that cultural pragmatics is born.

Actors

These patterned representations are put into practice, or are encoded (Hall 1980), by flesh-and-blood people. As Reiss (1971: 138) suggested in his study

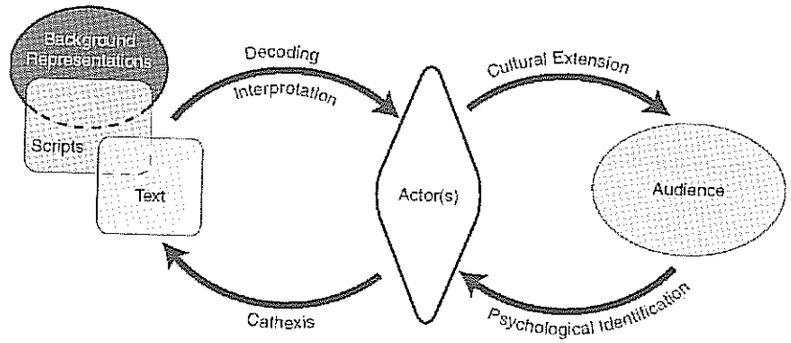

Figure 1.1 Successful performance: re-fusion

of the relation between theatrical technique and meaning in seventeenth-century French theatre, "the actor is as real as the spectator; he is in fact present in their midst." Whether or not they are consciously aware of the distinction between collective representations and their walking and talking, the actor's aim is to make this distinction disappear. As Reiss (1971: 142) put it, the actor's desire is "to cause the spectator to confuse his emotions with those of the stage character." While performers must be oriented to background and foreground representations, their motivations vis-à-vis these patterns are contingent. In psychological terms, the relation between actor and text depends on cathexis. The relation between actor and audience, in turn, depends on the ability to project these emotions and textual patterns as moral evaluations. If those who perform cultural scripts do not possess the requisite skills (Bauman 1989), then they may fail miserably in the effort to project their meanings effectively.

Observers/audience

Cultural texts are performed so that meanings can be displayed to others. "Others" constitute the audience of observers for cultural performance. They decode what actors have encoded (Hall 1980), but they do so in variable ways. If cultural texts are to be communicated convincingly, there needs to be a process of cultural extension that expands from script and actor to audience. Cultural extension must be accompanied by a process of psychological identification, such that the members of the audience project themselves into the characters they see onstage.

There is empirical variation in the extent to which cultural extension and psychological identification actually occur. Audiences may be focused or

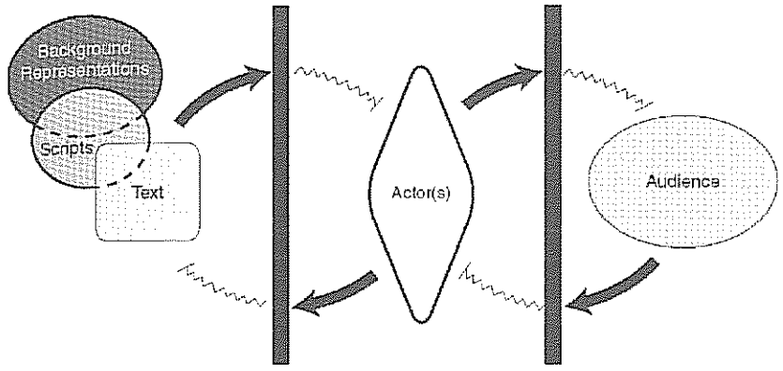

Figure 1.2 Performance failure: de-fusion

distracted, attentive or uninterested (Verdery 1991: 6; Berezin 1997: 28, 35, 250). Even if actors cathect to cultural texts, and even if they themselves possess high levels of cultural proficiency, their projections still may not be persuasive to the audience/observers. Observation can be merely cognitive. An audience can see and can understand without experiencing emotional or moral signification. As we will see in the following section, there are often social explanations of this variability. Audiences may represent social statuses orthogonal to the status of performers. Audience attendance may not be required, or it may be merely compelled. Critics can intervene between performance and audience. There might not be an audience in the contemporary sense at all, but only participants observing themselves and their fellow performers. This latter condition facilitates cultural identification and psychological extension, though it is a condition much less frequently encountered in the complex societies of the present day.

Means of symbolic production

In order to perform a cultural text before an audience, actors need access to the mundane material things that allow symbolic projections to be made. They need objects that can serve as iconic representations to help them dramatize and make vivid the invisible motives and morals they are trying to represent. This material ranges from clothing to every other sort of "standardized expressive equipment" (Goffman 1956: 34–51). Actors also require a physical place to perform and the means to assure the transmission of their performance to an audience.

Mise-en-scène

With texts and means in hand, and audience(s) before them, social actors engage in dramatic social action, entering into and projecting the ensemble of physical and verbal gestures that constitutes performance. This ensemble of gestures involves more than the symbolic devices that structure a non-performed symbolic text. If a text is to walk and talk, it must be sequenced temporally and choreographed spatially (e.g. Berezin 1997: 156). The exigencies of time and space create specific aesthetic demands; at some historical juncture, new social roles like director and producer emerge that specialize in this task of putting text "into the scene."

Social power

The distribution of power in society – the nature of its political, economic, and status hierarchies, and the relations among its elites – profoundly affects the performance process. Power establishes an external boundary for cultural pragmatics that parallels the internal boundary established by a performance's background representations. Not all texts are equally legitimate in the eyes of the powers that be, whether possessors of material or interpretive power. Not all performances, and not all parts of a particular performance, are allowed to proceed. Will social power (Mann 1986) seek to eliminate certain parts of a cultural text? Who will be allowed to act in a performance, and with what means? Who will be allowed to attend? What kinds of responses will be permitted from audience/observer? Are there powers that have the authority to interpret performances independently of those that have the authority to produce them? Are these interpretive powers also independent of the actors and the audience itself, or are social power, symbolic knowledge, and interpretive authority much more closely linked?

Every social performance, whether individual or collective, is affected fundamentally by each of the elements presented here. In the language of hermeneutics, this sketch of interdependent elements provides a framework for the interpretive reconstruction of the meanings of performative action. In the language of explanation, it provides a model of causality. One can say that every social performance is determined partly by each of the elements I have laid out – that each is a necessary but not sufficient cause of every performative act. While empirically interrelated, each element has some autonomy, not only analytically but empirically vis-à-vis the others. Taken together, they determine, and measure, whether and how a performance occurs, and the degree to which it succeeds or fails in its effect. Two pathways lead out from the discussion thus far. The analytic model can be developed further, elaborating the nature of each

factor and its interrelations with the others. I will take up this task in a later section. Before doing so, I will engage in a historical discussion. I wish to explore how the analytical model I have just laid out, despite the fact it is so far only presented very simply, already provides significant insight into the central puzzle of ritual and rationalization with which I introduced this chapter and that defines its central question.

The conditions for performativity: historical transformations

The model of performance I am developing here provides a new way of looking at cultural and organizational change over broad spans of historical time. We can see differently how and why rituals were once so central to band and tribal societies and why the nature of symbolic action changed so remarkably with the rise of states, empires, and churches. We can understand why both the theatre and the democratic *polis* arose for the first time in ancient Greece and why theatre emerged once again during the early modern period at the same time as open-ended social dramas became central to determining the nature of social and political authority. We can understand why Romanticism, secularization, and industrial society made the authenticity of symbolic action such a central question for modern times.

Old-fashioned rituals: symbolic performances in early societies

Colonial and modernist thinkers were deeply impressed by the ritualistic processes that explorers and anthropologists observed when they encountered societies that had not experienced "civilization" or "modernity." Some associated the frequency of rituals with the putative purity of early societies (Huizinga [1938] 1950) and others with some sort of distinctively primitive, non-rational mentality (Lévy-Bruhl 1923). Huizinga ([1938] 1950: 14), for example, stressed that rituals create not a "sham reality" but "a mystical one," in which "something invisible and inactual takes beautiful, actual, holy form." Less romantic observers still emphasized the automatic, predictable, engulfing, and spontaneous qualities of ritual life. Weber exemplified this understanding in a sociological manner; it also marked the modern anthropological approach to ritual that became paradigmatic. Turner (1977: 183) defined rituals as "stereotyped" and as "sequestered"; Goody (1986: 21) called them "homeostatic"; and Leach (1972: 334), insisting also on "repetition," expresses his wonderment at how, in the rituals he observed, "everything in fact happened just as predicted" (1972: 199).

Against these arguments for the essential and fundamental difference of symbolic interactions in earlier societies, critical and postmodern anthropologists

have argued for their more "conjunctural" (Clifford 1988: 11) quality. Those mysterious rituals that aroused such intense admiration and curiosity among earlier observers, it is argued, should be seen not as expressions of some distinctive essence but simply as a different kind of practice (Conquergood 1992). The model I am developing here allows us to frame this important insight in a more nuanced, less polemical, and more empirically oriented way. Rituals in early societies, I wish to suggest, were not so much *practices* as *performances*, and in this they indeed are made of the same stuff as social actions in more complex societies. In an introduction to his edition of Turner's posthumous essays, Schechner (1987: 7) suggested that "all performance has at its core a ritual action." It is better, I think, to reverse this statement, and to say that all ritual has at its core a performative act.

This is not to deny the differences between rituals and performances of other kinds. What it does suggest, however, is that they exist on the same continuum and that the difference between them is a matter of variation, not fundamental type. Ritual performances reflect the social structures and cultures of their historically situated societies. They are distinctive in that they are fused. Fusion is much more likely to be achieved in the conditions of less complex societies, but it occurs in complex societies as well.

To see why performances in simpler societies more frequently became rituals, we must examine how early social structure and culture defined the elements of performance and related them to one another in a distinctive way. The explanation can be found in their much smaller size and scale; in the more mythical and metaphysical nature of their beliefs; and in the more integrated and overlapping nature of their institutions, culture, and social structures. Membership in the earliest human societies (Service 1962, 1979) was organized around the axes of kinship, age, and gender. Forming collectivities of sixty to eighty members, people supported themselves by hunting and gathering and participated in a small set of social roles with which every person was thoroughly familiar. By all accounts, the subjectivity that corresponded with this kind of social organization resembled what Stanner (1972), when speaking of the Australian Aboriginals, called "dream time." Such consciousness merged mundane and practical dimensions with the sacred and metaphysical to the extent that religion did not exist as a separate form. In such societies, as Service (1962: 109) once remarked, "there is no religious organization" that is "separated from family and band."

The structural and cultural organization of such early forms of societies suggests differences in the kinds of social performance they can produce. The collective representations to which these social performances refer are not texts composed by specialists for segmented subgroups in complex and contentious social orders. Nor do these collective representations form a critical

"metacommentary" (Geertz 1973) on social life, for there does not yet exist deep tension between mundane and transcendental spheres (Goody 1986; Habermas 1982–3; Eisenstadt 1982; Bellah 1970). The early anthropologists Spencer and Gillen (1927) were right at least in this, for they suggested that the Engwura ritual cycle of the Australian Arunta recapitulated the actual lifestyle of the Arunta males. A century later, when Schechner (1976: 197) observed the Tsembaga dance of the Kaiko, he confirmed that "all the basic moves and sounds – even the charge into the central space – are adaptations and direct lifts from battle."

The tight intertwining of cultural text and social structure that marks social performances in early societies provides a contextual frame for Durkheim's theoretical argument about religion as simply society writ large. While claiming to propose a paradigm for studying every religion at all times, Durkheim might better be understood as describing the context for social performances in early societies. Durkheim insists that culture is identical with religion, that any "proper" religious belief is shared by every member of the group, and that these shared beliefs are always translated into the practices he calls rituals, or rites. "Not only are they individually accepted by *all members* of that group, but they also belong *to* the group and *unify* it . . . A society whose members are united because they imagine the sacred world and its relation with the profane world *in the same way*, and because they *translate* this common representation into identical practices, is called a Church" (Durkheim [1912] 1995: 41, italics added).[2]

In such ritualized performances, the belief dimension is experienced as personal, immediate, and iconographic. Through the painting, masking, and reconfiguring of the physical body, the actors in these performances seek not only metaphorically but literally to become the text, their goal being to project the fusion of human and totem, "man and God," sacred and mundane. The symbolic roles that define participation in such ritualized performances emerge directly, and without mediation, from the other social roles actors play. In the Engwura ritual (Spencer and Gillen 1927), the Arunta males performed the parts they actually held in everyday Arunta life. When social actors perform such roles, they do not have a sense of separation from them; they have little self-consciousness about themselves as actors. For participants and observers, rituals are not considered to be a performance in the contemporary sense at all but rather to be a natural and necessary dimension of ongoing social life. As for the means of symbolic production, while not always immediately available, they generally are near at hand – a ditch dug with the sharp bones of animals, a line drawn from the red coloring of wild flowers, a headdress made from bird feathers, an amulet fashioned from a parrot's beak (Turner 1969: 23–37).

In this type of social organization, participation in ritual performance is not contingent, either for the actors or the observers. Participation is determined by

the established and accepted hierarchies of gender and age, not by individual choices that respond to the sanctions and rewards of social powers or segmented social groups. Every relevant party in the band or tribe must attend to ritual performances. Many ceremonies involve the entire community, for they "regard their collective well-being to be dependent upon a common body of ritual performances" (Rappaport 1968, in Schechner 1976: 211). Turner (1982: 31, original italics) attested that "the *whole* community goes through the *entire* ritual round." Durkheim ([1912] 1995) also emphasized obligation, connecting it with the internal coherence of the audience. In the ritual phase of Aboriginal society, he wrote, "the population comes together, concentrating itself at specific places . . . The concentration takes place when a clan or a portion of the tribe is summoned to come together" ([1912] 1995: 217).

Nor are attendees only observers. At various points in the ritual, those merely watching the ritual performance are called upon to participate – sometimes as principals and at other times as members of an attentive chorus providing remonstrations of approval through such demonstrative acts as shouting, crying, and applause. At key phases in male initiation ceremonies, for example, women attend closely and, at particular moments, play significant ritual roles (Schechner 2002). They express indifference and rejection early in the performance and display physical signs of welcome and admiration in order to mark its end. Even when they do not participate, ritual audiences are hardly strangers. They are linked to performers by direct or indirect family ties.

In terms of the elementary model I have laid out already, it seems clear that such ritualized social actions fuse the various components of performance – actors, audiences, representations, means of symbolic production, social power, and *mise-en-scène*.

It is the actor/audience part of this fusion to which Service (1962: 109) referred when he wrote that "the congregation is the camp itself." Lévi-Strauss (1963: 179) meant to emphasize the same fusing when he spoke of the "fabulation" of ritual as a "threefold experience." It consists "first of the shaman himself, who, if his calling is a true one . . . undergoes specific states of a psychosomatic nature; second, that of the sick person, who may or may not experience an improvement of his condition; and, finally, that of the public, who also participates in the cure, experiencing an enthusiasm and an intellectual and emotional satisfaction which produce collective support." In the studies of shamanistic rituals offered by postmodern performance theorists, we can read their ethnographic accounts as suggesting fusion in much the same way. "They derive their power from listening to the others and absorbing daily realities. While they cure, they take into them their patients' possessions and obsessions and let the latter's illnesses become theirs . . . The very close relationship these

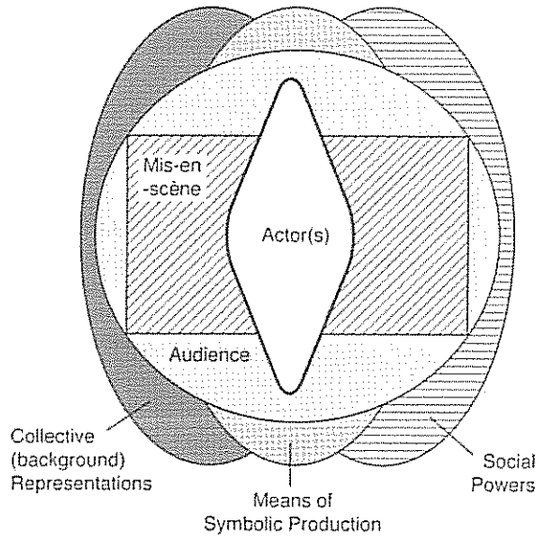

Figure 1.3 The fused elements of performance inside simple social organization

healers maintain with their patients remains the determining factor of the cure" (Trinh 1989, in Conquergood 1992: 44).

With sacred texts tied to mundane society, actors' roles tied to social roles, performance directly expressing symbolic text and social life, obligatory participation, and homogeneous and attentive audiences it is hardly surprising that the effects of ritual performances tend to be immediate and only infrequently depart from the expectations of actors and scripts (cf. Schechner 1976: 205, 1981: 92–4). As Lévi-Strauss attested (1963: 168, italics added), "There is . . . no reason to doubt the efficacy of certain magical practices" precisely because "the efficacy of magic implies *a belief in* magic." Rites not only mark transitions but also create them, such that the participants become something or somebody else as a result. Ritual performance not only symbolizes a social relationship or change; it also actualizes it. There is a direct effect, without mediation.

Anthropologists who have studied rituals in earlier forms of society reported that the tricks of ritual specialists rarely were scrutinized. Lévi-Strauss (1963: 179) emphasized the role of "group consensus" when he began his famous retelling of Boas's ethnography of Quesalid. The Kwakiutl Indian was so unusually curious as to insist (at first) that the sorcerer's rituals indeed were tricks. Yet after persuading ritual specialists to teach him the tricks of their trade, Quesalid himself went on to become a great shaman. "Quesalid did not become a great

shaman because he cured his patients," Lévi-Strauss assures us; rather, "he cured his patients because he had *become* a great shaman" (1963: 180, italics added). Shamans effect cures, individual and social, because participants and observers of their performances believe they have the force to which they lay claim. Shamans, in other words, are institutionalized masters of ritual performance. The success of this performance depends, in the first place, on their dramatic skills, but these skills are intertwined with the other dimensions that allow performances to be fused in simple social organizations.

Social complexity and post-ritual performances

Fused performances creating ritual-like effects remain important in more complex societies. There are two senses in which this is true. First, and less importantly for the argument I am developing here, in primary groups such as families, gangs, and intergenerationally stable ethnic communities, role performances often seem to reproduce the macrocosm in the microcosm (Slater 1966). Even inside of complex societies, audiences in such primary groups are relatively homogeneous, actors are familiar, situations are repeated, and texts and traditions, while once invented, eventually take on a time immemorial quality. The second sense in which ritual-like effects remain central, more importantly for my argument here, is that fusion remains the goal of performances even in complex societies. It is the context for performative success that has changed.

As I noted earlier, historians, anthropologists, and sociologists have analyzed the sporadic and uneven processes that created larger-scale societies in innumerably different ways. There is sharply contrasting theorizing about the causes and pathways of the movement away from simpler social organization in which ritual played a central role to more complex social forms, which feature more strategic, reflexive, and managed forms of symbolic communication. But there is wide consensus that such a transformation did occur, that the processes of "complexification," "rationalization," or "differentiation" (Thrift 1999; Luhmann 1995; Champagne 1992; Alexander and Colomy 1990; Habermas 1982–3; Eisenstadt 1963) produce different kinds of symbolic communications today. Even Goody (1986: 22) spoke confidently of the transition "from worldview to ideology."

This emphasis on ideology is telling, and it leads directly to the argument about changes in the conditions for performativity that I am making here. Earlier sociological and anthropological investigations into the social causes of the transition from simple forms of social organization emphasized the determining role of economic change. Technological shifts created more productivity, which led to surplus and the class system, and finally to the first distinctive political institutions, whose task was to organize the newly stratified society and to administer

material and organizational needs. By the end of the 1950s, however, anthropologists already had begun to speak less of technological changes than shifts in economic orientations and regimes. When Fried (1971: 103) explained "the move from egalitarian to rank society," he described a shift "from an economy dominated by reciprocity to one having redistribution as a major device." In the same kind of anti-determinist vein, when Service (1962: 171) explained movement beyond the monolithic structures of early societies to the "twin forms of authority" that sustained distinctive economic and political elites, he described it as "made *possible* by greater productivity" (1962: 143, italics added). Sahlins (1972) built on such arguments to suggest that it was not the economic inability to create surplus that prevented growth but the ideological desire to maintain a less productivity-driven, more leisurely style of life. Nolan and Lenski (1995) made the point of this conceptual-cum-empirical development impossible to overlook: "Technological advance created the possibility of a surplus, but to transform that possibility into a reality required an ideology that *motivated* farmers to produce more than they needed to stay alive and productive, and *persuaded* them to turn that surplus over to someone else" (1995: 157, italics added). As this last comment makes clear, this whole historiographic transition in the anthropology of early transitions points to the critical role of ideological projects. The creation of surplus depended on new motivations, which could come about only through the creation of symbolic performances to persuade others, not through their material coercion.

The most striking social innovation that crystallized such a cultural shift to ideology was the emergence of written texts. According to Goody (1986: 12), the emergence of text-based culture allowed and demanded "the decontextualization or generalization" of collective representations, which in oral societies were intertwined more tightly with local social structures and meanings. With writing, the "communicative context has changed dramatically both as regards the emitter and as regards the receivers" (1986: 13): "In their very nature written statements of the law, of norms, of rules, have had to be abstracted from particular situations in order to be addressed to a universal audience out there, rather than delivered face-to-face to a specific group of people at a particular time and place" (1986: 13). Only symbolic projection beyond the local would allow groups to use economic surplus to create more segmented, unequal, and differentiated societies. Without the capacity for such ideological projection, how else would these kinds of more fragmented social orders ever be coordinated, much less integrated in an asymmetrical way?

These structural and ideological processes suggest a decisive shift in actors' relation to the means of symbolic production. In text-based societies, literacy is essential if the symbolic processes that legitimate social structure are to be carried out successfully. Because literacy is difficult and expensive, priests

"have privileged access to the sacred texts." This allows "the effective control of the means of literate communication," concentrating interpretive authority in elite hands (Goody 1986: 16–17). Alongside this new emergence of monopoly power, indeed because of it, there emerges the necessity for exercising tight control over performance in order to project this ideological control over distantiated and subordinate groups. Evans-Pritchard (1940: 172, italics added) once wrote that, in order to "allow him to *play the part he plays* in feuds and quarrels," the Nuer chief needs only "ritual qualifications." Because the Nuer "have no law or government," or any significant social stratification, obeying their chief follows from the perception that "they are sacred persons" (1940: 173). In his study of the origins of political empires, Eisenstadt (1963: 65) demonstrated, by contrast, that: with the "relative autonomy of the religious sphere and its 'disembeddedness' from the total community and from the other institutional spheres," everything about political legitimation has changed. The sacredness of the economic, political, and ideological elites now has to be achieved, not assigned. As Eisenstadt put it, these elites now "*tried to maintain dominance*" (1963: 65, italics added); it was not given automatically to them. "In all societies studied here, the rulers *attempted to portray* themselves and the political systems they established as the bearers of special cultural symbols and missions. They *tried to depict* themselves as transmitting distinct civilizations . . . The rulers of these societies invariably *tried to be perceived* as the propagators and upholders of [their] traditions [and they] desire[d] to minimize any group's pretensions to having the right *to judge and evaluate* the rulers or to sanction their legitimation" (Eisenstadt 1963: 141, italics added).

The most ambitious recent investigation into pharaonic Egypt finds the same processes at work. "A state imposed by force and coercing its subjects to pay taxes and perform civil and military service," Assmann (2002: 74) wrote, "could hardly have maintained itself if it had not rested on a core semiology that was as persuasive as the state itself was demanding." Reconstructing "the semantics that underlie the establishment of the state" (2002: 75), Assmann finds that in the Old Kingdom Egyptians "clung to the graphic realism of hieroglyphic writing" with an "astounding tenacity." This "aspiration to permanence" meant that state rituals involved "maximum care . . . to prevent deviation and improvisation." Only the lector priest's "knowledge of the script and his ability to recite accurately" could "ensure that precisely the same text was repeated at precisely the same time in the context of the same ritual event, thus bringing meaning, duration, and action into precise alignment" (2002: 70–1). By the time of the Middle Kingdom, Assmann reported (2002: 118–19), "the kings of the Twelfth Dynasty were in a fundamentally different position." Social and cultural complexity had proceeded to such an extent that the pharaonic rulers "had to assert themselves against a largely literate and economically and militarily powerful aristocracy . . . and win over the lower strata." These objectives "could not be achieved by force alone," Assmann wrote, "but only by the power of eloquence and explanation."

> The assertion of political power was no longer a matter of apodictic self-glorification, but was accomplished . . . by the power of the word. "Be an artist in speech," recommends one text, "then you will be victorious. For behold: the sword-arm of a king is his tongue. Stronger is the word than all fighting." The kings of the Twelfth Dynasty understood the close links between politics and the instantiation of meaning. (2002: 118–19)

In terms of the model I am developing here, these empirical accounts suggest de-fusion among the elements of performance: (1) the separation of written foreground texts from background collective representations; (2) the estrangement of the means of symbolic production from the mass of social actors; and (3) the separation of the elites who carried out central symbolic actions from their mass audiences. The appearance of seamlessness that made symbolic action seem ritualistic gives way to the appearance of greater artifice and planning. Performative action becomes more achieved and less automatic.

The emergence of theatrical from ritual performance

To this point in our historical discussion, my references to performance have been generated analytically, which is to say they have been warranted by the theoretical considerations presented in the first section. While it seems clear that the emergence of more segmented, complex, and stratified societies created the conditions – and even the necessity – for transforming rituals into performances, the latter, more contingent processes of symbolic communication were not understood by their creators or their audiences as contrived or theatrical in the contemporary sense. There was social and cultural differentiation, and the compulsion to project and not merely to assume the effects of symbolic action, but the elements of performance were still not defused enough to create self-consciousness about the artificiality of that process.

Thus, when Frankfort (1948: 135–6) insisted on the "absence of drama" in ancient Egypt, he emphasized both the continuing fusion of sacred texts and actors and the relative inflexibility, or resistance to change, of ancient societies (cf. Kemp 1989: 1–16). "It is true," Frankfort conceded, "that within the Egyptian ritual the gods were sometimes represented by actors." For example, an embalming priest might be "wearing a jackal mask" to impersonate the god Anubis. In fact, one of the best-preserved Egyptian texts, the *Mystery Play of the Succession*, "was performed when a new king came to the throne." Nonetheless, Frankfort insists, such performances "do not represent a new art form." He calls them "simply the 'books' of rituals." They may be "dramatic," but "they

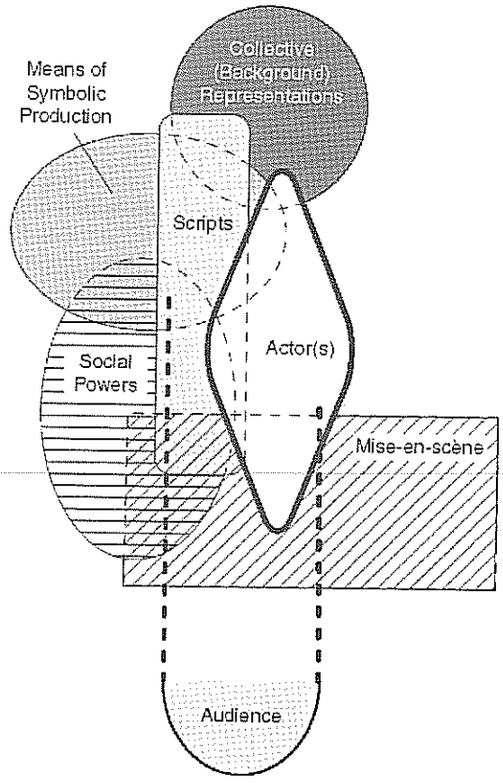

Figure 1.4 The de-fused elements of performance inside complex social organization

certainly are not drama." In drama, the meaning and consequences of action unfold, and in this sense are caused by, the theatrical challenge of *mise-en-scène*: "In drama, language is integrated with action and a change is shown to be a consequence of that action." In Egyptian rites, by contrast, as in Durkheim's Aboriginal ones, the "purpose is to *translate* actuality in the unchanging form of myth . . . The gods appear and speak once more the words they spoke 'the first time'" (Frankfort 1948: 135–6, italics added). It is the actuality of myth that marks ritual.

Only in the Greek city-states did drama in the contemporary sense emerge. The social organizational and cultural background for these developments was crucial, of course, even as the emergence of dramatic performance fed back into social and cultural organization in turn. As compared to the fused and ascriptive

hierarchies that ruled urban societies in the Asian empires, in Greece there emerged urban structures of a new, more republican kind. They were organized and ruled by elites, to be sure, but these elites were internally democratic. As Schachermeyr ([1953] 1971: 201) emphasized in his widely cited essay, the historically unprecedented "autonomy of the citizen body" in the Greek cities was accompanied by the equally distinctive "emancipation of intellectual life from Greek mythology." These new forms of organizational and culture differentiation fostered, according to Schachermeyr, a "revolutionary spirit" that engaged in "a constant fight against the monarchical, dictatorial, or oligarchic forms of government."

This marked opening up of social and cultural space focused attention on the projective, performative dimension of social action, subjecting the ritualized performances of more traditional life to increased scrutiny and strain (e.g. Plato 1980). In Greek society, we can observe the transition from ritual to performance literally and not just metaphorically. We actually see the de-fusion of the elements of performance in concrete terms. They became more than analytically identifiable: their empirical separation became institutionalized in specialized forms of social structure and available to common-sense reflection in cultural life.

Greek theatre emerged from within religious rituals organized around Dionysus, the god of wine (Hartnoll 1968: 7–31). In the ritual's traditional form, a dithyramb, or unison hymn, was performed around the altar of Dionysus by a chorus of fifty men drawn from the entire ethnos. In terms of the present discussion, this meant continuing fusion: actors, collective representations, audiences, and society were united in a putatively homogeneous, still mythical way. In expressing his nostalgia for those earlier, pre-Socratic days, Nietzsche ([1872] 1956: 51–5, 78–9) put it this way: "In the dithyramb we see a community of unconscious actors all of whom see one another as enchanted . . . Audience and chorus were never fundamentally set over against each other . . . An audience of spectators, such as we know it, was unknown . . . Each spectator could quite literally imagine himself, in the fullness of seeing, as a chorist [sic]."

As Greek society entered its period of intense and unprecedented social and cultural differentiation (Gouldner 1965), the content of the dithyramb gradually widened to include tales of the demi-gods and fully secular heroes whom contemporary Greeks considered their ancestors. The background representational system, in other words, began to symbolize – to code and to narrate – human and not only sacred life. This interjection of the mundane into the sacred introduced symbolic dynamics directly into everyday life and vice versa. During communal festivals dedicated to performing these new cultural texts, the good and bad deeds of secular heroes were recounted along with their feuds, marriages, and adulteries, the wars they started, the ethnic and religious ties

they betrayed, and the sufferings they brought on their parents and successors. Such social conflicts now provided sources of dramatic tension that religious performers could link to sacred conflicts and could perform on ritual occasions.

As the background representations became reconfigured in a more socially oriented and dramaturgical way – as everyday life became subject to such symbolic reconstruction – the other elements of performance were affected as well. The most extraordinary development was that the social role of actor emerged. Thespius, for whom the very art of theatrical performance eventually came to be named, stepped out of the dithyramb chorus to become its leader. During ritual performance, he would assume the role of protagonist, either god or hero, and would carry on a dialogue with the chorus. Thespius formed a traveling troupe of professional actors. Collecting the means of symbolic production in a cart whose floor and tailboard could serve also as a stage, Thespius traveled from his birthplace, Icaria, to one communal festival after another, eventually landing in Athens where, in 492 BC, he won the acting prize just then established by the City Dionysus festival.

During this same critical period of social development, systems of collective representations began for the first time not only to be written down, or to become actual texts, but also to separate themselves concretely from religious life. In fifth-century Athens, theatre writing became a specialty; prestigious writing contests were held, and prizes were awarded to such figures as Aeschylus and Sophocles. Such secular imagists soon became more renowned than temple priests. At first, playwrights chose and trained their own actors, but eventually officials of the Athenian festival assigned actors to playwrights by lot. In our terms, this can be seen as having the effect of emphasizing and highlighting the autonomy of the dramatic script vis-à-vis the intentions or charisma of its creators (cf. Gouldner 1965: 114).

As such an innovation suggests, the independent institution of performance criticism also had emerged, mediating and pluralizing social power in a new way. Rather than being absorbed by the performance, as on ritual occasions, interpretation now confronted actors and writers in the guise of judges, who represented aesthetic criteria separated from religious and even moral considerations. At the same time, judges also represented the city that sponsored the performance, and members of the *polis* attended performances as a detached audience of potentially critical observers. Huizinga ([1938] 1950: 145) emphasized that, because the state did not organize theatrical competitions, "audience criticism was extremely pointed." He also suggested that the public audience shared "the tension of the contest like a crowd at a football match," but it seems clear that they were not there simply to be entertained. The masked performers of Greek tragedies remained larger than life, and their texts talked and walked with compelling emotional and aesthetic force, linking performance to

the most serious and morally weighted civic issues of the day. From Aeschylus to Sophocles to Euripedes, Greek tragic drama (Jaeger 1945: 232–381) addressed civic virtue and corruption, exploring whether there existed a natural moral order more powerful than the fatally flawed order of human social life. These questions were critical for sustaining the rule of law and an independent and democratic civil life.

Nietzsche ([1872] 1956: 78–9) complained that, with the birth of tragedy, "the poet who writes dramatized narrative can no more become one with his images" and that he "transfigures the most horrible deeds before our eyes by the charm of illusion." In fact, however, the de-fusion of performative elements that instigated the emergence of theatre did not necessarily eliminate performative power; it just made this power more difficult to achieve. This increased difficulty might well have provided the social stimulus for Aristotle's aesthetic philosophy. In terms of the theoretical framework I am developing here, Aristotle's poetics can be understood in a new way. It aimed to crystallize, in abstract theoretical terms, the empirical differentiation among the elements of performance that pushed ritual to theatre. What ritual performers once had known in their guts – without having to be told, much less having to read – Aristotle (1987) now felt compelled to write down. His *Poetics* makes the natural artificial. It provides a kind of philosophical cookbook, instructions for meaning-making and effective performance for a society that had moved from fusion to conscious artifice. Aristotle explained that performances consisted of plots and that effective plotting demanded narratives with a beginning, middle, and end. In his theory of catharsis, he explained, not teleologically but empirically, how dramas could affect an audience: tragedies would have to evoke sensations of "terror and pity" if emotional effect were to be achieved.

This sketch of how theatre emerged from ritual is not teleological or evolutionary. What I have proposed, rather, is a universally shared form of social development, one that responds to growing complexity in social and cultural structure. Ritual moved towards theatre throughout the world's civilizations in response to similar social and cultural developments – the emergence of cities and states, of religious specialists, of intellectuals, and of needs for political legitimation. "There were religious and ritual origins of the Jewish drama, the Chinese drama, all European Christian drama and probably the Indian drama," Boulton (1960: 194) informed us, and "in South America the conquering Spaniards brought Miracle Plays to Indians who already had a dramatic tradition that had development out of their primitive cults."

Social complexity waxes and wanes, and with it the development of theatre from ritual. Rome continued Greek theatricality, but with the decline of the empire and the rise of European feudalism the ritual forms of religious performance dominated once again. What happened in ancient Greece was reiterated

later in medieval Europe, when secular drama developed from the Easter passion plays. In twelfth-century Autun, a center of Burgundian religious activity, an astute observer named Honorius actually made an analogy between the effects of the Easter Mass and the efforts of the ancient tragedians (Schechner 1976: 210; Hardison 1965: 40). "It is known," Honorius wrote, "that those who recited tragedies in theatres presented the actions of opponents by gestures before the people." He went on to suggest that, "in the theatre of the Church before the Christian people," the struggle of Christ against his persecutors is presented by a similar set of "gestures" that "teaches to them the victory of his redemption." Honorius compared each movement of the Mass to an equivalent movement in tragic drama and described what he believed were similar – tightly bound and fused, in our terms – audience effects. "When the sacrifice has been completed, peace and communion are given by the celebrant to the people," he wrote, and "then, by the *Ite, missa est*, they are ordered to return to their homes [and] they shout *Deo gratias* and return home rejoicing." It is no wonder that Boulton (1960) equated such early religious pageants with acting. Suggesting that "the earliest acting was done by priests and their assistants," she notes that "one of the causes of the increasing secularization of the drama was that laymen had soon to be called in to fill in parts in the expanding 'cast'" (1960: 195).

By the early seventeenth century in Europe, after the rise of city-states, absolutist regimes, the scientific revolution, and internal religious reforms, the institution of criticism was already fully formed: "Nearly every play had a prologue asking for the goodwill of the critics" (Boulton 1960: 195). Long before the rise of the novel and the newspaper, theatrical performances became arenas for articulating powerful social criticisms. Playwrights wove texts from the fabric of contemporary social life, but they employed their imagination to do so in a sharply accented, highly stimulating, and provocative manner. The performance of these scripted representations were furnaces that forged metaphors circulating back to society, marking a kind of figure-eight movement (Turner 1982: 73–4; Schechner 1977) from society to theatre and back to society again. Secular criticism did not emerge only from rationalist philosophy or from the idealized arguments in urban cafés (Habermas [1962] 1989) but also from theatrical performances that projected moral valuation even while they entertained. While providing sophisticated amusement, Molière pilloried not only the rising bourgeois but also the Catholic Church, both of which returned his vituperation in kind. Shakespeare wrote such amusing plays that he was patronized as low-brow by the more intellectual playwrights and critics of his day. Yet Shakespeare satirized every sort of conventional authority and dramatized the immorality of every sort of social power. Reviled by the Puritan divines, such Elizabethan drama was subject to strenuous efforts at censorship.

The Restoration comedies that followed were no less caustic in their social ambitions or stinging in their effects. In his study of seventeenth-century drama, Reiss (1971: 122) observed that "the loss of illusion follows when the *mise-en-scène* is designed with no attempt at *vraisemblance*," and he concludes that "the theater relied . . . on the unreality of the theatrical situation itself . . . to maintain a distance" (1971: 144). Taking advantage of performative de-fusion, these playwrights used stagecraft to emphasize artificiality rather than to make it invisible, producing a critical and ironic space between the audience and the mores of their day.

The emergence of social drama

The historical story I am telling here addresses the puzzle at the core of this chapter: Why do ritually organized societies give way not to social orders regulated simply by instrumentally rational action but instead to those in which ritual-like processes remain vital in some central way?

It is vital for this story to see that the emergence of theatre was more or less simultaneous with the emergence of the public sphere as a compelling social stage. For it was, in fact, roughly during the same period as theatrical drama emerged that social drama became a major form of social organization – and for reasons that are much the same.

When society becomes more complex, culture more critical, and authority less ascriptive, social spaces open up that organizations must negotiate if they are to succeed in getting their way. Rather than responding to authoritative commands and prescriptions, social processes become more contingent, more subject to conflict and argumentation. Rationalist philosophers (Habermas [1962] 1989) speak of the rise of the public sphere as a forum for deliberative and considered debate. A more sociological formulation would point to the rise of a public stage, a symbolic forum in which actors have increasing freedom to create and to project performances of their reasons, dramas tailored to audiences whose voices have become more legitimate references in political and social conflicts. Responding to the same historical changes that denaturalized ritual performance, collective action in the wider society comes increasingly to take on an overtly performative cast.

In earlier, more archaic forms of complex societies, such as the imperial orders of Egypt or Yucatán, social hierarchies simply could issue commands, and ritualized ideological performances would provide symbolic mystification. In more loosely knit forms of complex social organization, authority becomes more open to challenge, the distribution of ideal and material resources more subject to contention, and contests for social power more open-ended and contingent. Often, these dramatic contests unfold without any settled script.

Through their success at prosecuting such dramas, individual and collective actors gain legitimacy as authoritative interpreters of social texts.

It is a commonplace not only of philosophical but also of political history (e.g. Bendix 1964) that during the early modern period the masses of powerless persons gradually became transformed into citizens. With the model of social performance more firmly in hand, it seems more accurate to say that nonelites also were transformed from passive receptacles to more active, interpreting audiences.[3] With the constitution of audience publics, even such strategic actors as organizations and class fractions were compelled to develop effective forms of expressive communication. In order to preserve their social power and their ability to exercise social control, elites had to transform their interest conflicts into widely available performances that could project persuasive symbolic forms. As peripheries gradually became incorporated into centers, pretenders to social power strived to frame their conflicts as dramas. They portrayed themselves as protagonists in simplified narratives, projecting their positions, arguments, and actions as exemplifications of sacred religious and secular texts. In turn, they "cast" their opponents as narrative antagonists, as insincere and artificial actors who were only role playing to advance their interests.

These are, of course, broad historical generalizations. My aim here is not to provide empirical explanations but to sketch out theoretical alternatives, to show how a performative dimension should be added to more traditional political and sociological perspectives. But while my ambition is mainly theoretical, it certainly can be amplified with illustrations that are empirical in a more straightforward way. What follows are examples of how social processes that are well known both to historical and lay students of this period can be reconstructed with the model of performance in mind.

(i) *Thomas Becket.* When Thomas Becket opposed the effort of Henry II to exercise political control over the English church, he felt compelled to create a grand social drama that personalized and amplified his plight (Turner 1974: 60–97). He employed as background representation the dramatic paradigm of Christ's martyrdom to legitimate his contemporary script of antagonism to the king. While Henry defeated Sir Thomas in instrumental political terms, the drama Becket enacted captured the English imagination and provided a new background text of moral action for centuries after.

(ii) *Savonarola.* In the Renaissance city-states (Brucker 1969), conflicts between church and state were played out graphically in the great public squares, not only figuratively but often also literally before the eyes of the increasingly enfranchised *populo*. Heteronomy of social power was neither merely doctrine nor institutional structure. It was also public performance. Savonarola began his mass popular movement to cleanse the Florentine Republic with a dramatic announcement in the Piazza della Signoria, where open meetings had taken place already. Savonarola's public hanging, and the burning of his corpse that followed, were staged in the same civil space. Observed by an overflowing audience of citizens and semi-citizens – some horrified, others grimly satisfied (Brucker 1969: 271) – the performance instigated by Savonarola's arrest, confession, and execution graphically drew the curtain on the reformer's spiritual renewal campaign. It is hardly coincidental that Machiavelli's advice to Italian princes offered during this same period concerned not only how to muster dispersed administrative power but also instructions about how to display power of a more symbolic kind. He wished to instruct the prince about how to perform like one so that he could appear, no matter what the actual circumstances, to exercise power in a ruthlessly efficient and supremely confident way.

(iii) *The American Revolution.* In 1773, small bands of anti-British American colonialists boarded three merchant ships in the Boston harbor and threw 90,000 tons of Indian tea into the sea. The immediate, material effect of what immediately became represented in the popular imagination as "the Boston tea party" was negligible, but its expressive power was so powerful that it created great political effects (Labaree 1979: 246ff.). The collective performance successfully dramatized colonial opposition to the British crown,[4] clarified a key issue in the antagonism, and mobilized fervent public support. Later, the inaugural military battle of the American Revolution, in Lexington, Massachusetts, was represented in terms of theatrical metaphor as "the shot heard 'round the world.'" In contemporary memorials of the event, social dramatic exigencies have exercised powerful sway. American and British soldiers are portrayed in the brightly colored uniforms of opposed performers. Paul Revere is portrayed as performing prologue, riding through the streets and shouting, "The Redcoats are coming, the Redcoats are coming," though he probably did not. The long lines of soldiers on both sides are often depicted as accompanied by fifes and drums. Bloody and often confusing battles of the War of American Independence have been narrated retrospectively as fateful and dramatic contests, their victors transformed into icons by stamps and etchings.

(iv) *The French Revolution.* The similar staging of radical collective action as social drama also deeply affected the Revolution in France. During its early days, *sans-culottes* women sought to enlist a promise of regular bread from King Louis. They staged the "momentous march of women to Versailles," an extravagantly theatrical pilgrimage that one leading feminist historian described as "the recasting of traditional female behavior within a republican mode" (Landes 1988: 109–11). As the Revolution unfolded, heroes and villains switched places according to the agonistic logic of dramatic discourse (Furet 1981) and theatrical configuring (Hunt 1984), not only in response to political calculation. No matter how violent or bloodthirsty in reality, the victors and martyrs were

painted, retrospectively, in classical Republican poses and togas, as in David's celebrated portrait of Marat Sade (Nochlin 1993).

It was Turner (1974, 1982) who introduced the concept of social drama into the vocabulary of social science more than thirty years ago. For a time, this idea promised to open macro-sociology to the symbolic dynamics of public life (e.g. Moore and Myerhoff 1975, 1977), but with a few significant exceptions (e.g. Edles 1998; Alexander 1988; Wagner-Pacifici 1986) the concept has largely faded from view, even in the field of performance studies. One reason has to do with the triumph of instrumental reason in rational-choice and critical theories of postmodern life. There were also, however, basic weaknesses in the original conceptualization itself. Turner simplified and moralized social performance in a manner that obscured the autonomy of the elements that composed it. Searching for a kind of natural history of social drama on the one hand and for a gateway to ideological communitas on the other, Turner spoke (1982: 75) of the "full formal development" of social dramas, of their "full phase structure." While acknowledging that social complexity created the conditions for social drama, he insisted that it "remains to the last simple and ineradicable," locating it in "the developmental cycle of all groups" (1982: 78). He believed that the "values and ends" of performances were "distributed over a range of actors" and were projected "into a system . . . of shared or consensual meaning" (1982: 75). Social dramas can take place, Turner (1987) insisted, only "among those members of a given group . . . who feel strongly about their membership [and] are impelled to enter into relationships with others which become fully 'meaningful', in the sense that the beliefs, values, norms, and symbolism 'carried' in the group's culture become . . . a major part of what s/he might regard as his/her identity" (1987: 46; for similar emphases, see Myerhoff 1978: 32; Schechner 1987).

However, from the perspective on social dramas I am developing here, this is exactly what does not take place. The elements of social-dramatic performances are de-fused, not automatically hung together, which is precisely why the organizational form of social drama first emerged. Social drama is a successor to ritual, not its continuation in another form.

We are now in a position to elaborate the propositions about performative success and failure set forth in the first section.

Re-fusion and authenticity: the criteria for performative success and failure

The goal of secular performances, whether on stage or in society, remains the same as the ambition of sacred ritual. They stand or fall on their ability to produce psychological identification and cultural extension. The aim is to create,

via skillful and affecting performance, the emotional connection of audience with actor and text and thereby to create the conditions for projecting cultural meaning from performance to audience. To the extent these two conditions have been achieved, one can say that the elements of performance have become fused.

Nietzsche elegized the "bringing to life [of] the plastic world of myth" ([1872] 1956: 126) as one of those "moments of paroxysm that lift man beyond the confines of space, time, and individuation" ([1872] 1956:125). He was right to be mournful. As society becomes more complex, such moments of fusion become much more difficult to achieve. The elements of performance become separated and independently variable, and it becomes ever more challenging to bring texts into life.

The challenge confronting individual and collective symbolic action in complex contemporary societies, whether on stage or in society at large, is to infuse meaning by re-fusing performance. Since Romanticism, this modern challenge has been articulated existentially and philosophically as the problem of authenticity (Taylor 1989). While the discourse about authenticity is parochial, in the sense that it is specifically European, it provides a familiar nomenclature for communicating the sense of what performative success and failure mean. On the level of everyday life, authenticity is thematized by such questions as whether a person is "real" – straightforward, truthful, and sincere. Action will be viewed as real if it appears *sui generis*, the product of a self-generating actor who is not pulled like a puppet by the strings of society. An authentic person seems to act without artifice, without self-consciousness, without reference to some laboriously thought-out plan or text, without concern for manipulating the context of her actions, and without worries about that action's audience or its effects. The attribution of authenticity, in other words, depends on an actor's ability to sew the disparate elements of performance back into a seamless and convincing whole. If authenticity marks success, then failure suggests that a performance will seem insincere and faked: the actor seems out of role, merely to be reading from an impersonal script, pushed and pulled by the forces of society, acting not from sincere motives but to manipulate the audience.

Such an understanding allows us to move beyond the simplistic polarities of ritual versus rationality or, more broadly, of cultural versus practical action. We can say, instead, that re-fusion allows ritual-like behavior, a kind of temporary recovery of the ritual process. It allows contemporaries to experience ritual because it stitches seamlessly together the disconnected elements of cultural performance. In her performative approach to gender, Butler (1999: 179) insisted that gender identity is merely "the stylized repetition of acts through time" and "not a seemingly seamless identity." Yet seamless is exactly what the successful performance of gender in everyday life makes it appear to be.

"In what sense," Butler (1999: 178) then asks, "is gender an act?" In the same sense, she answers, "as in other ritual social dramas . . . the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation."

In psychological terms, it is this seamless re-fusion that Csikszentmihalyi (1975) described as "flow" (cf. Schechner 1976) in his innovative research on virtuoso performance in art, sport, and games. In the terms I am developing here, what Csikszentmihalyi (1975) discovered in these widely varying activities was the merging of text, context, and actor, a merging that resulted in the loss of self-consciousness and a lack of concern for – even awareness of – the scrutiny of observers outside the action itself. Because of "the merging of action and awareness," Csikszentmihalyi (1975: 38) wrote, "a person in flow has no dualistic perspective." The fusion of the elements of performance allows not only actors but also audiences to experience flow, which means they focus their attention on the performed text to the exclusion of any other possible interpretive reference: "The steps for experiencing flow . . . involve the . . . process of delimiting reality, controlling some aspect of it, and responding to the feedback with a concentration that excludes anything else as irrelevant" (Csikszentmihalyi 1975: 53–4).

Performances in complex societies seek to overcome fragmentation by creating flow and achieving authenticity. They try to recover a momentary experience of ritual, to eliminate or to negate the effects of social and cultural de-fusion. Speaking epigrammatically, one might say that successful performances re-fuse history. They break down the barriers that history has erected – the divisions between background culture and scripted text, between scripted text and actors, between audience and *mise-en-scène*. Successful performances overcome the deferral of meaning that Derrida (1991) recognized as *différance*. In a successful performance, the signifiers seem actually to become what they signify. Symbols and referents are one. Script, direction, actor, background culture, *mise-en-scène*, audience, means of symbolic production – all these separate elements of performance become indivisible and invisible. The mere action of performing accomplishes the performance's intended effect (cf. Austin 1957). The actor seems to be Hamlet; the man who takes the oath of office seems to be the president.

While re-fusion is made possible only by the deposition of social power, the very success of a performance masks its existence. When performance is successful, social powers manifest themselves not as external or hegemonic forces that facilitate or oppose the unfolding performance but merely as sign-vehicles, as means of representation, as conveyors of the intended meaning. This is very much what Bourdieu ([1968] 1990: 211) had in mind when he

spoke of the exercise of graceful artistic taste as culture "becoming natural." The connoisseur's poised display of aesthetic judgment might be thought of as a successful performance in the sense that it thoroughly conceals the manner in which this gracefulness is "artificial and artificially acquired," the result of a lengthy socialization resting upon class privilege. "The virtuosi of the judgment of taste," Bourdieu wrote, present their knowledge of art casually, as if it were natural. Their aim is to present "an experience of aesthetic grace" that appears "completely freed from the constraints of culture," a performance "little marked by the long, patient training of which it is the product."

Attacking the hegemonic exercise of sexual rather than class power, Butler (1999) makes a similar argument. The successful performance of gender, she claims, makes invisible the patriarchal power behind it. The difference is that, by drawing upon the theories of Austin and Turner, Butler can explicitly employ the language of performance. "Gender is . . . a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions . . . The appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (1999: 179).

When post-ritual drama emerged in ancient Greece, Aristotle (1987) explained that a play is "an imitation of action, not the action itself." When re-fusion occurs, this cautionary note goes unheeded. The performance achieves verisimilitude – the appearance of reality. It seems to be action, not its imitation. This achievement of the appearance of reality via skillful performance and flow is what Barthes ([1957] 1972) described in his celebrated essay on "true wrestling." He insisted that the "public spontaneously attunes itself to the spectacular nature of the contest, like the audience at a suburban cinema . . . The public is completely uninterested in knowing whether the context is rigged or not, and rightly so; it abandons itself to the primary virtue of the spectacle, which is to abolish all motives and all consequences: what matters is not what it thinks but what it sees" ([1957] 1972:15).

How does cultural pragmatics work? The inner structures of social performance

Having elaborated the criteria of performative failure and success, I now turn to a more detailed discussion of the elements and relations that sustain it. I will draw upon the insights of drama theory to decompose the basic elements of performance into their more complex component parts, and I will link these insights to the social dramas that compose the public sphere. To be able to

move back and forth between theatrical and social drama enriches both sides of the argument; it also helps document my core empirical claim. Social action in complex societies so often is ritual-like because it remains performative. The social conditions that gave rise to theatre also gave rise to post-ritual forms of symbolic action.

The challenge of the script: re-fusing background representations with contingent performance

Behind every actor's social and theatrical performance lies the already established skein of collective representations that compose culture – the universe of basic narratives and codes and the cookbook of rhetorical configurations from which every performance draws. In a theatrical performance, the actor strives to realize "individual character," as Turner (1982: 94) put it, but he or she can do so only by taking "partly for granted the culturally defined roles supposedly played by that character: father, businessman, friend, lover, fiancé, trade union leader, farmer, poet" (1982: 94). For Turner (1982: 94), "these roles are made up of collective representations shared by actors and audience, who are usually members of the same culture," but we do not have to accept his consensual assumptions to get his point. The ability to understand the most elementary contours of a performance depends on an audience knowing already, without thinking about it, the categories within which actors behave. In a complex social order, this knowledge is always a matter of degree. In contrast with Turner (1982), I do not presume that social performance is ritualistic; I wish to explain whether and how and to what degree.

It is precisely at this joint of contingency or possible friction between background representations and the categorical assumptions of actors and audience that scripts enter into the scene. The emergence of the script as an independent element reflects the relative freedom of performance from background representations. From within a broader universe of meanings, performers make conscious and unconscious choices about the paths they wish to take and the specific set of meanings they wish to project. These choices are the scripts – the action-oriented subset of background understandings. If script is meaning primed to performance, in theatrical drama this priming is usually, though not always, sketched out beforehand. In social drama, by contrast, scripts more often are inferred by actors. In a meaning-searching process that stretches from the more intuitive to the more witting, actors and audiences reflect on performance in the process of its unfolding, gleaning a script upon which the performance "must have" been based.

In such social-dramatic scripting, actors and audiences actively engage in drawing the hermeneutical circle (Dilthey 1976). Performances become the

foreground parts upon which wholes are constructed, the latter being understood as the scripts that allow the sense of an action to be ascertained. These scripts become, in turn, the parts of future wholes. It seems only sensible to suggest that an authentic script is one that rings true to the background culture. Thus, as one critic of rock music suggests, "authenticity is often located in current music's relationship to an earlier, 'purer' moment in a mythic history of the music" (Auslander 1999: 71). Yet, while this seems sensible, it would be misleading, since it suggests the naturalistic fallacy. It is actually the illusory circularity of hermeneutic interpretation that creates the sense of authenticity, and not the other way around. A script seems to ring true to the background culture precisely because it has an audience-fusing effect. This effectiveness has to do with the manner in which it articulates the relationship among culture, situation, and audience. Another recent music critic (Margolick 2000: 56) argued against the claim that Billie Holiday's recording of "Strange Fruit" – the now almost-mythical, hypnotic ballad about black lynching – succeeded because lynching was "already a conspicuous theme in black fiction, theater, and art." She had success, rather, because "it was really the first time that anyone had so . . . poetically transmitted the message." The existence of the background theme is a given; what is contingent is the dramatic technique, which is designed to elicit an effective audience response. In our terms, this is a matter of fusing the script in two directions, with background culture on the one side and with audience on the other. If the script creates such fusion, it seems truthful to background representations and real to the audience. The former allows cultural extension; the latter psychological identification.

The craft of script writing addresses these possibilities. The writer aims to "achieve concentration" (Boulton 1960: 12–13) of background meaning. Effective scripts compress the background meanings of culture by changing proportion and by increasing intensity. They provide such condensation (cf. Freud [1900] 1950) through dramatic techniques.

(i) *Cognitive simplification.* "In a play," Boulton (1960: 12–13) wrote, "there are often repetitions even of quite simple facts, careful explanations, addressing of people by their names more frequently than in real conversation and various oversimplifications which to the reader of a play in a study may seem almost infantile." The same sort of simplifying condensation affects the less consciously formed scripts of successful social dramas. As they strive to become protagonists in their chosen narrative, such social performers as politicians, activists, teachers, therapists, or ministers go over time and time again the basic story line they wish to project. They provide not complex but stereotyped accounts of their positive qualities as heroes or victims, and they melodramatically exaggerate (Brooks 1976) the malevolent motives of the actors they wish to identify as their antagonists, depicting them as evildoers or fools.

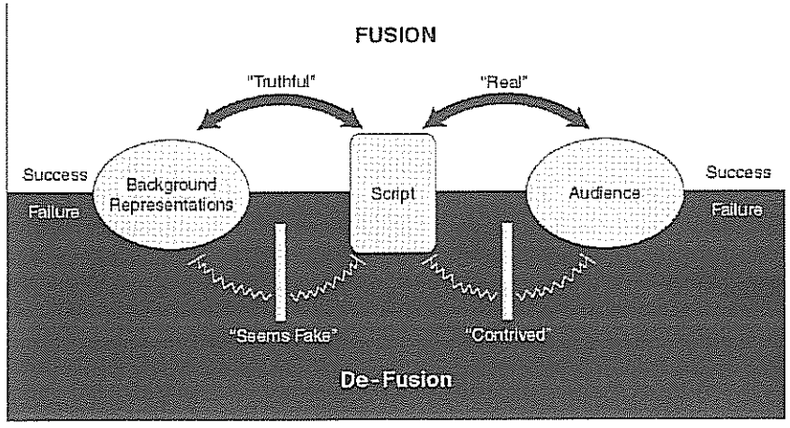

Figure 1.5 Fusion/de-fusion of background representation, script, and audience

Professional speechwriters plotting social dramas are as sensitive to this technical exigency as screen writers and playwrights plotting theatrical ones. In Noonan's (1998) manual *On Speaking Well*, the much-heralded speech writer for Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush emphasized time and time again that simplification is the key to achieving the fusion among speaker, audience, and background culture (cf. Flesch 1946). "You should treat the members of the audience as if they're friends," Noonan (1998: 23) instructs, which means "that you're going to talk to them the way you talk to your friends, with the same candor and trust and respect." Noting the "often unadorned quality to sections of great speeches, a directness and simplicity of expression," Noonan (1998: 48) attributes this to the fact that "the speaker is so committed to making his point, to being understood and capturing the truth." Sentences "must be short and sayable," she warns, because "your listeners [are] trying to absorb what you say" (1998: 35). Noonan praised Bush's acceptance speech at the 1988 Republican Convention in terms of this two-way fusion. On the one hand, her script allowed Bush to connect his own life to the background representations of American society. Bush "was not only telling about his life in a way that was truthful and specific [but] was also connecting his life to history – the history of those who'd fought World War II and then come home to the cities, and married, and gone on to invent the suburbs of American, the Levittowns and Hempsteads and Midlands." On the other hand, the script also allowed Bush to fuse speaker with audience: "He was also connecting his life to yours, to everyone who's had a child and lived the life that children bring with them . . . You were part of the saga" (1998: 28–9).

(ii) *Time–space compression*. Responding to the emergence of theatre from ritual, Aristotle (1987) theorized that every successful drama contains the temporal sequence of beginning, middle, and end. In early modern Europe, when ritual was secularized and de-fused once again, the demand for narrative coherence became a stricture that dramatists must stress "three unities" – of action, place, and time (Boulton 1960: 13ff.). Given the material and behavioral constraints on performance, the classic dramatists argued, theatrical action must be clearly of one piece. If the background culture is to be articulated clearly and if the audience is to absorb it, then performance must take place in the confines of one dramatic scene – in one narrative place – and must unfold in one continuous time.

Such social dramas as congressional hearings or televised investigations strive strenuously to compress time and space in the same way. With large visual charts, lead investigators display time lines for critical events, retrospective plottings whose aim is to suggest continuous action punctuated by clearly interlinked causes and effects. Daytime television is interrupted so that the representations of these investigations themselves can unfold in continuous and real, and thus forcefully dramatic time. Ordinary parliamentary business is suspended so that such political-cultural performances, whether grandiose or grandiloquent, can achieve the unity of action, place, and time.

(iii) *Moral agonism*. The fusion achieved by successful scripting does not suggest harmonious plots. To be effective, in fact, scripts must structure meaning in an agonistic way (Benhabib 1996; Arendt 1958). Agonism implies a dynamic movement that hinges on a conflict pitting good against evil (Bataille 1985), creating a wave-like dialectic that highlights the existential and metaphysical contrast between sacred and profane. "Performing the binaries" (Alexander 2003a) creates the basic codes and propels narratives to pass through them. The drama's protagonists are aligned forcefully with the sacred themes and figures of cultural myth and, through this embodiment, become new icons and create new texts themselves. Signaling their antipathy to the profane, to the evil themes and figures that threaten to pollute and to overwhelm the good, one group of actors casts doubt on the sincerity and verisimilitude of another. If a protagonist successfully performs the binaries, audiences will pronounce the performer to be an "honest man," the movement to be "truly democratic," an action to be the "very epitome of the Christian spirit." If the performance is energetically and skillfully implanted in moral binaries, in other words, psychological identification can be achieved and elements from the background culture can be extended dramatically.

Agonistic scripting is exhibited most clearly in grandiloquent performance. Geertz (1973: 420–1) portrayed the Balinese cockfight as "a blood sacrifice offered . . . to the demons," in which "man and beast, good and evil, ego and id, the creative power of aroused masculinity and the destructive power of loosened

animality fuse in a bloody drama." Barthes ([1957] 1972: 17) recounted how the wrestler's "treacheries, cruelties, and acts of cowardice" are based in an "image of ignobility" portrayed by "an obese and sagging body" whose "asexual hideousness always inspires . . . a particularly repulsive quality." But performing the binaries is also fundamental to the emergent scripts of everyday political life. In 1980, in the debate among Republican and Democratic candidates for vice president of the United States, the Republican contender from Indiana, Senator Dan Quayle, sought to gain credibility by citing the martyred former president John F. Kennedy. Quayle's opponent, Texas Senator Lloyd Benton, responded with a remark that not merely scored major debating points but also achieved folkloric status in the years following: "Senator, I had the honor of knowing Jack Kennedy, and you're no Jack Kennedy." Speaking directly to his political opponent, but implicitly to the television audiences adjudicating the authenticity of the candidates, Senator Benton wished to separate his opponent's script from the nation's sacred background representations. To prove they were not aligned would block Senator Quayle from assuming an iconic role. As it turned out, of course, while Senator Quayle's debate performance failed, he was elected anyway.

(iv) *Twisting and turning*. Explicating "the general artistic laws of plot development," Boulton (1960: 41ff.) observed that "a play must have twists and turns to keep interest until the end." To keep the audience attentive and engaged, staged dramas "must develop from one crisis to another." After an initial clarification, in which "we learn who the chief characters are, what they are there for and what are the problems with which they start," there must be "some startling development giving rise to new problems." This first crisis will be followed by others, which "succeed one another as causes and effects."

Turner (1974) found almost exactly the same plot structure at work in social drama. He conceptualized it as involving successive phase movements, from breach to crisis, redress, and reintegration or schism. The initial breach that triggers a drama "may be deliberately, even calculatedly, contrived by a person or party disposed to demonstrate or challenge entrenched authority." But a breach also "may emerge [simply] from a scene of heated feelings" (Turner 1982: 70), in which case the initiation of a social drama is imputed, or scripted, by the audience, even when it is not intended by the actors themselves.

The naturalism underlying Turner's dramaturgical theory prevents him from seeing twisting and turning as a contingent effort to re-fuse background culture and audience with performative text. In her revisions of Turner's scheme, Wagner-Pacifici (1986, 1994, 2000) demonstrated just how difficult it is for even the most powerful social actors to plot the kind of dramatic sequencing that an effective script demands. Her study of the 1978 kidnapping and assassination of the Italian prime minister Aldo Moro (Wagner-Pacifici 1986) can be

read as a case study of failed performance. Despite Moro's status as the most influential Italian political figure of his day, the popular prime minister could not convince other influential collective actors to interpret his kidnapping in terms of his own projected script. He wished to portray himself as still a hero, as the risk-taking and powerful protagonist in a performance that would continue to demonstrate the need for a historic "opening to the left" and, thus, the necessity to negotiate with his terrorist kidnappers to save his life. Against this projected script, other social interpreters, who turned out to be more influential, insisted that Moro's kidnapping illuminated a script not of romantic heroism but of a tragic martyrdom, which pointed to a narrative not of reconciliation but of revenge against a terrorist left. Wagner-Pacifici herself attributes the failure of Moro's performance primarily to unequal social power and the control that anti-Moro forces exercised over the means of symbolic production. The more multidimensional model I am elaborating here would suggest other critically important causes of the failed performance as well.

The challenge of mise-en-scène: re-fusing script, action, and performative space

Even after a script has been constructed that allows background culture to walk and talk, the "action" of the performance must begin in real time and at a particular place. This can be conceptualized as the challenge of instantiating a scripted text, in theatrical terms as *mise-en-scène*, which translates literally as "putting into the scene." Defining *mise-en-scène* as the "confrontation of text and performance," Pavis (1988: 87) spoke of it as "bringing together or confrontation, in a given space and time, of different signifying systems, for an audience." This potential confrontation has developed because of the segmentation that social complexity rends among the elements of performance. It is a challenge to put them back together in a particular scene.

Rouse (1992: 146) saw the "relationship between dramatic text and theatrical performance" as "a central element in the Occidental theatre." Acknowledging that "most productions here continue to be productions 'of' a preexisting play text," he insists that "exactly what the word 'of' means in terms of [actual] practices is, however, far from clear," and he suggests that "the 'of' of theatrical activity is subject to a fair degree of oscillation." It seems clear that the specialized dramatic role of director has emerged to control this potential oscillation. In Western societies, theatrical performances long had been sponsored financially by producers and had been organized, in their dramatic specifics, by playwrights and actors. As society became more complex, and the elements of performance more differentiated, the coordinating tasks became more demanding. By the late nineteenth century, according

to Chinoy (1963: 3, in McConachie 1992: 176), there was "so pressing a need" that the new role of director "quickly preempted the hegemony that had rested for centuries with playwrights and actors." Chinoy (1963) believes that "the appearance of the director ushered in a new theatrical epoch," such that "his experiments, his failures, and his triumphs set and sustained the stage" (1963: 3).

When Boulton (1960:182–3) warned that "overdirected scripts leave the producer no discretion," she meant to suggest that, because writers cannot know the particular challenges of *mise-en-scène*, they should not write specific stage directions into their script. Writers must leave directors "plenty of scope for inventions." Given the contingency of performance, those staging it will need a large space within which to exercise their theatrical imagination. They will need to coach actors on the right tone of voice, to choreograph the space and timing among actors, to design costumes, to construct props, and to arrange lights. When Barthes ([1957] 1972: 15) argued that "what makes the circus or the arena what they are is not the sky [but] the drenching and vertical quality of the flood of light," he points to such directorial effect. If the script demands grandiloquence, Barthes observes, it must contrast darkness with light, for "a light without shadow generates an emotion without reserve" ([1957] 1972: 15).

For social dramas, in which scripts are attributed in a more contemporaneous and often retrospective way, *mise-en-scène* more likely is initiated within the act of performance itself. This coordination is triggered by the witting or unwitting sensibilities of collective actors, by the observing ego of the individual – in Mead's terms, her "I" as compared with her "me" – or by suggestions from an actor's agents, advisers, advance men, or event planners. This task of instantiating scripts and representations in an actual scene underscores, once again, the relative autonomy of symbolic action from its so-called social base. The underlying strains or interest conflicts in a social situation simply do not "express" themselves. Social problems not only must be symbolically plotted, or framed (Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Snow et al. 1986), but also must be performed on the scene. In analyzing "how social movements move," Eyerman (this volume) highlights "the physical, geographical aspects of staging and managing collective actions." In theorizing the standoff, Wagner-Pacifici (2000: 192–3) distinguishes between "ur-texts" and "texts-in-action," explaining how the often deadly standoffs between armed legal authorities and their quarries are triggered by "rules of engagement" (2000: 157) that establish "set points" (2000: 47) in a physical scene, such as barricades. Temporal deadlines also are established, so that the "rhythm of siege" becomes structured by the "clock ticking" (2000: 64). Standoffs are ended by violent assault only when dramatic violations occur vis-à-vis these specific spatial and temporal markers in a particular scene.

The challenge of the material base: social power and the means of symbolic production

While *mise-en-scène* has its own independent requirements, it remains interdependent with the other performative elements. One thing on which its success clearly depends is access to the appropriate means of symbolic production. Goffman's (1956) early admonishment has not been sufficiently taken to heart: "We have given insufficient attention to the assemblages of sign-equipment which large numbers of performers can call their own" (1956: 22–3). Of course, in the more typically fused performances of small-scale societies, access to such means was not usually problematic. Yet even for such naturalistic and fused performances, the varied elements of symbolic production did not appear from nowhere. In his study of the Tsembaga, for example, Schechner (1976) found that peace could be established among the warring tribes when they performed the *konj kaiko* ritual. While the ritual centered on an extended feast of wild pig, it took "years to allow the raising of sufficient pigs to stage a *konj kaiko*" (1976: 198). War and peace thus depended on a ritual process that was "tied to the fortunes of the pig population" (1976: 198).

One can easily imagine just how much more difficult and consequential access to the means of symbolic production becomes in large-scale complex societies. Most basic of all is the acquisition of a venue. Without a theatre or simply some makeshift stage, there can be no performance, much less an audience. Likewise, without some functional equivalent of the venerable soapbox, there can be no social drama. The American presidency is called "the bully pulpit" because the office provides its occupant with extraordinary access to the means for projecting dramatic messages to citizens of the United States.

Once a performative space is attained, moreover, it must be shaped materially. Aston and Savona (1991: 114) remarked that "the shape of a playing space can be altered by means of set construction." There is, in the literal and not the figurative or metaphysical sense, a material "base" for every symbolic production. The latter are not simply shaky superstructures in the vulgar Marxist manner, but neither can cultural performances stand up all by themselves. The *Micro-Robert Poche* (1992) defines *mise-en-scène* as "*l'organization matérielle de la représentation*," and the means of symbolic production refers to the first half of this definition, the material organization. Still, even the physical platforms of performance must be given symbolic shape. Every theatre is marked by "the style in which it is designed and built," said Aston and Savona (1991: 112), and social dramas are affected equally by the design of their place. During the Clinton impeachment, it was noted widely that the hearings were being held in the old Senate office building, an ornate setting whose symbolic gravitas had been reinforced by the civil theatrics of Watergate decades before.

Yet the design of theatrical space depends, in part, on technological means. In the pre-industrial age, according to Aston and Savona (1991), the "confines" of the "large and inflexible venue" (1991: 114) of open-air theatres placed dramatic limits on the intimacy that performers could communicate, whatever the director's theatrical powers or the artistry of the script. Later, the introduction of lighting "established the convention of the darkened auditorium" and "limited the spectator's spatial awareness to the stage area" (1991: 114). Once attention is focused in this manner, as Barthes ([1957] 1972) also suggested in his observations on spectacle (as mentioned previously), a "space can be created within a space" (Aston and Savona 1991: 114), and greater communicative intimacy is possible.

Equally significant dramatic effects have followed from other technical innovations in the means of symbolic production. The small size of the television as compared with the movie screen limited the use of long-distance and ensemble shots, demanded more close-up camera work, and required more editing cuts to create a scene. Greater possibilities for dramatic intimacy and agonistic dialogue entered into televised performance as a result. The availability of amplification pushed the symbolic content of performance in the opposite way. With the new technological means for electronically recording and projecting the human voice, recordings proliferated and large-scale commercial musicals became amplified electronically through microphones. Such developments changed the criteria of authenticity. Soon, not only concerts but also most non-musical plays needed to be amplified as well, "because the results sound more 'natural' to an audience whose ears have been conditioned by stereo television, high fidelity LPs, and compact disks" (Copeland 1990, in Auslander 1999: 34).

It is here that social power enters into performance in particular ways. Certainly, censorship and intimidation have always been employed to prevent the production and distribution of symbolic communication and, thus, to prevent or control political dissent. What is more interesting theoretically and empirically, however, and perhaps more normatively relevant in complex semi-democratic and even democratic societies, is the manner in which social power affects performance by mediating access to the means of symbolic production (e.g. Berezin 1991, 1994). The use of powerful arc lights, for example, was essential to Leni Riefenstahl's *mise-en-scène* in her infamous propaganda film, *Triumph of the Will*, which reconstructed Adolph Hitler's triumphant evening arrival at the Nuremberg rally in 1933. Whether Riefenstahl had the opportunity to put her imagination into place, however, was determined by the distribution of German political and economic power. Because Hitler's party had triumphed at the level of the state, Nazis controlled the means of symbolic production. As an artist, Reifenstahl herself was infatuated by the Nazi cause, and she wrote

a script that cast Hitler in a heroic light. But the tools for making her drama were controlled by others. It was Goebbels who could hire the brilliant young filmmaker and provide her with the means for staging her widely influential work.

In most social-dramatic performances, the effect of social power is even less direct. To continue with our lachrymose example, while the Nazi concentration camps remained under control of the Third Reich, their genocidal purpose could not be dramatized. Performative access to the camps – the critical "props" for any story – was denied to all but the most sympathetic, pro-Nazi journalists, still photographers, and producers of newsreels and films. On the few occasions when independent and potentially critical observers were brought to the camps, moreover, they were presented with falsified displays and props that presented the treatment of Jewish prisoners in a fundamentally misleading way. This control over the means of symbolic production shifted through force of arms (Alexander 2003b). Only after allied troops liberated the western camps did it become possible to produce the horrifying newsreels of dead and emaciated Jewish prisoners and to distribute them worldwide (Zelizer 1998). It would be hard to think of a better example of performance having a material base and of this base depending on power in turn.

As this last example suggests, in complex societies social power not only provides the means of symbolic production but of symbolic distribution as well. The more dependent a dramatic form is on technology, the more these two performative phases become temporally distinct. It is one thing to perform a drama, and even to film it, and it is quite another to make it available to audiences throughout the land. In the movie industry, distribution deals develop only after films are made, for those who represent theatre syndicates insist on first examining the performances under which they intend to draw their bottom line. Similarly, video technology has separated the distribution of social dramas from live-action transmission. Media events (Dayan and Katz 1992; Boorstin 1961) are social performances whose contents are dictated by writers and photographers and whose distribution is decided by corporate or state organization. If the former represent "hermeneutical power" and the latter social power in the more traditional sense, then there is a double mediation between performance and audience. As we will see, there are, in fact, many more mediations than that.

Whether those who "report" media effects are employed by institutions whose interests are separated from – and possibly even are opposed to – those of the performers is a critical issue for whether or not social power affects performance in a democratic way. Because control over media is so vital for connecting performances with audience publics, it is hardly surprising that newspapers for so long remained financially and organizationally fused with particular ideological,

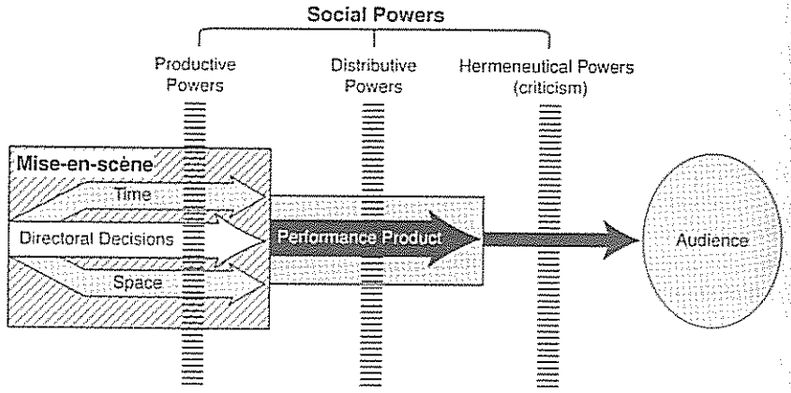

Figure 1.6 *Mise-en-scène* interfacing with social powers

economic, and political powers (Schudson 1981). This fusion allowed those who held hegemonic structural positions to decide which of their performances should be distributed and how they would be framed.

As social power becomes more pluralized, the means of recording and distributing social dramas have been distributed more widely, media interpretation has become more subject to disputation, and performative success more contingent. Even in the "iron cage" of nineteenth-century capitalism, British parliamentary investigations into factory conditions were able to project their often highly critical performances on the public stage. Their hearings were reported widely in the press (Osborne 1970: 88–90), and their findings were distributed in highly influential "white papers" throughout the class system (Smelser 1959: 291–2). Even after Bismarck outlawed the socialist party in late nineteenth-century Germany, powerful performances by militant labor leaders and working-class movements challenged him in "rhetorical duels" that were recorded and were distributed by radical and conservative newspapers alike (Roth 1963: 119–35). In mid-twentieth-century America, the civil rights movement would have failed if Southern white media had monopolized coverage of African-American protest activities. It was critical that reporters from independent Northern-owned media were empowered to record and to distribute sympathetic interpretations, which allowed psychological identification and cultural extension with the black movement's cause (Halberstam 1999).

Differentiating the elements of performance, then, is not just a social and cultural process but a political one as well. It has significant repercussions for the pluralization of power and the democratization of society. As the elements

of performance become separated and relatively autonomous, there emerge new sources of professional authority. Each of the de-fused elements of performance eventually becomes subject to institutions of independent criticism, which judge it in relation to criteria that establish not only aesthetic form but also the legitimacy of the exercise of this particular kind of performative power. Such judgments issue from "critics," whether they are specialized journalists employed by the media of popular or high culture or intellectuals who work in academic milieux.

Such critical judgments, moreover, do not enter performance only from the outside. They also are generated from within. Around each of the de-fused elements of drama there have developed specialized performative communities, which maintain and deploy their own critical, sometimes quite unforgiving, standards of judgment. The distance from the first drama prizes awarded by the City Dionysius festival in ancient Greece to the Academy Awards in postmodern Hollywood may be great in geographic, historical, and aesthetic terms, but the institutional logic (Friedland and Alford 1991) has remained the same. The aim is to employ, and deploy, autonomous criteria in the evaluation of social performance. As the elements of performance have been differentiated, the reach of hegemonizing, hierarchical power has necessarily declined. Collegial associations, whether conceived as institutional elites, guilds, or professional associations, increasingly regulate and evaluate the performance of specialized cultural goods. In complex societies, continuous critical evaluations are generated from within every performative medium and emergent genre – whether theatre or feature film, documentary or cartoon, country-and-western song or rap, classical recording, sitcom, soap opera, news story, news photo, editorial, feature, or nightly newscast. Such self-policing devices aim to "improve" the possibilities for projecting performance in effective ways. These judgments and awards are determined by peer evaluations. Despite the power of the studios and mega-media corporations, it is the actors, cinematographers, editors, directors, script and speechwriters, reporters, and costume designers themselves who create the aesthetic standards and prestige hierarchies in their respective performative communities.

In less formal ways, critical interpretive judgments circulate freely and endlessly throughout dramatic life, in both its theatrical and social forms. The public relations industry, new in the twentieth century, aims to condition and structure the interpretations such critics apply. Such judgments are also the concern of agents and handlers, of experts in focus groups, of privately hired pollsters. The more complex and pluralized the society, the tighter this circle of criticism and self-evaluation is wound. Normative and empirical theories of power and legitimacy in the contemporary world must come to terms with how the conditions of performativity have changed everywhere.

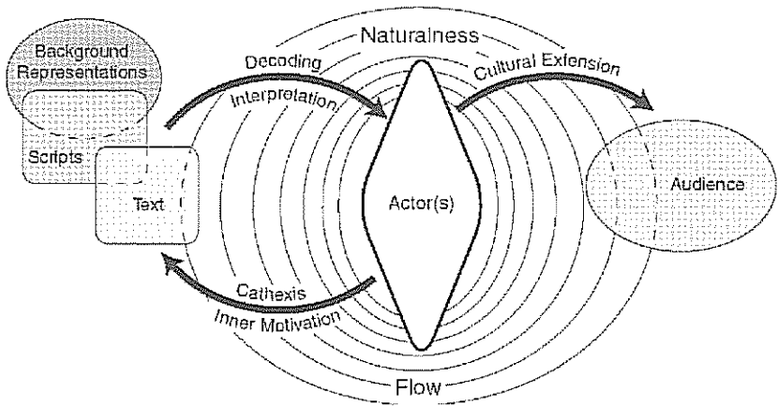

Figure 1.7 Double fusion: text–actor–audience

The challenge of being natural: re-fusing actor and role

Even if the means of symbolic production are sufficient, the script powerfully written, and the *mise-en-scène* skillfully set in place, there is no guarantee that the performance will succeed. There remains the extraordinary challenge of acting it out. Actors must perform their roles effectively, and they often are not up to the task. Thus, while Veltrusky (1964: 84) acknowledges that signifying power resides in "various objects, from parts of the costume to the set," he insists, nevertheless, that "the important thing is . . . that the actor centers their meanings upon himself."

In smaller-scale societies, ritual performers act out roles they have played in actual social life or from sacred myths with which they are intimately familiar. In post ritual societies, the situation is much more complex. In theatrical performances, actors are professionals who have no off-screen relation to their scripted role.

In a neglected essay, Simmel (1968: 92) put the problem very clearly: "The role of the actor, as it is expressed in written drama, is not a total person . . . not a man, but a complex of things which can be said about a person through literary devices." In social dramas, actors perform a role they often do occupy, but their ability to maintain their role incumbency is always in doubt; their legitimacy is subject to continuous scrutiny; and their feeling for the role is often marked by unfamiliarity.[5]

As the actor in theatrical drama increasingly became separated from the role, the challenge of double fusion – actor and text on the one side and actor with audience on the other – became a topic of increasing intellectual attention.

When social texts were more authoritative, less contested, and less separated from familiar social roles, professional actors could achieve re-fusion in a more indexical than iconographic way. In what later came to be seen as histrionic, "picture acting," performers merely would point to a text rather than seeking actually to embody it. This overt exhibition of the separation of actor and role could have theatrical purchase (Aston and Savona 1991: 118) only because dramatic texts had a more deeply mythical status than they typically have today. By the late eighteenth century, when sacred and traditional social structures were being reconstructed by secular revolutions (Brooks 1976), this "anti-emotionalist" method came under criticism. In *The Paradox of Acting*, Diderot ([1830] 1957) attacked acting that communicated feelings by gesture rather than embodiment. But it was not until the so-called new drama of the late nineteenth century – when social and culture de-fusion were considerably more elaborate – that the intensely psychological and introspective theatre initiated by Strindberg and Ibsen demanded an acting method that placed a premium on subjective embodiment, or facsimile.

Just as Aristotle wrote the *Poetics* as a cookbook for script-writing once myth had lost its sway, the Russian inventor of modern dramatic technique, Constantin Stanislavski ([1934] 1989), invented "the system" to teach professional actors how to make their artificial performances seem natural and unassuming. He began by emphasizing the isolation of the actor from scripted text. "What do you think?" he admonished the novice actor. "Does the dramatist supply everything that the actors need to know about the play? Can you, [even] in a hundred pages, give a full account of the life of the *dramatis personae*? For example, does the author give sufficient details of what has happened before the play begins? Does he let you know what will happen when it is ended, or what goes on behind the scenes?" ([1934] 1989: 55).

That the answer to each of these rhetorical questions is "no" demonstrates the challenge of re-fusion that contemporary actors face. "We bring to life what is hidden under the words; we put our thoughts into the author's lines, and we establish our own relationships to other characters in the play, and the conditions of their lives; we filter through ourselves all the materials that we receive from the author and the director; we work over them, supplementing them out of our own imagination" (Stanislavski [1934] 1989: 52).

The art of acting aims at eliminating the appearance of autonomy. The ambition is to make it seem that the actor has not exercised her imagination – that she has no self except the one that is scripted on stage. "Let me see what you would do," Stanislavski advised the neophyte, "if my supposed facts were true" ([1934] 1989: 46). He suggested that the actor should adopt an "as if" attitude, pretending that the scripted situation is the actor's in real life. In this way, "the feelings aroused" in the actor "will express themselves in the acts of this

imaginary person" – as if she had actually "been placed in the circumstances made by the play" ([1934] 1989: 49; cf. Goffman 1956: 48). If the actor believes herself "actually" to be in the circumstances that the script describes, she will act in a natural way. She will assume the inner motivation of the scripted character, in this way refusing the separation of actor and script. Only by possessing this subjectivity can an artfully contrived performance seem honest and real (Auslander 1997: 29). "Such an artist is not speaking in the person of an imaginary Hamlet," Stanislavski concludes, "but he speaks in his own right as one placed in the circumstances created by the play" ([1934] 1989: 248).

> All action in the theater must have an inner justification, be logical, coherent and real . . . With this special quality of *if* . . . everything is clear, honest and above board . . . The secret of the effect of *if* lies in the fact that it does not . . . make the artist do anything. On the contrary, it reassures him through its honesty and encourages him to have confidence in a supposed situation . . . It arouses an inner and real activity, and does this by natural means. ([1934] 1989: 46–7, italics altered)

If social and cultural de-fusion has shifted the focus of theatrical acting, we should not be surprised that the acting requirements for effective social drama have changed in a parallel way. When social and political roles were ascribed, whether through inheritance or through social sponsorship, individuals could be clumsy in their portrayal of their public roles, for they would continue to possess them even if their performances failed. With increasing social differentiation, those who assume social roles, whether ascriptive or achieved, can continue to inhabit them only if they learn to enact them in an apparently natural manner (e.g. Bumiller 2003; Von Hoffman 1978). This is all the more true in social dramas that instantiate meanings without the benefit of a script, and sometimes without any prior clarification of an actor's roles.

It is not at all uncommon, for example, for the putative actors in an emergent political drama to refuse to play their parts. During the televised Watergate hearings in the summer of 1973, even Republican senators who privately supported President Richard Nixon felt compelled to join their fellow Democrats in their expressions of outrage and indignation at the Republican president's behavior (Alexander 2003c; McCarthy 1974). By contrast, during the televised Clinton impeachment hearings in 1998, the Democrats on the House panel distanced themselves from the script, refusing to participate seriously in what Republican leaders tried to perform as a tragic public event (Mast 2003, this volume). Their refusal destroyed the verisimilitude of the social drama. Actors on both sides of the aisle seemed "political," offering what appeared to be contrived and artificial performances. Despite the tried-and-true authenticity of the political script, the political drama failed because the actors could not, or would not, fuse with their parts.

The causal import of acting to performative success is so large that even bad plays can be a great theatrical success. "We know where a bad play has achieved world fame," Stanislavski ([1934] 1989: 52) said, "because of having been re-created by a great actor." Simmel (1968: 93) also emphasized that the "impression of falsehood is generated only by a poor actor." If an actor experiences flow, then he or she has succeeded in fusing with the scripted role. The idea, according to Stanislavski, is "to have the actor completely carried away by the play" so that "it all moves of its own accord, subconsciously and intuitively" ([1934] 1989: 13). Only when flow is achieved can the actor fuse with audience as well. To seem real to an audience, "it is necessary that the spectators *feel* his inner relationship to what he is saying" ([1934] 1989: 249, original italics; cf. Roach 1993: 16–17, 218).

Even the best acting, however, cannot ensure that the audience gets it right.

The challenge of reception: re-fusing audience with performative text

One-sided culturalist and pragmatic theories share one thing in common: each eliminates the contingent relationship between performative projection and audience reception. Viewing performance purely in textual terms, semioticians tie audience interpretation directly to the dramatic intentions of the actors and the culture structure that performance implies. The role of the spectator, according to Pavis (1988: 87), is simply to decipher the *mise-en-scène*, to "receive and interpret . . . the system elaborated by those responsible for the production." If such a theoretical position makes psychological identification and cultural extension seem easy to achieve, then the purely pragmatic position makes it seem virtually impossible. The founder of audience response theory, Iser (1980: 109–10), spoke about "the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader," asserting that the "lack of common situation and a common frame of reference" is so large as to create an "indeterminate, constitutive blank." Speaking in a more historical vein, his French counterpart, Leenhardt (1980), observed that "with the formation of a new reading public," the "organic relationship to the producer has nearly disappeared." The "codes of production of literary works" have now become utterly "alien" to the "spontaneous codes of readers" (1980: 207–8).

It is a mark of social and cultural complexity that the audience has become differentiated from the act of performance. Reception is dictated neither by background nor foreground representations, nor by social power, effective direction, or thespian skill. Yet neither is reception *necessarily* in conflict with them. Every dramatic effort faces uncertainty, but re-fusion is still possible.

Boulton (1960) articulated this contingent possibility when she described the audience as the third side of "the great triangle of responses which is drama."

Will the audience remain apart from the performative experience, or will it be "cooperative," proving itself capable of "submitting itself to a new experience" (1960: 196–97)? Boulton pointed here to the psychological identification of audience with enacted text. By "accepting a sample of life and tasting it," she wrote, an audience is "sharing in the lives of imaginary people not altogether unlike known live persons," (1960: 196–97). It is revealing that the psychoanalyst who created psychodrama, J. L. Moreno, focuses also on the contingent relation between audience and stage and on the manner in which this gap is bridged by identification. "The more the spectator is able to accept the emotions, the role, and the developments on the stage as corresponding to his own private feelings, private roles, and private developments, the more thoroughly will his attentions and his fantasy be carried away by the performance" (Moreno 1975: 48). The paradox that defines the patient-performance is "that he is identifying himself with something with which he is not identical." Overcoming this paradox is the key to therapeutic success: "The degree to which the spectator can enter into the life upon the stage, adjusting his own feelings to what is portrayed there, is the measure of the catharsis he is able to obtain on this occasion."

The audience–performance split also has preoccupied the theatrical avant-garde. Some radical dramatists, such as Brecht (1964) or the Birmingham school of cultural studies (Hall and Jefferson 1976), have sought to accentuate de-fusion, in theory or in practice, in order to block the cultural extension of dominant ideology. By far the greater tendency among radical dramatists, however, has been the effort to overcome the de-fusion that makes theatrical performance artificial and audience participation vicarious and attenuated. Avant-garde performances have tried to create flow experiences, to transform mere theatre into rituals where script, actors, and audience become one. In his 1923 Geneva address, Copeau ([1923] 1955, in Auslander 1997: 16) observed that "there are nights when the house is full, yet there is no audience before us." The true audience is marked by fusion, when its members "gather [and] wait together in a common urgency, and their tears or laughter incorporate them almost physically into the drama or comedy that we perform." Exactly the same language of re-fusion is deployed fifty years later by Brook (1969) when he describes the aim of his "Holy Theatre." Only when the process of "representation no longer separates actor and audience, show and public" can it "envelop them" in such a manner that "what is present for one is present for the other." On a "good night," he comments, the audience "assists" in the performance rather than maintaining "its watching role" (1969: 127).

Postmodern theatrical analysts are acutely aware of the fact that "theatre is attended by the 'non-innocent' spectator whose world view, cultural understanding or placement, class and gender condition and shape her/his response"

(Aston and Savona 1991: 120). Film and television producers and distributors try to protect their investments by targeting specific audience demographics and by staging test runs that can trigger textual readjustments in response. Politicians may be committed vocationally rather than aesthetically and financially to generating an audience, but they display an equally fervent interest in re-fusing the audience–performance gap. They "keep their ear to the ground" and try to gauge "feedback" from the grassroots in front of whom their social performances are staged. That this testing of the demographics and responses of potential audiences is now conducted by candidate-sponsored scientific polling (Mayhew 1997) does not change the performative principle involved. The goal remains to achieve performative success by overcoming social-dramatic de-fusion.

If large-scale societies were homogeneous, this segmentation of performance from an audience would be a matter of layering. Performances are projected first to an immediate audience of lay and professional interpreters and only subsequently to the impersonal audience that constitutes the vast beyond (cf. Lang and Lang 1968: 36–77). In real life, however, the problem is much more difficult than this. Audiences are not only separated from immediate contact with performers but also are internally divided among themselves. Even after the intensely observed ritual ceremonies that displayed the political consensus about Nixon's impeachment, poll data revealed that some 20 percent of Americans did not agree that the President was guilty even of a legal violation, much less of moral turpitude (Lang and Lang 1983). In opposition to the vast majority of Americans, this highly conservative group interpreted the impeachment as political vengeance by Nixon's enemies (O'Keefe and Mendelsohn 1974).

Copeau ([1923] 1955) rightly linked the fusion of audience and performance to the internal unity of the audience itself. "What I describe as an audience is a gathering in the same place of those brought together by the same need, the same desire, the same aspirations . . . for experiencing together human emotions – the ravishment of laughter and that of poetry – by means of a spectacle more fully realized than that of life itself" (in Auslander 1997: 16). In complex societies, the main structural barrier to re-fusing social drama and audience is the fragmentation of the citizenry. Social segmentation creates not only different interests but also orthogonal subcultures, "multiple public spheres" (Eley 1992; Fraser 1992), that produce distinctive pathways for cultural extension and distinctive objects of psychological identification. More and less divided by ideology, race, ethnicity, class, religion, and region, citizen-audiences can respond to social performances in diametrically opposed ways (Liebes and Katz 1990). For this reason, group-affirming social dramas are much easier to carry off than universalizing ones. This

particularistic strategy informs recent identity politics, but it has always been the default position of social drama in complex societies. When these structured divisions are exacerbated by political and cultural polarization, the seamless re-fusion of audience and performance becomes more difficult still (Hunt 1997).

Whether or not some shared culture framework "really exists" is not, however, simply a reflection of social structure and demographics. It is also a matter of interpretation. Audience interpretation is a process, not an automatic result. For example, Bauman (1989) suggested that a consciousness of doubleness is inherent in the interpretation of performance – that every performance is compared to an idealized or "remembered" model available from earlier experience. In other words, audience interpretation does not respond to the quality of the performative elements per se. Rather, audiences of social and theatrical dramas judge quality comparatively. Scripts, whether written or attributed, are compared to the great and convincing plots of earlier times. Did the fervor over President Reagan's trading of arms for hostages constitute "another Watergate," or did it pale by comparison (Schudson 1992b; Alexander 1987a)? In his role as chair of the House Impeachment Committee, how did Representative Henry Hyde's efforts stack up against Sam Ervin's bravura performance as chair of the Senate Select Committee during the Watergate hearings? How do the participants in today's presidential debates compare to the towering model of the Lincoln–Douglas debates that, according to American mythology (Schudson 1992a), made civil-dramatic history more than a century ago?

When audiences interpret the meaning and importance of social dramas, it is such comparative questions that they keep firmly in mind. If their answers are negative, even those who are within easy demographic reach will be less likely to invest their affect in the performance. For those separated further, neither psychological identification nor cultural extension will likely occur. Fragmented performance interpretations feed back into the construction of subcultures, providing memories that in turn segment perceptions of later performances (Jacobs 2000). If there are some shared memories, by contrast, audiences will experience social drama in a deeper and broadened way. As audiences become more involved, performance can draw them out of demographic and subcultural niches into a more widely shared and possibly more universalistic liminal space.

Conclusion: cultural pragmatics as model and morality

Why are even the most rationalized societies still enchanted and mystified in various ways? The old-fashioned rituals that marked simpler organizational forms

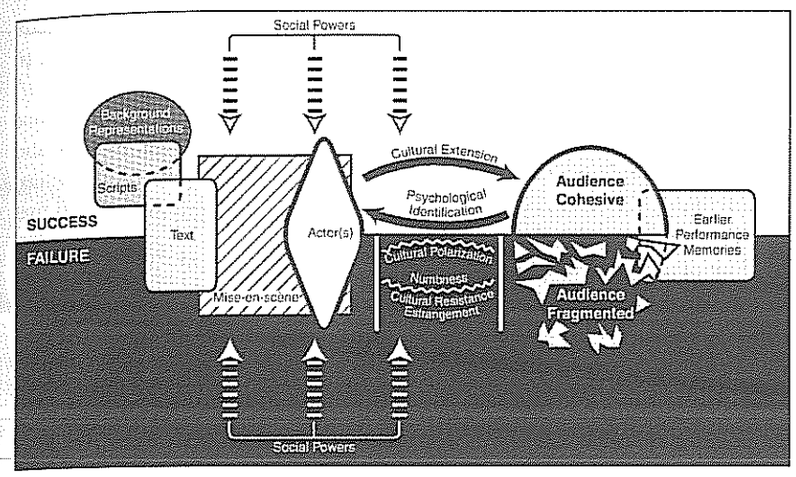

Figure 1.8 Audiences and performance

have largely disappeared, but ritual-like processes most decidedly remain. Individuals and collectivities strategically direct their actions and mobilize all their available resources, but their instrumental power usually depends on success of a cultural kind. This does not mean that the explanation of their success should be purely symbolic. It means that pragmatic and symbolic dimensions are intertwined.[6]

It is such a cultural-pragmatic perspective that has informed this work. I have developed a macro model of social action as cultural performance. In the first section, I proposed that performances are composed of a small number of analytically distinguishable elements, which have remained constant throughout the history of social life although their relationship to one another has markedly changed. In the second section, I demonstrated that, as social structure and culture have become more complex and segmented, so the elements that compose performance have become not only analytically but also concretely differentiated, separated, and de-fused in an empirical way. In the third section, I showed that whether social and theatrical performances succeed or fail depends on whether actors can re-fuse the elements of which they are made. In the fourth section, I explored the challenge of modern performance by investigating the complex nature of the demands that each of its different elements implies.

In simpler societies, Durkheim believed ([1912] 1995), rituals are made at one time and place, after which the participants scatter to engage in activities of a more instrumental and individualistic kind. In complex societies, things are rarely so cut and dried. All actions are symbolic to some degree. In social

science, it is best to convert such dichotomous either/or questions into matters of variation. The aim is to discover the invariant structures that vary and to suggest the forces that propel this change over time.

In complex societies, the relative autonomy and concrete interdependence (Kane 1991) of performative elements ensures variation both within and between groups. Even for members of relatively homogeneous communities, performances will range from those that seem utterly authentic to those that seem utterly false, with "somewhat convincing," "plausible," and "unlikely but not impossible" coming somewhere in between. For performances that project across groups, the range is the same, but attributions of authenticity are made less frequently. Such attributions also can be seen to vary broadly across historical time.

It might be worthwhile to offer a figurative rendering of the discussion I have presented here. Figure 1.9 presents a graphical, highly simplified schematization. The x-axis plots the variation in social and cultural structures, from simpler to more complex; the y-axis plots the elements that compose/organize a performance, from fused to de-fused. Three empirical lines are plotted in a hypothetical way. The higher horizontal plot line (a) traces performances that achieve fusion – ritual or ritual-like status – no matter what the degree of social complexity. The lower horizontal plot line (b) graphs failed performances, or those that fail to re-fuse the elements of performance, once again without regard for the state of social complexity. The diagonal plot line (c) graphs the average expectations for successful performance, which decline in stepwise and symmetrical fashion with each increment of social complexity. It has a downward, 45-degree slope, for each increase in social and cultural complexity stretches farther apart – farther de-fuses – the elements of performances, which makes success that much more difficult to achieve. Performances above the diagonal (c) are more successful than expected, given the historical conditions of performance; those below are less.

Wariness about authenticity is intrinsic to the pluralism and openness of complex societies, whether ancient, modern, or postmodern social life. Nietzsche ([1872] 1956: 136) bemoaned that "every culture that has lost myth has lost, by the same token, its natural and healthy creativity." But from a moral point of view, it is often healthy to be skeptical of myths, to see through the efforts of actors to seamlessly re-fuse the elements of performance. When political democracy made its first historical appearance, in ancient Greece, Plato (1980) feared that demagogy might easily sway the *polis* to undertake immoral acts. In terms of the perspective set out here, Plato was an implacable opponent of performance, deeply suspicious of its cultural-pragmatic effects. In one of his dialogues, he portrayed a master of oratory, Gorgias, as bragging about its extraordinary persuasive powers. "You might well be amazed, Socrates, if you

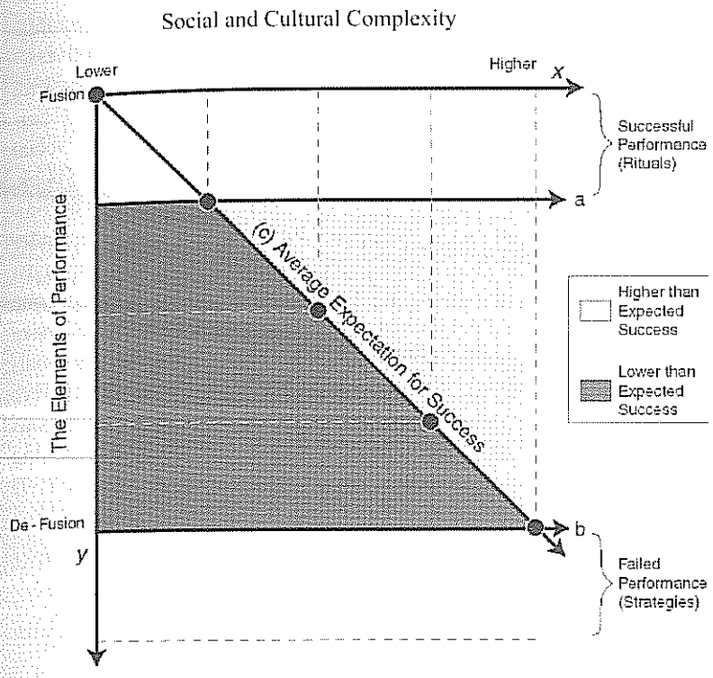

Figure 1.9 The historical conditions of social performance: structured variation

knew . . . that oratory embraces and controls almost all other spheres of human activity . . . The orator can speak on any subject against any opposition in such a way as to prevail on any topic he chooses." Socrates answered caustically, relativizing peformative skill by connecting success to mere audience acceptance. "The orator need have no knowledge of the truth about things," Socrates exclaims; "it is enough for him to have discovered a knack of convincing the ignorant that he knows more than the experts." Socrates continues in an equally sarcastic vein: "What happens is that an ignorant person is more convincing than the expert before an equally ignorant audience. Am I right?" Gorgias responds cynically, asking: "Isn't it a great comfort, Socrates, to be able to meet specialists in all the other arts on equal terms without going to the trouble of acquiring more than this single one?" By this time, Socrates is furious. He acknowledges that orators need "a shrewd and bold spirit together with an aptitude for dealing with men," but he denies that it can be called an art. "Oratory certainly isn't a fine or honorable pursuit," he avows; indeed, "the generic name which I should give it is pandering." As a moral philosopher, Plato sees sincerity as the victim

of performance. He insists that "the supreme object of a man's efforts, in public and in private life, must be the reality rather than the appearance of goodness."

From the normative point of view, performative fusion must be unmasked, and rational deliberation provides the means. From a cultural-sociological perspective, however, embracing rationality as a norm does not mean seeing social action as rational in an empirical way. Culture is less toolkit than storybook. Why else are critical efforts to question a performance almost always accompanied by creative efforts to mount counterperformances in turn (Alexander 2004)? Re-fusion remains critically important to complex societies. One must insist that social power be justified and that authority be accountable, but one also must acknowledge that even the most democratic and individuated societies depend on the ability to sustain collective belief. Myths are generated by ritual-like social performance (Giesen, this volume). Only if performances achieve fusion can they reinvigorate collective codes, allowing them to be "ubiquitous and unnoticed, presiding over the growth of the child's mind and interpreting to the mature man his life and struggles," as Nietzsche ([1872] 1956: 136–7) astutely observed.

Notes

I am grateful to the members of the Yale-Konstanz seminars for feedback on earlier versions of this essay, and particularly to Bernhard Giesen and Jason Mast.

1. The aim of the present chapter is to develop theory at the middle range. For a more metatheoretical investigation of the intellectual history of performance theory and its relationship to more textual cultural theories, and for the positioning of cultural pragmatics vis-à-vis other contemporary theoretical orientations in the social sciences and humanities, see Alexander and Mast (introduction, this volume).
2. Because Durkheim is the founder of virtually every strong program for cultural analysis in the human sciences (Smith and Alexander, forthcoming), it is particularly unfortunate that he equated socially meaningful symbolic action with ritual rather than conceptualizing ritual as one moment along a continuum of social performance that ranges from fused to defused. One result has been the very broad usage of "ritual" as a synonym for symbolic action (e.g. Goffman 1967; Collins 2004), a usage that camouflages the contingency of symbolic action. Another result has been the restriction of symbolic action to highly integrated and repetitive, i.e. "ritualized," situations, a restriction that conceptualizes acultural, strategic, and materialistic "practices" as taking up the rest of the action space. In his "religious sociology" of aboriginal societies, Durkheim wished to establish the basic elements of a cultural sociology of contemporary life. While he succeeded in laying the foundations for such a theory, he failed to sufficiently differentiate, in an analytical manner, the conditions for symbolic action in simpler and more complex societies. He could not have fully succeeded in his ambition, then, without the kind of differentiated and variable theory of the social conditions for symbolic activity I am presenting here.

3. Normative theorizing about the deliberative aspects of democracy has been allergic to its aesthetic and symbolic dimensions, implicitly equating the latter with anti-democratic, irrationalist commitments. The cultural pragmatics of social performance can provide an important corrective. For their part, Marxian hegemony and Foucauldian power-knowledge perspectives fail to conceptualize the myriad of contingencies that successful symbolic reproduction entails. It is very difficult to hyphenate power with knowledge and to gain the fusion that is indicated by an audience's inability to perceptually differentiate these two dimensions.
4. "The undertaking had all the signs of a well-planned operation . . . The rain had stopped, and some people showed up with lanterns to supplement the bright moonlight that now illuminated the scene . . . As work progressed, a large crowd gathered at the wharf to watch the proceedings in silent approval. It was so quiet that a witness standing at some distance could hear the steady whack-whack of the hatchets . . . 'This is the most magnificent Movement of all,' wrote John Adams in his diary the next day. 'There is a Dignity, a Majesty, a Sublimity in this last Effort of the Patriots that I great admire . . . This Destruction of the Tea,' he concluded, 'is so bold, so daring to form, intrepid, and inflexible, and it must have so important Consequences and so lasting, that I cannot but consider it as an Epocha [sic] in History' " (Labaree 1979: 144–5).
5. The relative autonomy of the "actor" element in contemporary social drama was demonstrated in a world-historical manner by US Secretary of State Colin Powell, whose televised speech to the United Nations Security Council on February 5, 2003, provided the crucial legitimation that allowed America and its allies to launch the Iraq war. By that late date, billions of dollars had been spent already on preparation, American military forces were primed and ready, and the most powerful military and political leaders in the world's most powerful nation were intent on launching the invasion. By their own accounts, however, they felt that they could not do so unless the war was legitimated on the public stage. This legitimation depended on making the case that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and that their use was imminent. After several failed efforts to prepare for such a performance, those who were directing it decided that only one man could play the critical role. In the following account, the veteran reporter Bob Woodward continually makes resort to performative concepts, including rehearsal, preparation, background scripts, symbolic polarization, actor motivation and skillfulness, *mise-en-scène*, the reading of audience perspective, the role of critics, and audience response.

> [President George] Bush and [National Security Advisor Condoleezza] Rice had asked the CIA to put together the best information in a written document – the "slam dunk" case [for WMDs] that [CIA Director George] Tenet had promised . . . The President was determined to hand the evidence over to experienced lawyers who could use it to make the best possible case. The document was given to . . . Scooter Libby . . . On Saturday, January 25, Libby gave a lengthy presentation in the Situation Room . . . Holding a thick sheaf of paper, Libby outlined the latest version of the case against Saddam . . .

> The most important response came from [former presidential assistant] Karen Hughes. As a communications exercise, she said, it didn't work . . . This was a communications problem, not a legal one . . . So who then should present the public case? . . . Powell was the logical choice . . . To have maximum credibility, it would be best to go counter to type and everyone knew that Powell was soft on Iraq [and] when Powell was prepared, he was very persuasive . . . "I want you to do it," Bush told the Secretary of State. "You have the credibility to do it." Powell was flattered to be asked to do what no one else could. Rice and Hughes told Powell that he should get three days for the presentation to the Security Council . . . "No way," Powell said. "I'm doing it once." Okay, [then] it might be three or four hours long. "No, it won't," Powell insisted. "You can't hold these guys for three to four hours." They would fall asleep . . . Powell won agreement that the length and content would be his decision . . . Public expectation was building on Powell's presentation. Newspaper stories and cable television were running with it hard: Will Powell deliver a knockout blow? What does he have? What secrets will finally be let out of the box? Will Saddam be exposed? Will Powell have an Adlai Stevenson moment? Will Saddam fold? Will Powell fold? Powell was well aware that the credibility of the United States, of the president, and his own, were going to be in the Security Council room that day . . . After the final rehearsal in Washington, Tenet announced that he thought their case was ironclad . . . "You're coming with me," Powell said. He wanted Tenet sitting behind him at the U.N. as a visible, on-camera validation of the presentation, as if the CIA director were saying each word himself. Tenet was not the only prop. Powell had a sound and light show, audios and visuals to be presented on large hanging monitors in the Security Council chamber. He even had a teaspoon of simulated anthrax in a small vial to wave around. Millions around the world watched and listened on live television . . . Dressed in a dark suit and red tie, hands clasped on his desk, Powell began cautiously . . . He had decided to add his personal interpretation of the intercepts [of Iraqi military conversations] to his rehearsed script, taking them substantially further and casting them in the most negative light . . . He had learned in the Army that meaning had to be explained in clear English . . . The secretary's presentation took 76 minutes [but] the mixture of understatement, overstatement and personal passion made for riveting television. Mary McGrory, the renowned liberal columnist for the *Washington Post*, and a Bush critic, wrote in the lead column for the next day's op-ed page. . . . "I can only say that he Persuaded me, and I was as tough as France to convince . . . I'm not ready for war yet. But Colin Powell has convinced me that it might be the only way to stop a fiend, and that if we do go, there is reason." (Woodward 2004: 288–312)

6. Twentieth-century linguistic theory – which was central in creating social understandings of discourse – was marked by a struggle between structuralism and pragmatics. The present theoretical effort can be understood as a sociological extension, and reformulation, of the series of fundamentally significant philosophical-linguistic efforts to transcend this divide, e.g. Bakhtin's (1986) concepts of dialogue and speech genre, Jakobson's dynamic synchrony (1990: 64) and code/message schema (1987: 66), and Morris' (1938) syntactic-semantic-pragmatic model. I am also following upon, while challenging and revising, significant synthetic efforts in sociological theory, e.g. Swidler (1986), Sewell (1992), and most especially Emirbayer and Mische (1998), which is closest to the analytic synthesis I am pursuing here. As these latter efforts suggest, twentieth-century sociological theory was marked by a sharp tension between pragmatic and structural approaches, against which some of my own earlier theoretical efforts were directed as well (Alexander 1998, 1987b, 1987c, 1982–3).

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2

From the depths of despair: performance, counterperformance, and "September 11"

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Introduction

After introducing a perspective on terrorism as post-political and after establishing the criteria for success that are immanent in this form of anti-political action, this essay interprets September 11, 2001 and its aftermath inside a cultural-sociological perspective. After introducing a macro-model of social performance that combines structural and semiotic with pragmatic and power-oriented dimensions, I show how the terrorist attack on New York City and the counterattacks that immediately occurred in response can be viewed as an iteration of the performance/counterperformance dialectic that began decades, indeed centuries, ago in terms of the relation of Western expansion and Arab-Muslim reaction. I pay careful attention to the manner in which the counterperformance of New Yorkers and Americans develops an idealized, liminal alternative that inspired self-defense and outrage, leading to exactly the opposite performance results from those the al-Qaeda terrorists had intended.

To understand the sociological processes that created "September 11" (hereafter also referred to as "9/11") and what transpired politically, morally, and humanly during that tragic time and its aftermath, and also to understand how to prevent a tragic eternal return, we must reflect on the theoretical presuppositions that underlie our empirical perceptions. We need to theorize terrorism differently, thinking of its violence less in physical and instrumental terms than as a particularly gruesome kind of symbolic action in a complex performative field. If we do, we will understand, as well, how the American response to that terror thwarted its nihilistic intention and established a counterperformance that continues to structure the cultural pragmatics of national and international politics today.

Terrorism as (post)political

Terrorism can be understood as a form of political action, one of a very specific type. It is distinguished first by the sustained violence of its principal methods, in contrast to a politics that relies on organization and communication or one that rests, like those of most nation-states in their foreign relations, on the periodic but discrete application of coercion and force. Terrorism is distinguished, second, by the isolation of its practitioners, in contrast not only to the communal character of mass organizations but also even to the vanguard politics of Leninism, which seeks to establish thick network relations with groups whose ideology it can mold and whose solidarity it can claim.

Finally, terrorism is distinguished by the relative diffuseness of its ideology. Drunk on grandiose delusions of the millennium and on visions that make worldly success impossible in realistic terms, terrorist ideology cannot spell out the political steps to achieve its ideological aims. Because of this yawning gap between ideals and realities, the working ideology of terrorism focuses almost exclusively on tactics and rather little on broader strategy. Another way of putting this is to say that terrorism focuses on deeds more than words.

These disjunctions reflect the institutional failures that breed a politics of terror, which flourishes only in social situations where *politics*, in the classical sense of the term, has not been allowed free play (Crick 1962). In much of the contemporary Arab-Islamic world, national and regional institutions have flattened drastically and have narrowed the dynamics of political will-formation. Discursive, democratic, and humane forms of political expression have become impossible.

Hobsbawm (1959) once called banditry and peasant riots *pre-political* – to differentiate them from the militant and sometimes violent revolutionary politics that characterized what he took to be the normal, class-war politics of his day. Contemporary terrorism might be called *post-political*. It reflects the end of political possibility. In this sense, 9/11 expresses, and displaces, the bitterness of an Arab nationalism whose promises of state-building, economic development, and full citizenship lay in tatters throughout the North African and Middle Eastern world. Terrorism is post- rather than pre-political in another sense as well. Its profound experience of political impotence is expressed not merely in cultural or metaphysical terms but in a hungry will to power and a manifest ambition to rebuild a great Arab-Muslim state.

Rather than defeating its opponents through political struggle, terrorism seeks to draw blood. Its tactics deliver maiming and death; they serve a strategy of inflicting humiliation, chaos, and reciprocal despair. Beyond these primordial ambitions lie three destabilizing aims. These flow in increasingly powerful ripples from the initial drawing of blood:

- to create *political* instability by murdering key leaders and overwhelming the immediate political process;
- to achieve *social* instability by disrupting networks of exchange and by sowing such fear that distrust becomes normal and chaos ensues; and
- to create *moral* instability by inducing authorities to respond to these political and social threats with repressive actions that will delegitimate key institutions in their own society. Such repression may be domestic or foreign, and it is less a matter of actual engagement in violent and suppressive actions than of how these actions are framed.

The post-political and the civil

Does terrorist action typically succeed in these aims? This depends on context. Success is a direct function of the authoritarian nature of the regime against which terrorism takes aim. Post-political tactics are much less likely to succeed in societies that allow politics to mediate power, and this is particularly the case in legitimate, deeply rooted democratic regimes. Post-political action certainly does produce significant, sometimes world-historical, and almost always existentially horrendous effects. In societies that have more developed civil spheres, however, such effects are not nearly as transformative as their initiators had hoped.

The seemingly demonic ferocity of terrorists, their ruthless willingness to sacrifice the lives of others and their own, indeed does draw blood and does create social and political chaos and instability. The slaughterhouse of World War One began with terrorist assassination. Anarchist and syndicalist violence in late nineteenth-century America marked new phases of anti-capitalist agitation. The activities of the Red Brigades, the Baader-Meinhof gang, and the Weathermen in the late 1960s and early 1970s sent shockwaves of terror throughout significant parts of the Italian, German, and American populations. White militia groups wreaked terrible havoc in Oklahoma City and elsewhere in the 1990s.

Still, none of these terrorist waves, so effective in narrowly post-political terms, succeeded in translating their immediate tactical "achievements" into the broader strategic aims of moral delegitimation and regime change. The reason is clear: in civil societies, to eschew the tactic of politics is to be blinded in broader strategic terms. In democratic societies, in order to achieve broad effects political actors must orient their tactics to address the moral frameworks that compel the larger population. This is exactly what terrorism cannot do. It is hardly surprising then that on September 11, the terrorists who attacked the Twin Towers produced exactly the opposite effect than the one they had in mind.

This broad sociological claim about the ineffectiveness of terrorism in a civil society might be countered by pointing to earlier terrorist movements, from the Irish and South African to the Zionist and Palestinian, which seemingly did achieve institutional success. It would take a different and much more comparative essay to respond fully to such counterclaims. Here I focus only on one terrorist act. Yet we might consider the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as one brief case in point. While it first came to world attention through acts of terror, the PLO began to achieve its aims of territory and quasi-statehood only later, during the years of *Intifadeh* (uprising).

This youth-centered, stone-throwing protest movement against Israeli occupation engaged not in murderous, post-political terrorism but in highly effective political dramaturgy (Liebes 1992a, 1992b). The young Palestinian "Davids" created sympathy, not only outside Israel but also within it, for their struggle against the Israeli military "Goliaths." What eventually followed was an occasionally enthusiastic but more often resigned acceptance of the Palestinians' national ambition among influential segments of the Israeli public that had been steadfast in their opposition to the PLO during its terrorist days.

A dramaturgical framework of politics

Despite the critical importance of politics, the difficulty that terrorism has in gaining success cannot be explained in purely instrumental terms. Success and failure in politics is not a game. It neither responds simply to available resources nor is guided exclusively by rational choice. Terrorism has a moral reference, and its understanding demands a cultural-sociological frame.

We must consider terrorism as a form not only of political but also of symbolic action. Terrorism is a particular kind of political performance. It draws blood – literally and figuratively – making use of its victims' vital fluids to throw a striking and awful painting upon the canvas of social life. It aims not only to kill but in and through killing aims also to gesture in a dramatic way. In Austinian (1957) terms, terrorism is an illocutionary force that aims for perlocutionary effect.

Performative actions have both a manifest and latent symbolic reference.[1] Their explicit messages take shape against background structures of immanent meaning. In other words, social performances, like theatrical ones, symbolize particular meanings only because they can assume more general, taken-for-granted meaning structures within which their performances are staged. Performances select among, reorganize, and make present themes that are implicit in the immediate surround of social life – though these are absent in a literal sense. Reconfiguring the signifieds of background signifiers, performances evoke a new set of more action-specific signifiers in turn.

It is these signifiers that compose a performance's *script*. Social performance cannot be reduced to background culture. Performance is initiated because actors have particular, contingent goals. Scripts are cultural, but the reverse is not equally true: background cultures are not themselves scripts. It is not "culture" that creates scripts, but pragmatic efforts to project particular cultural meanings in pursuit of practical goals.

Scripts narrate and choreograph conflicts among the sacred, profane, and mundane. An effectively scripted narrative defines compelling protagonists and frightening antagonists and pushes them through a series of emotionally laden encounters. Such agonistic action constitutes a *plot*. Through plotted encounters, social dramas create emotional and moral effects. Their audiences may experience excitement and joy if the plots are romances or comedies, or pity and suffering if they are melodramas or tragedies. If the scripted narrative is effective and if the performance of the plot is powerful, the audience experiences catharsis, which allows new moral judgments to form and new lines of social action to be undertaken in turn.

The scripts of social dramas initially are imagined by would-be authors and agents (Turner 1982). These scripts actually might be written before a performance begins, but they also may be emergent, crystallizing only as the drama unfolds. Here, the dramas that scripts are meant to inspire aim at *audiences* composed of the publics of complex civil societies. The *actors* in these social dramas may be institutional authorities or rebels, activists or couch potatoes, political leaders or foot soldiers in social movements, or the imagined publics of engaged citizens themselves. The motivations and patterns of such actors are affected deeply, though are not controlled, by *directors*. In social dramas, these are the organizers, ideologists, and leaders of collective action (Eyerman and Jameson 1991).

Social-dramatic action can be understood, in these terms, by the theatrical concept of the *mise-en-scène*, literally, putting into the scene. Such dramatic enactment requires control over the *means of symbolic production*, which suggests a stage, a setting, and certain elementary theatrical props. For social dramas, control over such means points to the need to create platforms for performance in the public imagination and, eventually, to create access to such media of transmission as television, cinema, newspapers, radio, and the Internet.

The elements of performative success and failure

When theatrical dramas are successful, there emerges a kind of "fusion" between these diverse elements of performance, a coming together of background meaning, actors, props, scripts, direction, and audience. Actors seem really to "be" their role. Their performances are experienced as convincing, as authentic.

Audiences, sometimes literally but always figuratively, forget for the moment that they are in a theatre or movie house. The performance has achieved verisimilitude, the aesthetic quality of seeming to be real.

If such triumphant fusion is not easy to produce in theatre, in social performance it is that much more difficult to effect. In small societies with more simplified and integrated social organization, the social-dramatic task is less challenging than in more complex and less integrated ones. Indeed, the frequency with which performative fusion is achieved marks the centrality and effectiveness of ritual in earlier societies. Even in complex societies, however, fusion is still possible, and it frequently is achieved in settings where the elements of performances can be controlled carefully: between the faithful and their priest, rabbi, or mullah; between children and their mothers and fathers; between patients and their doctors and therapists; between motivated employees and inspiring managers; between partisan audiences and artful orators.

The more complex the society, however, the more often social performances fail to come together in convincing, seemingly authentic ways. The more that institutional and cultural resources become differentiated from one another – the more political and ideological pluralism allows conflict – the more common performative failure becomes. In complex societies, real social rituals are few and far between.

Long before postmodern philosophers declared the end of metanarratives, the metaphysical logic that established the *telos* of performances in traditional societies began to disappear. As societies become more complex and cultures less metaphysical, the elements of social performance become contingent and more difficult to coordinate and control. Action becomes open-ended, and everything can go awry. Rather than being sympathetically infused with teleological prejudice, social dramas become endemically unconvincing. Actors often seem inauthentic and manipulated, as if they are puppets and not autonomous individuals. Modern audiences tend to see power at work and not to see meaning. They attribute to would-be actors instrumental, not idealistic, motivations.

Performances may fail if any of the elements that compose them are insufficiently realized, or if the relation among these elements is not articulated in a coherent or forceful way. If there is not access to the means of symbolic production, for example, the effectiveness of the other elements goes for naught. Such failure to gain access to contemporary media might be the product of social distance, powerlessness, poverty, or of the unconvincing and unpopular dramatic content of the performance itself.

Even if productions are projected fully onto the public stage, they will fail if the roles and institutions mediating audience interpretation do so in a critical manner. Such interpretive criticism has the effect of separating dramatic intention from dramatic reception. It alienates actors from audience, de-fusing rather

than re-fusing the elements of performance. In complex societies, critics, intellectuals, social authorities, and peer groups continuously comment upon the social-dramatic stream, as do the professional journalists who wish to appear merely to report upon it. But even if access is gained and if performances are interpreted positively, the thoroughgoing success of a performance can be thwarted if audiences are fragmented. Cultural antagonisms and/or social cleavages can create polarized and conflicting interpretive communities. A drama that is utterly convincing for one audience-public might seem artificial to another. Insofar as group understandings of critical performances diverge, their existential and moral realities become irreconcilable.

Performative failures allow the law of unintended consequences to enter into the cultural sphere. Social dramas produce unintended interpretations; they become performative contradictions in the philosophical sense. Ambiguity replaces clarity. There is a doubleness of text. For the social dramas of complex societies, there seems always to be an absent audience alongside the putative visible one that performers themselves have in mind. The absent audience is likely to understand the performance in a manner that belies its script and the actors' and director's intentions. In this way, the total meaning of a performance is delayed. It is deferred beyond a drama's immediate reception to the audiences waiting "off stage." In complex societies, then, interpretation is marked by *différence* (Derrida 1978).

The performative contradictions of East versus West

In the face of conservative claims about the clash of civilizations, it seems important to begin by emphasizing that, while there are distinctive differences between the great monotheistic religions of the East and West, in broad comparative terms they share the same general symbolic order to a remarkable degree (cf. Lapidus 1987; Udovitch 1987; Mirsepassi 2000; Alexander 2001).

Both the Judeo-Christian and the Islamic religious traditions, which in some significant part have formed the backdrop for their inter-civilizational dynamics, are dualistic and Manichean. They are relatively "this-worldly" and "ascetic" in Weber's (1978) terms, and they contain powerful egalitarian strains. Both have legitimated not only heterodox but also revolutionary movements. Finally, and most tellingly for the present case, each has developed powerful religious legitimation for just, or holy, wars. Drawing from sacred narratives of judgment, each tradition has produced ethical prophecies that legitimate violent means for holy ends, prophecies that culminate in apocalyptic visions of the pathway to paradise.[2] The dichotomies informing the complementary Eastern and Western narratives of salvation and damnation can be sketched out in a very rough way (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 *The structure of Eastern and Western narratives of salvation and damnation*

Sacred/Friend	Profane/Enemy
Peaceful	Violent
Cooperative	Antagonistic
Honest	Deceitful
Equal	Dominating
Rational	Irrational
Solidaristic	Fractious
Ethical	Instrumental
Honorable	Corrupt
Faithful	Cynical

If the same semiotic code supplies the signifiers for the sacred political actions in both religious and civilizational traditions, why do groups representing these civilizations stand today in such dangerous conflict? The reason is that mediated through a series of historical developments, the signifieds of these signifiers have become strikingly, even fatefully, different. The Christian Crusades, the geopolitics of the Mogul and Ottoman Empires, the military triumphs of European empire – through such historical developments as these, the shared signifiers of the great monotheistic religions became connected with concrete signifieds that conveyed not their mutual understanding of the sacred and profane but extraordinary cultural difference and social antagonism. Over the long course of historical time, and with tragic and sometimes terrifying consequences, there gradually emerged the pronounced tendency for the Islamic and Judeo-Christian religio-political civilizations to embody evil for each other. What has developed is a self-reinforcing system of cultural-cum-social polarization, in which the sacralizing social dramas of one side have been the polluting dramas of the other.

From the mid-twentieth century, this system of performative contradiction has been fueled by such proximate social and political developments as Israeli statehood; the failure of pan-Arabism and economic modernization in the regions of the Islamic crest; the increasing relative and often absolute impoverishment of what once was called the Third World; the globalization of capital markets and the undermining of national sovereignty; the rise of feminist movements; American displacement of France and Britain as the pre-eminent capitalist and military power; and the end of the bipolar world and the emergence of America's asymmetrical military, cultural, and economic position.

At every point, these economic and political developments were mediated, channeled, and crystallized by the background codes and narratives that polarized the East and West as cultural-political regions. The religious orientations that East and West share in the most general comparative terms were so refracted by social history that mutual misunderstanding became the norm. Indeed, what has remained constant through the twists and turns of contingent events is the polarizing cultural logic that forms a background to them. The social performances on one side are misperceived by audiences on the other. Even when Western actors are scripted and are played as sincere protagonists, they pass fluidly, artfully, and authentically into the position of antagonists in the scripts that emerge from the perceptions of the "Eastern" side. At the same time, when Islamic scripts portray Eastern actors as protagonists in leading roles, they are easily reinterpreted as antagonistic "others" in the eyes of Western audiences.

There is no better illustration of this performative contradiction than the *jihad*. Created as a violent means for religious-cum-political purification within medieval Islam (Black 2001), the *jihad* was applied to Western occupiers in a later historical time (Kepel 2002). For its Islamic practitioners and key sections of Islamic audiences, this modern *jihad* is viewed as a sacred and highly demanding performance of holy war. For its non-Islamic victims and audience, the performance of *jihad* is interpreted in precisely the opposite manner, as an authentic demonstration of the polluted and demonic qualities of Islam itself.

The most recent and most highly consequential emplotments on this tragic contrapuntal culture structure resulted from American performances in Afghanistan in the 1980s and the Gulf War in the 1990s. The Afghan war, despite its apparent triumph for the West, marked a failed performance, for it unintentionally produced an anti-Western understanding in a significant segment of its audience. Having helped Islamic insurgents dislodge the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, a defeat that significantly contributed to the larger project of destabilizing the Communist "evil empire," the United States declared victory and withdrew. This triumphal exit was interpreted as typical Western indifference by the national and religious formations that framed the anti-Soviet war from their own, radically different point of view. This construction of Jewish–Christian–American infidelity is what generated the first wave of organized anti-American *jihad*, a vicious and determined counterperformance.

The interpretation of the Gulf War and its aftermath followed a similar pattern. Presented to Western audiences as a virtuous war of liberation, it merely served to confirm Western deceit and aggression to groups of radical Islamic nationalists. The post-war United Nations (UN) treaty, which allowed Iraq continued sovereignty while sharply curtailing its economic and military freedom,

was regarded widely at the time of the war's conclusion as reasonably motivated and humane in its concerns. During the course of the 1990s, however, the treaty provisions – and the treaty's steadfast and aggressive American and British guarantors – came to be regarded, first by radical Islamic groups in the region and subsequently by many humanitarian agencies and critical intellectuals around the world, as selfish, militaristic, and even orientalist. Once again, the unintended consequences of performative action had intensified the polarizing understandings of earlier misinterpretations. These audience reactions inspired Islamic radicals to engage in new and even more destructive counterperformances in turn.

These tragic misperformances recall another war-ending misinterpretation that became, equally unwittingly, a war-starting one. When the triumphant Allies wrote the Treaty of Versailles after World War One their strategic aim was to secure a long-term international peace. But the treaty negotiations, and the final document, were also scripts that allowed leaders to project performances to their French, American, and British audiences back home. Not surprisingly, German audiences read these performances in a very different manner. Eventually, a talented but malevolent Austrian political actor wrote a new script for holy war and directed Germany's tragic performance in it. The Western world has come to rue that day.

Initial success: bin Laden assembles the performative elements of terror

Osama bin Laden was another world-historical actor who would lead another "people" in counterperformance against the West in another time. Like that other infamous but highly effective demagogue before him, bin Laden responded to the social despair and the moldering anger that marked significant segments of his home audience – in this case an Arab-Islamic, not a German, one.[3] Activist in the anti-Soviet holy war and embittered, impotent observer of the Western occupation of Saudi Arabia during and after the Gulf War, bin Laden proved himself to be enormously effective in staging the next phase of the contrapuntal performance cycle of East versus West. He imagined how a new kind of performance could be staged in the conditions of today. His innovation was to turn terrorism into mass murder and to place this counterperformance on the world stage. Bin Laden not only imagined himself as the protagonist of a massively organized and globally televised *jihad*, but he also had the awful artfulness and the personal resources to actually place himself in the center of the real thing.

Because bin Laden was rich and well connected, he possessed the resources to hire "actors" for a vastly larger terrorist organization than ever had been put together before, and he also had the networks to find possible actors and to interview them before allowing them to join his production teams. But more than resources were involved. Bin Laden was charismatic and creative. He had a real feeling for the story line, the traditional Islamic agonistic that plotted virtuous al-Qaeda heroes fighting for their sacred honor against villainous Americans with money in their hearts and blood on their hands. This cunning director established secret training camps that allowed backstage rehearsals for the public performances to come. In these protected spaces, fresh recruits were coached on how they could assume the parts assigned to them faithfully and convincingly in the al-Qaeda script. When the new "method" could be assumed with utter authenticity, the actor-terrorists were released into "performance teams," which secretly prepared for the full-dress production of martyrdom in Western lands.[4]

But perhaps what most distinguished bin Laden was his ability to command the means of symbolic production. He needed a worldwide stage and means for murder on a scale far larger, and more dramaturgically compelling, than he ever before had been able to acquire. His demonic genius was to teach his would-be martyrs yet another role – that of student-visitors to America who were eager to learn to fly the big planes. Once the actor-terrorists possessed this skill, they could commandeer passenger jets that already were inside the American staging area. With these props, the martyr-terrorists could attack and could try to destroy the symbols of polluted power that were central to the emotional dynamics of their script. If they were fortunate, they also could kill thousands of Americans, and other Westerns, who were outside the passenger plane. If this occurred, then the bin Laden performance of *jihad* would possess the widest possible public stage.

As the world learned at 9:03 a.m. on September 11, 2001, bin Laden's performance of mass terror unfolded with barely a hitch. It created a shocking narrative of gothic horror that unfolded, in agonizing and simultaneous detail, before an audience of hundreds of millions. The terrorist-martyr-actors succeeded in destroying polluted icons of modern American capitalism, the Twin Towers, which evocatively symbolized their atheistic Western enemy. The terrorist performances created not only unprecedented physical destruction and loss of life but also moral humiliation and emotional despair, and they captured the world's media attention for days on end.

In purely sociological terms – which for the sake of analysis must bracket normative considerations – this performance surely marked an extraordinary achievement. So many personnel and so much materiel had to be organized and directed. The scripts had to be refined so continuously. The terrorists' method acting had to be sustained so continuously. So many failures were possible, yet in the end, the play went on.

The audience responds: joy and despair as interpretations of the terror-performance

Yes, the play went on, but with what result? Did the performance have its intended effect? Was the plot, when enacted, perceived as martyrdom for a just cause? Did the physical destruction lead beyond immediate social instability and chaos to political imbalance and moral delegitimation? Destabilization is both objective and subjective. Emotions are coded and regulated symbolically; the objects of cathexis simply are not felt but simultaneously are understood. Because traumas are subject to interpretation, different background understandings led to different reactions and, eventually, to different paths for recovery.

Such considerations point to the fragmentation that marks contemporary societies. If the elements of artful staging are defused, and are difficult to bring successfully together, so indeed is the audience. In most public events, in fact, there are many different audiences, and their reactions to the same event often are framed by fiercely incompatible scripts. It was the failure to understand the separation of audience from performance – and the fragmentation of these separated audiences into different and often hermetically sealed interpretive spaces – that made the initial success of the terrorist *jihad* so short-lived and the response to it at most only a partial success.

The events on that morning of September 11 played before profoundly different viewing groups. Many Arab-Islamic audiences hailed the performances with great applause. The Arab streets, it was reported authoritatively, sometimes danced with joy. Among Arab elites, emails of satisfaction and triumph were passed quietly. Among these groups, real performative fusion was obtained in the destruction's immediate wake. Terrorists were perceived as martyrs who had gone on to their heavenly reward. The infidels had been punished, and Allah would treat them, too, in an appropriate way. As the producer and director of this world-historical drama, and indeed as its protagonist-at-a-distance, Osama bin Laden became an object of extraordinarily intense identification. He was lionized as a hero, mythologized in an instant. His likeness was emblazed on T-shirts that were displayed like totemic images on human bodies. Recordings of his triumphant words were reproduced and continuously replayed on video and compact disc. The fusion among script, performance, actors, and audience was indeed impressively achieved.[5] But what about the other audience?

When *jihad* emerged in medieval Islamic society, its success did not depend on wide audience response. Success required only the performance assassination itself. Because social structure and culture were simpler and more integrated, the *jihad* message was readable, clearly and directly, from the act. In complex global society, nothing can be further from the truth.

At first, however, it appeared that the American audience might react in a manner consistent with al-Qaeda's script. As the drama unfolded, Western viewers witnessed objective destruction and experienced fears of personal annihilation and of the center giving way. The unimaginable destruction of giant buildings and the vicarious experience of mutilation and violent death were palpable, shocking, and psychologically debilitating. Because Western viewers identified with those who were attacked, they experienced the injuries as if they were attacks on their own buildings, bodies, and minds.

That the jaws of destruction had opened and the final days were at hand were powerful experiences in the immediate aftermath of the terror. Images of just punishment, of hell and damnation, are deep and recurrent themes in the Western imagination, and images of the New York City crash site were framed by aesthetic archetypes of apocalypse that recalled the late medieval paintings of Hieronymus Bosch. Dust blotted out the sun. Day turned to night. People caught on fire, suffocated, and jumped to their death. Hysteria and wild screaming were recorded and were transmitted worldwide. Strong men cried; firefighters and guards and policemen were brought to their knees, and they died in abject confusion, gasping for air. In the towers above, rich and powerful men and women waited helplessly, their sophisticated machines useless, and they died in even greater numbers. Unable to evoke an explicitly religious framework, commentators and observers evoked metaphors of the long-feared nightmare of nuclear holocaust to describe the scene, and they soon named the crash site "Ground Zero."

Not only physical but also ontological security was threatened, and there was a specifically American dimension as well. For in the country's collective imagination, America remained a virgin land (Smith 1950), a shining beacon on a protected hill. It also was imagined as a fortress that foreigners would forever be unable to breach. Indeed, the nation's sacred soil had not been stained with American blood since the middle of the second century before.

The innocent honor of this mythical America stood in grave danger of being polluted on this day. Fear stalked the land. Americans were reluctant to project themselves into their environments. There was a real and immediate deflation of generalized social trust. People stopped driving, stayed away from public transportation, and failed to show up for work. The stock market dipped sharply, and deposits were withdrawn from banks. Tourism evaporated, and pleasure traveling disappeared.

These early American reactions, projected worldwide as denouement to the initial performative act, provided some Arab-Islamic audiences with evidence that the terrorist activity had succeeded not only in its immediate but also in its ultimate aims. These initial impressions were justifiable, but they eventually proved incorrect. The structural conditions for fusion proved impossible to

overcome, and bin Laden's terrorist performance would be as subject to misinterpretation as those actions that America once had initiated on its own. The fragmentation of media and critics was a social fact; so were the polarized background meanings that structured the audiences for the terrorist performance on a global scale. The contrapuntal logic of East–West confrontation continued, and there emerged counterreadings that eventually generated counterperformances.

Bin Laden misperforms: American counterreading and idealization

What was heroism for one audience was terrorism for the other. In fact, the terrorist pollution and destruction of American core symbols produced, within large segments of the American audience, a one-sided idealization in turn of everything American. This idealization began almost immediately, became stronger in the hours and days after the event, and worked itself out at many different levels of social structure and cultural life. It marked the beginnings of a counterreading that provided the script for the counterperformance that continues today.

This counterreading allowed the nightmare story of terrorist destruction to be retold – by critics, commentators, and reporters; by victims, helpers, and sideline observers; and by political, social, and intellectual leaders who were the once and future directors of American action on the world stage. For themselves and for their audiences of listeners, viewers, and readers, these groups recast the humbling and fearful destruction of America as an ennobling narrative, one that revealed the strength of an ideal American core.[6] The existence of this inner, spiritual core was asserted in a matter-of-fact way, as if it had to do neither with metaphysics nor metaphor but was a matter of self-evident, natural truth. "The fire is still burning, but from it has emerged a stronger spirit," remarked New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani when he led a memorial service at the site one month later. Following upon a series of deeply structured symbolic antitheses – ideal and material, soul and body, light and dark, truth and falsehood – Americans described the terrorist destruction as having an effect only on external, physical forms. The ideal inner core of America was still intact; indeed, as a result of the effort at destruction, this core actually had grown stronger than ever before. Rather than being threatened or destroyed, the social center was being reconstituted as an ideal and not as a material thing. Because the center of society existed in the imagination, in the nation's soul, it certainly would be rematerialized in the days ahead.

This counterreading of the terrorist performance took leave from the mundane vagaries of time and place, from the dust, grime, and blood that marked the physical terrorist site. It constituted a new imaginary that created an alternative,

a liminal time and space, an existential zone located in the collective consciousness, not in the material world. The new time was symbolized as a new calendrical date, 9/11, a numerical sequence referring literally to an emergency call but whose pragmatic meaning was transformed into an iconic marker of time. After September 11, it was remarked continuously, "Nothing has ever been the same." The new beginning, in other words, marked the beginning of a new world.[7] Transcendent rather than geographic, this new world would fill in and would smooth over the crater that threatened the center of American life.

Before 9/11, America had been fractured by social cleavages, by the normal incivilities attendant on social complexity, and even, on occasion, by unspeakable hostilities. After 9/11, the national community experienced and interpreted itself as united by feeling, marked by the loving kindness displayed among persons who once only had been friends, and by the civility and solicitude among those who once merely had been strangers. There was an intense generalization of social attention, which shifted away from specificity, concreteness, and idiosyncrasy to abstraction, idealization, and universality.[8] This idealizing emotional and moral framework spread from the physical to the social world, from the individual to the collectivity, from the family to the business community, from the city of New York to the American nation, and from the fate of the American nation to (Western) civilization itself.

Before September 11, the giant Twin Towers that struck upward from the bottom of Manhattan were perceived routinely, were taken for granted as mundane physical objects. If they were noticed at all, it was for their ugliness and vulgarity and for the intrusive and almost aggressive manner in which they towered over lower Manhattan life, overshadowing, it was sometimes said, the light of "Lady Liberty" herself. By the very act of their destruction, however, the towers moved from the mundane and profane to the sacred of symbolic life. They were re-presented as having embodied not capitalism but enterprise; not the bourgeois but the cosmopolitan; not private property but public democracy. They were reconstructed retrospectively as their architects once idealistically had envisioned them, as cool icons of aesthetic modernism, symbols of economic energy that were deemed now to have been compatible fully with the famous statue that represented political freedom in the harbor beyond.

If these physical containers were transformed in the American imagination, so much more so were the maimed and murdered people whom these buildings once contained. Before 9/11, the merchants and traders of Wall Street often had been the objects of envy and resentment, maligned as selfish and indulgent, as a new and unattractively yuppified social class. In America's fiercely fought, even if largely symbolic, class war, no group launched such critical salvos more fiercely than the often resentful remnants of America's skilled working class, largely white, ethnic, and male. Yet they themselves also were frequent objects

of popular disdain, ridiculed as macho and racist, as unlettered, beer-drinking, red-necked conservatives too quick to wrap themselves in the American flag. It was this class who composed the larger part of the firefighters and police officers who entered the Twin Towers in the ill-fated efforts to help the elites who worked in the floors above.

As they perished, the members of both groups were transformed symbolically. They were made innocent and good, were portrayed in a mythical manner that abstracted from their particular qualities of gender, class, race, or ethnicity.

The first-place level of transfiguration focused on the victims and participants as archetypal individuals *tout court*. In the magazine, television, and newspaper elegies that were composed about them, which indeed amounted to commemorations, in the weeks and months after the tragic event, the traders and firemen, secretaries and police became the heroic subjects in sentimental, often heart-wrenching stories about their pluck and their determination. Their highly genred (Bakhtin 1986) biographies revealed that the strength, dedication, and kindness of the innocents murdered on September 11 allowed each one to build a meaningful and coherent life.

The second level of idealized reconstruction focused on the family. Whatever sociological statistics might have to say about divorce and loneliness, absent fathers and latch-key children, abandoned wives and extramarital affairs, the now mythically reconstructed individuals who perished on 9/11 were represented as members of warm and loving families. They were devoted husbands and wives, attentive mothers and fathers, loyal children and grandparents. Their familial love was always constant, vivid, and pure.

The third level of transfiguration concerned the economic elite itself. The highly profitable, often cutthroat, and relentlessly competitive business enterprises who rented space in the Twin Towers were represented as decent, entirely human enterprises. They made an honest living, and their industry contributed to the bounty of American life. Their employees often had risen from rags to riches, and they were, by ethnicity, taste, and personal life, no different in any important way than any other participant in American life. On the day after 9/11, Cable News Network (CNN) interviewed the president of the investment firm Cantor Fitzgerald, all of whose employees in the World Trade Center had died. In the course of recounting his company's tragedy, this powerful businessman broke down and wept in a pitiable way. This scene was remarked upon throughout the world. It was the human face of 9/11's American side: it was a sign that the terrorists had targeted human life, not the West or some abstraction of modernity and capitalism. It was also a demonstration that the humanity the terrorists had tried to destroy somehow had managed to survive.

From this transformation of degraded and antagonistic economic classes into idealized images of individual, family, and enterprise, the generalization

of solidary feelings expanded like a ripple from a stone that had been thrown into the middle of a tranquil pond. New York City often had been portrayed as a dirty, angry, and competitive place, the epicenter of the cutthroat, impersonal cosmopolitanism that conservative Americans loved to hate. After 9/11, it was presented as a prototypically human place. It was a living organism attacked by virulent foreign bodies, and it was fighting for its life. Residents of small towns sent messages not just of condolence but also of identification. "Arkansas Prays for You" and "Southwest Airlines Loves NYC" were messages scrawled at the wreckage site. One Midwestern town raised money for a replacement fire engine, and others for new earth-moving machines.[9] Hundreds of Americans swiftly traveled to the city and joined volunteer brigades to clean up and to purify the damaged area and to help those who had been traumatized by the events. Europeans publicly pronounced their love and affection for this quintessentially American city and expressed alarm over its injury. New York City became the center of the ideal core, concentrating within itself the spirit, energy, and openness to difference that made America the "land of the free and the home of the brave."

These gestures of identification towards the center from the peripheries had the reciprocal effect of strengthening national and supra-national solidarity in turn. While it was only one part of New York City that was injured, and only 2,813 particular persons who perished within it, the news headlined an attack on "America," and ordinary citizens everywhere expressed themselves with the plural first-person pronoun "we." In the long aftermath of 9/11, during the period of the new beginning, it was not uncommon for this identification to expand outside of the American nation as well. In the first year of the Bush Administration, there had been increasing hostility and separateness between America and Europe. After 9/11, the German prime minister proclaimed, "We are all Americans now." The reciprocal bonds that connect Europe and the United States were reasserted idealistically, and the moral debt from World War Two was repaid symbolically. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) declared its determination to defend America, as if to underscore the bond of extra-national, shared civilization itself. Once again Europeans and Americans were united under a great cause to fight for the common good, but this time the unity was wider, for it extended to Germany and Russia and Japan.

From counterscript to counterperformance: the "war against terrorism" and beyond

Osama bin Laden's terrorist performance had achieved physical destruction and social instability, and it briefly threatened to disrupt the nation's political life. But it did not achieve terrorism's most significant goal, which has to do with

the moral delegitimation of the regime itself. This performative turn seemed to have taken the director, bin Laden, by surprise, and certainly it must have disappointed him deeply. According to the binaries of his background script, if al-Qaeda was strong and pure, then Americans were soft and corrupt, their regime democratic only in the formal sense. Convinced of their weak motives, devious relations, and corrupt institutions, bin Laden believed that neither Americans nor their government would be able to respond politically, socially, or morally to his perfectly executed script.[10] In fact, however, the effect of al-Qaeda's performance was the very opposite from the one it had hoped to achieve. Rather than moral destabilization, there was revivification. Osama bin Laden's terrorism was performed before a fragmented and polarized audience, and it produced a reading counter to those intended by the terrorist-actors themselves.

This counterreading led to a new militarization of America, and later to a new war that would destroy al-Qaeda's national-territorial base. The cultural-sociological processes described here were causes to these more material effects. The new solidarity that developed in reaction to 9/11 deepened the divisions that had produced it. The idealization of America and the West was constructed in relation to an equally powerful stigmatization of everything not it. The new national unity produced a new global polarity at the same time. The counterreading had created an idealized and powerful protagonist, and it demanded an equally threatening antagonist in turn. Without it, there would be no tension to the plot, and the redemption of the moral actors would not be allowed to unfold realistically. Purification demanded pollution, and salvation required revenge. The discourse of friends and enemies was ready at hand. The terrorists were constructed as bitter and frustrated, as marginal, as weak and cowardly human beings. They were monsters, not men, and their actions had no principled rationale.

Against such sinister creatures the only appropriate response was force, for they could not be reasoned with but only suppressed. "None of us will forget this day," President Bush told the nation on the evening of September 11, "yet we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in the world" (quoted in Woodward 2002: 30). There must be a war against terror. The terrorists were evildoers. "We haven't seen this kind of barbarism in a long period of time," the President later remarked (Woodward 2002: 94). He added, "This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while." But it was not only a matter of recalling from the fog of memory the Christian campaigns against the Muslim usurpers of earlier times. Fiercely virtuous military campaigns had defended Republican regimes against "despotic" invaders from Athens to Florence to the beaches at Normandy (Hanson 2001).

Will the war against terrorism succeed? Will it not produce inevitably another counterperformance in turn? Even the most successful of the Crusades failed

to roll back Islam's energetic expansion, much less its theological-political self-regard. Terrorism produces wars against it, and crusades produce *jihad*s in turn. Contingent actions taken in freedom reaffirm the binding structures of contrapuntal plot. Perhaps this logic of performance and counterperformance has not been appreciated fully yet by the leaders of either side.

With the arrival of the "Age of Terror" (Talbot and Chanda 2002), the power to initiate the newest phase in the contrapuntal cycle has moved from West to East. But the *mis en scène* has not been altered. Islamic terrorism is a dramatic gesture, the Western response to it a dramatic misunderstanding. These Islamic and Western scripts fuel iterative sequences of misperformance.[11] Unless the cycle is broken, it will undermine the prospects for social stability and international understanding and, for many unfortunate persons, the very right to life.

Notes

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1. Here I draw from, "Cultural pragmatics: social performance between ritual and strategy" (ch. 1, this volume), in which I try to synthesize the pragmatic and textual dimensions of cultural action. I develop a model of the different elements of social performance and discuss how these elements are fused, de-fused, and re-fused in different social situations.
2. "Prophetic religion . . . assumes the exclusiveness of a universal god and the moral depravity of unbelievers who are his adversaries and whose untroubled existence arouses his righteous indignation . . . The precursor and probable model for this was the promise of the Hebrew god to his people, as understood and reinterpreted by Muhammad . . . The ancient wars of the Israelite confederacy, waged under the leadership of various saviors operating under the authority Yahweh, were regarded by the tradition as holy wars. This concept of a holy war, i.e., a war in the name of a god, for the special purpose of avenging a sacrilege, which entailed putting the enemy under the ban and destroying him and all his belongings completely, is not unknown in Antiquity, particularly among the Greeks. But what was distinctive about the Hebraic concept is that the people of Yahweh, as his special community, demonstrated and exemplified their god's prestige against their foes. Consequently, when Yahweh became a universal god, Hebrew prophecy and the religion of the Psalmists created a new religious interpretation. The possession of the Promised Land, previously foretold, was supplanted by the farther-reaching promise of the elevation of Israel, as the people of Yahweh, above other nations. In the future all nations would be compelled to serve Yahweh and to lie at the feet of Israel. On this model Muhammad constructed the commandment of the holy war involving the subjugation of the unbelievers to political authority and economic domination

of the faithful . . . The religion of the medieval Christian orders of celibate knights, particularly the Templars . . . were first called into being during the Crusades against Islam and . . . corresponded to the Islamic warrior orders" (Weber 1978: 473–5).

3. "We – with God's help – call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God's order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. We also call on Muslim *ulema*, leaders, youths, and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan's U.S. troops and the devil's supporters allying with them, and to displace those who are behind them so that they may learn a lesson. The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al Aqsa Mosque [in Jerusalem] and the Holy Mosque [in Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim" (1997 CNN interview, excerpts taken from "*Osama bin Laden v. the U.S.*: Edicts and Statements," www.pbs.org/frontline, quoted in Bernstein 2002: 90).
4. "Bin Laden organized a network of about a dozen different training camps . . . Each *mujahid*, or holy warrior, was given a code name so that even his fellow recruits generally did not know his real name . . . The training . . . was accompanied by steady infusions of Islamic fervor, in the form of Koran study, movies, lectures, and pamphlets. There was great stress on the glory of giving one's life for Allah, and the two greatest prohibitions [were] called 'love of the world' and 'hatred of death.' A key slogan was 'In time of war there is no death"' (Bernstein 2002: 86). "One of the pieces missing in the reconstruction of the September 11 plot," Bernstein later comments (2002: 145), "is the training in hijackings while they were in the United States." Did the terror-performers have "at their disposal mock-ups of passenger aircraft interiors where they could have gone through dress rehearsals"? While "it is possible," of course, "that they dispensed with such rehearsals, and simply made their plans on the basis of what they knew of the interiors of Boeing 767s from having been passengers on them," Bernstein suggests it "would seem more likely that the hijackers would have preferred to do some serious practice." The terrorists did have a sheet of final instructions, evidently prepared by Mohammed Atta, about how to prepare themselves just before the performance began. The night before, they were to shave their bodies of excess hair and to read *Al Tawba* and *Anfal*, the war chapters in the Koran. The goal was to control the inner self so that it would not interfere with their performative role.

> Remind your soul to listen and obey . . . purify it, convince it, make it understand, and incite it . . . and do not fight among yourselves or else you will fail. And be patient, for God is with the patient. When the confrontation begins, srike like champions who do not want to go back to this world. Shout "*Allah'u Akbar*" because this strikes fear in the hearts of the nonbelievers. (Bernstein 2002: 173)

5. A videotape discovered by American forces in Afghanistan in the months after 9/11 allowed Western audiences to become privy to bin Laden's own response to the 9/11 terrorist performance and to his close associates' comments about the broadcast of other Arab-Islamic reactions as well. It constituted, in this sense, the genre of a "play within a play."

> A few weeks after the attacks, bin Laden was with some of his close aides and a visitor from Saudi Arabia, and, sitting on a rug, relaxing with their backs leaning against the wall behind them, they expressed joy at the extent of the destruction, and they made jokes . . . about the events of September 11.
>
> "The TV broadcast the big event," said Sulaiman Abou-Ghaith, a radical Kuwaiti cleric who served as a close adviser to bin Laden. "The scene was showing an Egyptian family sitting in their living room. They exploded with joy. Do you know when there is a soccer game and your team wins? It was the same expression of joy."
>
> "A plane crashing into a tall building was out of anyone's imagination," the visitor from Saudi Arabia put in. "This was a great job" . . . He was Khaled al-Harbi, a veteran of the wars in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Chechnya who had lost his legs in combat.
>
> "It was 5:30 p.m. our time," bin Laden said. "Immediately, we heard the news that a plane had hit the World Trade Center. We turned the radio station to the news from Washington. The news continued and there was no mention of the attack until the end. At the end of the newscast, they reported that a plane just hit the World Trade Center."
>
> The visiting sheik interrupted to give a kind of religious sanction to the happy news. "Allah be praised," he intoned . . .
>
> Bin Laden continued his account of how he experienced September 11. "After a little while," he said, "they announced that another plane had hit the World Trade Center. The brothers who heard the news were overjoyed by it." (Bernstein 2002: 9–10)

6. These recastings were not reported as constructions but were presented as actual accounts, as objective descriptions, and objective rememberings. This ambiguity, how the implicit social role of journalism in such liminal situations contradicts its explicit professional ethics, is revealed nicely in the Foreword written by the executive editor of the *New York Times*, Howell Raines, to *Out of the Blue: The Story of September 11, 2001: From Jihad to Ground Zero*, authored by a *Times* journalist and based on the staff's reporting of the previous year.

> As daily journalists, of course, we do not set about our work with the idea of being teachers or moral historians. We are engaged in an intellectual enterprise built around bringing quality information to an engaged and demanding readership. Sometimes that means writing what some have called the first rough draft of history. Sometimes it also means constructing a memorial to those whose courage and sacrifice we have recorded or – to speak more precisely – erecting a foundation of information upon which our readers can construct their own historical overviews, their own memorials to those who are lost and to the struggle to preserve democratic values. (Bernstein 2002: x)

7. For a discussion of "new beginning" as a metaphorical construction that allows consensual commitment and social reform, see Edles' (1998) reconstruction of this image as one of the core representations that allowed the Spanish transition to democracy in post-Franco Spain.
8. Thousands of examples of such generalization and abstraction can be culled from the communicative media in the days, weeks, and months that followed 9/11. The nuanced ways in which this idealization functioned as a medium for identification and solidary-extension would be well worth the effort at hermeneutic reconstruction. A single quotation, merely as illustration, will have to suffice here. As the one-year anniversary of the tragedy approached, a flood of books appeared, written by some of the same journalists who initially had reported the events in the daily news media. The generalization and memorialization that formed the contents of these books then were condensed further and were broadcast to a much larger audience by the short book reviews published in the daily media in turn. Under the headline "On a Hijacked Airliner, Moments of Moral Clarity," the following paragraph appeared in a review of a book-length account of the passengers on United Flight 98, who evidently were able to overwhelm the hijackers and to prevent a fourth terrorist conflagration.

> Heroism is rarely the province of kings. This certainly emerged as a lesson in the many acts of courage we saw on Sept. 11, and it is a sustaining message within the story of the men and women who helped bring down United Flight 98 in the woods of Pennsylvania that day, on the one hijacking mission that failed to strike an intended target. The passengers and crew members were "ordinary" men and women who remind us again that no one, in fact, is ordinary; they saved innumerable other lives and contributed to our sense in the midst of that tragedy that as capable as we humans are of destruction, we are even more reliably capable of love, dedication, and sacrifice. (*New York Times*, August 29, 2002: E5)

9. "In Normal, Illinois, three local radio stations set up a tent in front of Schnucks Supermarket on Veterans' Parkway to collect donations in five-gallon water bottles – and the money came in at the rate of $5,000 per hour" (Bernstein 2002: 247–8).
10. In one of his commentary videotapes released after September 11 by the Arabic television station Al-Jazeera, bin Laden prematurely equated the physical destruction of American buildings and the horror Americans experienced with the destruction of the heart of the American social organism, that is, with "America" in a social and moral sense:

> Here is America struck by Almighty God in one of its vital organs so that its greatest buildings are destroyed . . . America has been filled with horror from north to south and east to west, and thanks be to God . . . God has used a group of vanguard Muslims, the forefront of Islam, to destroy America." (quoted in Bernstein 2002: 252–3)

11. The Iraq war demonstrates the continuation of this cycle in a particularly dramatic and unfortunate way. From its very inception, the principal actors talked past one another,

with little understanding or appreciation of the manner in which their actions would be perceived by some appreciable segment of the audience on the other side. On record for insisting that "events aren't moved by blind chance" but by "the hand of a just and faithful God," US President George W. Bush justified the American-led invasion of Iraq in his January 2003 State of the Union address: "We do not claim to know all the ways of Providence, yet we can trust in them . . . This call of history has come to the right country" (quoted in Lears 2003). Two weeks later, the spiritual leader of the Palestinian group Hamas, which initiated the strategy of suicide terrorism in Israel and the West Bank, instructed Muslims around the world to retaliate in the event of an American attack. Describing the imminent invasion as "a crusader's war" against Islam by "the envious West and the U.S. first among them," he insisted that, "as they fight us, we have to fight them" (quoted in Benet 2003). The day before the actual conflict began, Iraqi president Saddam Hussein described war with the United States as "the decisive battle between the army of faith, right and justice, and the forces of tyranny and American-Zionist savagery on the other." Declaring himself a "*jihad*ist," he called for a "holy war" that would "wipe out the ranks" of the invading American troops" (quoted in Tyler 2003).

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3

The cultural pragmatics of event-ness: the Clinton/Lewinsky Affair

Jason L. Mast

Introduction

Imagined communities generate events that compel community-wide attention, regardless of size or degree of social and cultural differentiation. Early in the twentieth century Durkheim famously argued there "can be no society that does not experience the need at regular intervals to maintain and strengthen the collective feelings and ideas that provide its coherence and its distinct individuality" ([1912] 1995: 429). Rituals, he specified, represent the processes through which solidarity and collective identity are rejuvenated. While social and cultural differentiation has made ritual-like processes in twenty-first-century America more difficult to sustain, this imagined community (Anderson 1983) continues to produce events that draw issues of collective identity and solidarity to the fore of its individuals' consciences (cf. Larson and Wagner-Pacifici 2001).

Contemporary ritual-like events, however, differ markedly from the processes Durkheim described. They are subject to much higher degrees of conflict, disconsensus, and contingency. Victor Turner (1969, 1974, 1982) responded to this critical fact when he pushed his ritual framework towards the theory of social dramas. Social dramas represent events in the making that compel community-wide attention, generating narratives, oftentimes conflicting, that define and explain what has occurred and its seriousness. The Clinton/Lewinsky Affair, which dominated the national spotlight in 1998, was just such a drama. It appeared to erupt from an initial occurrence for which the vast majority of the country's citizens wanted, if not demanded, an explanation and some form of redressive action. The resulting fourteen-month-long social drama was structured by the thrusts and parries of multiple publics competing to control the meaning of the event *in media res*.

Explaining Monicagate, however, requires that we analyze the particular cultural and political context out of which the social drama erupted. Early in

Clinton's first term, Congressional Republicans, with the support of an exuberant, solid quarter of the nation's citizens, began to construct Clinton's assumption of power as representing a national "fall from grace" drama. After meeting with some narrative success that enabled significant political victories, the persuasive power of the Republicans' dramatic narratives began to erode. Towards the end of its first term, the Clinton Administration became increasingly effective at controlling social dramas. The Administration's new-found social dramatic acumen enabled it to weather the right's relentless symbolic and political onslaughts. The Administration's narratives shored up support from its Democratic base, and increasingly secured the sympathy of the silent, swayable, middle majority of American citizens. In this chapter I will analyze the cultural pragmatics, or structure and action dialectics, that produced Monicagate's frenetic beginning and shaped the contours of the event's unfolding. In so doing I will show how the cultural pragmatic framework explains the apparent paradox of how Clinton, though impeached by the House Republicans, remained in office to finish out his second term with high approval ratings, and the sympathy and support of a majority of American publics.

The theoretical roots of cultural pragmatics

Cultural pragmatics addresses a range of social phenomena that are variously referred to in sociological literature as degradation ceremonies (Garfinkel 1956), secular rituals (Douglas 1966), moments out of time (Turner 1969, 1974, 1982), media events (Dayan and Katz 1992), and, of course, collective rituals (Durkheim [1912] 1995; Shils and Young 1953; Lukes 1975; Alexander 1988; Smith 1991; Edles 1998). These sociological conceptualizations describe highly orchestrated collective processes that produce a "break" from mundane, routine social life, and for this reason are central to the maintenance of social order and the formation and extension of collective identity. These processes emerge in response to initiating occurrences that appear to demand attention, interpretation, and remedial action. It was such *apparent* occurrences that precipitated events like Watergate (1972), the hostage crisis in Iran (1979), the Iran-Contra Affair (1987), Rodney King's videotaped arrest (1991) and the acquittal of his police subduers (1992), the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City (1995), and the death of Diana, Princess of Wales (1997), as well as Monicagate and the Clinton impeachment trial (1998). In each case, these event-processes demonstrate ceremonial qualities. On the one hand, as non-routine events, such processes conform to historically grounded, routine structures with more or less agreed upon beginnings, middles, and ends. On the other, they are adorned with overt aesthetic dimensions in the form of intentionally exaggerated symbolic performances. Such

event-processes concern themselves with attributing meaning to an initializing occurrence in order to bring about a change in the social status of an individual or group, simultaneously creating and resolving conflict between segments of a collectivity.

From mundane to extraordinary experiences, social life is inextricably infused with meaning. An "occurrence" is any cognized happening (Molotch and Lester 1974: 102), and cognition suggests some degree of interpretation. Yet, while meaningful occurrences exist only temporarily and relatively discretely in a social actor's awareness; they neither transcend their originating contexts nor take root in a larger public's consciousness. An "event," by contrast, is a set of narratively interconnected occurrences that achieves "generalization," drawing a public's attention away from the specificity of everyday life (Alexander 1988; Smelser 1963). As unusually significant meaning constellations, events become lasting points of demarcation in the flow of collective time and retain the potential to inform ongoing social experience. Structurally, events take shape from stark clashes of meaning structures within a broad cultural system of shared sign relations. At the same time, such clashes are both orchestrated and reactively mediated by purposeful, creative human agents who narrate the interconnections between occurrences.

What explains event-ness's natural feel, the sensed rightness of its status, and the passions it can generate, a naturalness that belies the self-conscious quality of an event's orchestration? Durkheim's late work ([1912] 1995) explains one absolutely critical piece of this puzzle.[1] As anchoring nodes in the cultural fabric, Durkheim explains, the sacred and the profane stand in diametrical opposition to one another as "hostile and jealous rivals" ([1912] 1995: 37). It follows that "the mind experiences deep repugnance about mingling, even simple contact, between the corresponding things, because the notion of the sacred is always and everywhere separate from the notion of the profane in man's mind, and because we imagine a kind of logical void between them" ([1912] 1995: 37). Durkheim concludes that rites and ritual ceremonies function to maintain this logical void, re-establishing and reaffirming individuals' understandings of their community's symbolic boundaries between good and evil and right and wrong. Individual actions are shaped by the way actors understand their situations vis-à-vis these meaning structures. By focusing on the processes that establish the foundations for social understanding, Durkheim laid the groundwork for a cultural sociology. Such cosmological mechanisms must play a central role in any explanation of social order or variations thereof. By retaining the theoretical centrality of meaning, Turner (1969, 1974, 1982), Alexander (1988), and others (e.g. Smith 1991; Edles 1998) have demonstrated that the basic processes Durkheim illuminated explain the structure and outcome of even the most conflict-laden, chaotic, or violent

contemporary events. Collectivities, whether wracked by violent expressions of difference or seemingly seduced into sleepy indifference, are ontologically tethered to the world via cultural systems that render social interactions sensible by structuring lived experiences into coded discourses, myths, genres, and narratives.

The "natural" repugnance or shock many Americans demonstrated during the Clinton/Lewinsky Affair's inception, which contributed to the precipitation of full-fledged event-ness, exemplifies this symbolic dynamic of a perceived profanation of a sacred space, for instance, counter-democratic actions being found in a democracy's sacred center (see Alexander 1988; Alexander and Smith 1993; Douglas 1966). Degrees of exasperation point to the interconnectedness of affect and meaning structures. The logic of structuralism – the culture system's relative stability, its constitution of consciousness – suggests particular actions, like taking another human's life, are culturally predetermined to provoke purifying, restorative rituals: the sacred's status seems natural to us and the "logical void" between it and the profane is not negotiated or reflectively considered during everyday, mundane experience. Rather, this cultural structure informs our worldly interpretations even though it is socially constructed and its idiosyncratic contents are essentially arbitrary.

Despite the natural feel of such breaching events, turning an "occurrence" into an "event" in postmodern, highly differentiated, late capitalist America – gaining control over its meaning by persuading countless anonymous others to share one's interpretation and recommendation for remedial action – is an exceedingly contingent and combative process. Social actors and parties work to create events, to define occurrences as such, often in the face of considerable opposition from actors who would rather let this occurrence pass by unnoticed. When an eventworthy occurrence develops, and widespread public attention does shift towards investigating and making sense of it, multiple and motivated parties emerge to impose on this eruption a "master narrative" (Wagner-Pacifici 1986). Their goal is to control its ultimate interpretation and effects. Controlling the event's outcome points beyond meaning to such "material" effects as determining the meting out of punishments, redistributing resources such as money and positions of power, and restructuring institutions.

A theoretical caution: the cynical tendency towards reduction

Normative and political orientations may tempt us to reduce Monicagate to partisan politics, prurient titillation, and "mere scandal." This interpretive urge is strong enough for some scholars to "wonder if the events themselves were not imaged, or imaginary" (Larson and Wagner-Pacifici 2001: 736). They point to polls that showed "only a minority of Americans followed the impeachment hearings closely" and to the fact that the Affair appeared "discontinuous, [and] unsupported by any 'plot'" (Larson and Wagner-Pacifici 2001: 737). Yet this is precisely *not* to understand what makes an occurrence into an event, and what differentiates contemporary social dramas from earlier rituals.[2] As will be shown, it is the competition between groups of producers, actors, and partial audiences that characterizes *any* contemporary "affair," and multiple plots are the rule. It will require introducing a much more elaborate theory of social performance to allow me to further explain these points.

The ritual and social dramatic analytical frameworks that have dominated earlier sociological interpretations of such events have contributed significant insights. For instance, demonstrating a prescient cultural pragmatic sensibility, Alexander's (1988) analysis of Watergate offers a thickly described hermeneutics of the event's primary phases and explains its outcome in terms of "non-rational ritualization" becoming the order of the day.[3] Yet, at the same time Alexander was demonstrating culture must figure robustly in sociological explanations, others were arguing that late-capitalist, postmodern societies' meaning systems are too fragmented and commodified, their audiences too jaded and skeptical, for ritual-like productions to actively engage members of an imagined community (Wagner-Pacifici 1986; Jameson 1982: 84–5). This latter line of theoretical speculation performs a kind of contorted dance: simultaneously attributing central explanatory importance to culture while arguing capitalism has reduced culture's contents to commodities and instruments of power, forces some interesting theoretical contradictions.[4]

In her analysis of the kidnapping and murder of Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro, for instance, Wagner-Pacifici (1986) argues the cultural realm has been fully colonized by postmodern capitalism and symbols reduced to commodities and weapons. In a nutshell, culture is determined by the mode of production and infused with power. While her analysis is rich with conceptual insights into the pragmatics of social-dramatic productions, Wagner-Pacifici's theoretical presuppositions of postmodern society undercut her analytical gains. On the one hand, she makes culture structures important to the event's outcome. The event's self-appointed interpreters make use of socially pre-structured meanings to influence their audiences, and audiences rely on these frames to make sense of Moro's situation and fate. Yet, at the same time, Wagner-Pacifici also argues that, once capitalism has commodified symbols, their effectiveness gets diminished, that, as commodities, symbols are ubiquitous, degraded, and cheapened through repetitive use. Consumer-savvy moderns are thus uninterested and too apathetic and disenchanted to be taken in by elite narratives about Moro's predicament. Within this ontology about culture's relation to human life, in which symbols are reduced to superficial, empty vessels, how can meaning and interpretation be central to the event's dynamics (cf. Alexander and Smith 1998)?

Goffman drew our attention to the "problem of misrepresentation" (1951: 298), that people have the ability to present persuasively false meanings, and it is certainly true that political and normative predilections pull on epistemology (Said 1978; Clifford 1988). Still, it is vital that sociology resist subsuming meaning to collective power and individual practice. Yes, culture is in part a "tool kit" (Swidler 1986), and studies such as Wagner-Pacifici's demonstrate this in a powerful way. We use words intentionally to try to communicate particular ideas for particular reasons. Yet culture's relevance to social life depends on its relative autonomy from the social structure, in its structural form, or *langue* (language) (see Kane 1991). While culture is made present through *parole* (speech), or through an actor's use of a particular "tool," it is made meaningful and comprehensible, and therefore socially influential, because of the "tool's" analogical and antipathetic relations to other tools in the "kit" that are not explicitly in play, but which, nonetheless, exercise power in the experienced social situation (Barthes [1968] 1977a; Eco 1976; Saussure 1985). Action is always citational (Derrida 1988). Each instantiation of meaning draws forth unseen signs and symbols, rooted in the cultural fabric, into momentary if non-conscious presence.

There is also the matter of temporality. A "tool's" meaning in social life is the product of its relation to other tools that are made present by actors in a temporal flow of successive instantiations. Flows of signs demonstrate structures; they are discourses, narratives, myths, and genres. Understanding a tool's particular meaning at a particular time requires locating its presence in relation to the overall structural flow. Just as the meaning of a word is determined by its location in the structure of a sentence, so the sociologist must account for where a particular tool stands in relation to the more general cultural-structure in which it is invoked. These are the structures of social life, and must be the centerpieces of sociological explanations. Limiting our sociological understanding of action to "what gets done," and seeking to get beyond the problem of meaning (Wuthnow 1987) inevitably attributes inordinate degrees of instrumentality to social practice. The meaning of action is thus shaped more by the structure of the sociologist's explanatory narrative (for instance, see Larson and Wagner-Pacifici 2001), than by the experiences and understandings of the social actors actually engaged in an event.

However, sociology that simply debunks and elucidates is insufficient and partial. Sociology must aim to understand and explain. Cultural pragmatics is an analytic solution to the philosophical conundrum of how theory and practice interact in the production of everyday life. It provides a conceptual framework for mapping, and thickly describing, the incongruities between words and deeds. It enables us to explain events in terms of their meaningful contents for participants, the power relations brought to bear in the event, and the influence of material factors on event production and reception, without negating the background culture's continuing structural effects (Derrida 1988).

The Clinton/Lewinsky Affair

Monicagate's dramatic prelude

Monicagate was a coded, narratively structured social drama, given form through the interactions of political and social elites, critics and interpretive entrepreneurs, and multiple American publics. At different times throughout the event, each of these three clusters of agents assumed the lead role in focusing the production's spotlight, while the other two groups assumed the role of audience, as though inhabiting the seats in a darkened theatre, celebrating or booing the production along. Each cluster of agents simultaneously enacted a role and interpreted the others' performances. The form and outcome of Monicagate was the product of these interactions.

Yet the event's interactions were themselves structured by participants' reliance on shared, collective representations. Adopting the cultural pragmatic perspective, it becomes clear that the symbols and discourses mobilized during the political battles that preceded the scandal, and were continually invoked throughout Monicagate, combined to form identifiable narrative structures. Agents' invocations of particular symbols during the event, such as regular recourse to the symbol "Slick Willie" to villainize Clinton, suggest dynamics sociologically more profound than the fact that particular agents used symbols instrumentally as tools or weapons. Cultural pragmatics acknowledges social actors orient towards meaning with intent, but it analytically probes deeper by asking, for instance, why a particular symbol is meaningful, what makes it damaging like a weapon, and why does its invocation produce positive reactions in some audience members and adverse reactions in others?

Monicagate's main protagonists drew on dramatic structures from two popular film genres, the bank robber and gangster films of the late 1920s and early 1930s, and the bad cop films and television news narratives of the 1990s. Rooted in America's political and social history, these popular culture structures are latently present in civil society members' understandings of citizenship. While these cops and robbers genres shape American participants' understandings of routine flows and hiccups in the everyday meting out of justice (Christensen 1987; Gibson 1994; King 1999),[5] it is during political scandals and social crises that their dramatic tropes are most forcefully deployed and their social, interpretive power made explicit. Monicagate's three clusters of agents routinely drew upon these culture structures' tropes to describe themselves as victims or as agents of justice on the one hand, and to frame the

other clusters in the social drama as villains and perpetrators of injustice on the other.

Elements from the bank robber and gangster genres began to permeate civil discourse during Clinton's bid for the Democratic nomination in 1992, most notably in the mushrooming use of the name "Slick Willie" to capture the candidate's charisma, charm, and sharp intellect, on the one hand, and the suspicion that within him lurked a penchant for mischief and a talent for deceit, on the other. The use and force of the symbol increased its hold over American imaginations from early 1992 until late in 1995, when tropes from the bad cop genre forcefully emerged in the discourse of civil society to describe Republicans investigating the president and accusing him of criminal wrongdoing. While American publics – whether composed of Clinton enthusiasts, ambivalent moderates, or unwavering conservatives – were exposed to and invoked these genre idioms with increasing frequency during these time periods, the way any particular public oriented towards these symbol-complexes remained contingent. In effect, the idioms came to serve as lexicons for, and sites of, symbolic contestation between publics.

Clinton entered office in January 1993, having won the election with the smallest portion of the popular vote (43 percent) since Richard Nixon's 1968 victory.[6] Exit polls indicated Clinton, Bush, and Independent Party candidate Ross Perot, all drew remarkably high unfavorable ratings, and the *New York Times* editorial page framed Clinton's victory as a "fragile mandate . . . of tenuous proportion."[7]

It was Clinton's impressive biography that helped the candidate win the trust of the Democratic base and a decisive portion of the nation's undecided moderate middle. The facts of Clinton's rise to the national stage resonated with the American myth that any boy with talent and pluck, no matter how humble his origins, could become the president of the United States. Clinton's campaign overcame its candidate's "character issues" and assuaged voter suspicion by emphasizing his rise from a broken home in rural Arkansas to becoming a Rhodes Scholar, Yale Law School graduate, and governor of his home state. Clinton's campaign combined these biographical facts with their candidate's youthful enthusiasm to construct the image of a natural populist.[8] Within the narrative context of a nation adrift in economic stagnation, the Clinton campaign's dramatic strategy was extraordinarily effective, particularly when the candidate was juxtaposed to Bush Sr.'s genteel aloofness.

The election drama carved the nation's citizenry into three distinct audiences. Both the Democratic and Republican Party bases, each comprising roughly a quarter of the voting public, reacted to Clinton's campaign and victory with strong feelings. Yet, despite the political passions stirred in both parties' bases, Clinton's five-percentage point victory over Bush Sr. indicates the nation's enormous third audience at the political center was decisive in the contest, and voted as much against Bush's poor handling of the nation's economic malaise as for Clinton himself.

Despite his compelling personal narrative and the hope he inspired in many, Clinton entered the presidency with a binary character as a result of the bruising symbolic battles of the Democratic primaries and general election contest. In addition to representing the best and brightest of a new generation of political leadership, Clinton entered the White House as "Slick Willie." An editor of Arkansas's most widely read newspaper, the *Democrat-Gazette*, initiated the symbolic linkage between Clinton and this gangster symbol in the late 1980s. The moniker was picked up by national media outlets[9] and fused to Clinton's national character early in 1992, as a tide of allegations of womanizing, dope smoking, and draft evasion threatened to overwhelm the frontrunner's campaign for his party's nomination. The allegations themselves cast a shadow of duplicity around Clinton, and ironically, this suspicion was only strengthened by the deftness with which Clinton rhetorically evaded and confounded his critics and questioners.

Was the symbol simply a nickname, a "tool" designed for practical effect? Quite the contrary, the symbol's invocation, spread most effectively by the *New York Times* liberal political commentator and satirist, Maureen Dowd, indicates the initial formation of a negative and polluting cultural structure. Though often used in jest, the symbol, rooted deeply in American popular and political culture, would play a large role in Clinton's later emplotment in Monicagate.

The prototypical gangster of this genre comes from an impoverished rural area to the big city, rises through the ranks of a criminal organization through hard work, ambition, quick wits, and a kind of business acumen, to become the head crime boss of an enormous profit-making enterprise, a role quite similar to the president of a legitimate corporation. Bold, charismatic, reckless, and vainglorious, a top gangster is an outgoing and expansive performer driven by an uncontrollable lust to show the world that he is *somebody*. His desires are boundless. While his rural roots have left him lacking in cultural knowledge and manners, he nonetheless remains a ladies' man. Not needing love in the traditional sense, the gangster associates with "loose women" because of their easy and eager availability. These associations ultimately come at a high price. Because he always wants more and must constantly conquer new territory, the gangster's ultimate defeat seems a natural product of his desires and demands of life (Sobchack and Sobchack 1987). Though a master of escape to his very end, the higher he rises the more others seek his demise, and the more isolated and paranoid he becomes.

Willie Sutton, the original "Slick Willie," was a bank robber in the early 1930s known for the gentlemanly and personable demeanor with which he handled his victims when plying his trade. Bank robbers like Slick Willie Sutton, and gangsters like Al Capone and Baby Face Nelson grew to mythic stature

in Depression-era America, when American society was seen as failing average Americans, and lenders and wealthy capitalists were foreclosing on small businesses, farms, and homes. Though flawed in important respects, gangsters were interpreted as more similar to average Americans in life circumstances and moral sensibilities than were representatives of material wealth and institutional power.

In the American collective imagination the gangster symbol, in both its real person and filmic forms, came to represent a kind of romanticized outlaw, a good-bad guy, or a pragmatic Robin Hood. The intensity with which portions of the Depression-era public came to identify with these social renegades is perhaps best illustrated by people's reaction to John Dillinger's violent death by the guns of FBI agents outside the Biograph Theatre in 1934, Chicago. Immediately after his fall from the gunshots, hordes of onlookers descended on the scene and began mopping up the icon of romantic populism's blood with their clothes.[10] Just as Dillinger drew fire from the feds, the highly popular gangster film genre came under institutional fire as well. Drafted in 1930 and strictly instituted in 1934, the Hays Code represented a quasi-governmental, religious reaction to the gangster's increasingly beloved status in the American imagination. The product of collaboration between William Harrison Hays, who served in President Warren Harding's cabinet, a grab-bag of religious figures, and Hollywood moguls whose industry was plagued by scandals, the Hays Code was a self-regulatory code mandating that criminal acts should "never be presented in such a way as to throw sympathy with the crime as against law and justice or to inspire others with a desire for imitation." The simultaneity of these regulatory mechanisms' enactment, and the Hays Code's explicit reference to the connection between real gangsters and the cinema's version of these outlaws, suggests that the existences of real objects and representations of real objects mutually constitute one another through a feedback loop dynamic (Schechner 2002; Turner 1982).

While Clinton entered the White House tenuously as a good-bad guy, by July 17, 1995, the *Washington Times* was describing the Clinton White House as shrouded in a "Climate of Suspicion." *TIME Magazine*'s headline the following week was "Whitewater Tricks; New Hearings Prompt the Clintons to Make New Revelations – Only to Be Caught Short Again." What led to these constructions in which, for a sizeable portion of the nation's political center, Clinton was increasingly associated with the negative codes of gangsterism?

1993 saw the development of several Clinton White House scandals: "Travelgate," concerning charges of nepotism and the mismanagement of federal travel funds;[11] Vince Foster's suicide;[12] the failure of Arkansas' Madison Guaranty S&L run by the Clintons' friends and periodic business partners the McDougals.[13] The White House staff's resistant and evasive responses

combined with the developments themselves to create the *Times*'s "climate of suspicion."[14] While Congressional Republicans' approval ratings began to rise, Clinton's approval ratings repeatedly set record lows, hovering between the mid-30s and 40s until spring 1995.

The single most significant political consequence of the climate of suspicion surrounding the Clinton White House was the Democratic Party's loss of control of both the House of Representatives and the Senate in 1994's November elections.[15] This transferred an enormous amount of institutional power to the Republicans who treated their sweeping victory as a mandate from the public and as an indictment of the Clinton White House.[16] Earlier that year, Attorney General Janet Reno had appointed Robert Fiske to head the investigation into the Whitewater land and S&L dealings and Vince Foster's suicide. November's shift in Congressional power enabled the Republican-controlled Senate to remove Fiske and appoint Ken Starr to the role of special prosecutor. Additionally, the House and Senate Banking Committees both began hearings on Whitewater. And Newt Gingrich, as the new Speaker of the House, became increasingly vocal in his criticisms of Clinton, announcing upwards of twenty new task forces and subcommittees to investigate him – a number he was later forced to reduce.

A shift in the dramatic landscape, in which new villains emerged, occurred after the Republicans won control of Congress. While the bank robber and gangster genres continued to shape civil discourse after 1995, polls indicate that a growing majority of citizens began to both orient towards their idioms with greater degrees of irony, and to emphasize the quasi-heroic dimensions of the gangster figure when describing Clinton. The declining significance of the gangster genre's *polluting* dimensions was due in part to the rising power in the discursive arena of the "bad cop" film genre (cf. Christensen 1987; King 1999), whose tropes were increasingly drawn upon to characterize the investigative authorities pursuing Clinton and working so hard to assassinate his character. These symbolic shifts facilitated one another, and as Clinton's political team became more successful at morphing the president's accusers into bad cops, Clinton's transformation into the quasi-heroic, quick-thinking, gangster escapist accelerated.

The bad cop picture represents a mutation of the rogue cop genre film popular in the mid- and late 1970s. Rising to prominence in the wake of Watergate, the rogue cop picture pits a stoic, everyman cop-figure fighting for justice against both street criminals and representatives of institutional authority. His departmental superiors and political authorities have become sources of corruption, and instead of representing authors and protectors of justice, they are portrayed as standing in the way of justice. Shifting the locus of corruption, the bad cop genre proliferates in the wake of 1991's widely and frequently televised

home-videotape clip showing Los Angeles policemen violently subduing African American motorist Rodney King.

In the bad cop genre no character is left completely innocent or virtuous; rather, all characters are portrayed as struggling against social forces to maintain a civilized dignity. The bad cop is one of the few that gives up this struggle completely and exercises his power in frequently arbitrary, yet always self-interested ways. While the pervasiveness of corruption amongst the league of police foot-soldiers is left ambiguous, those with the power to investigate and physically subdue others are portrayed as the clearest representatives of potential evil. This genre's presence in the collective constitution of the real was powerfully demonstrated in 1995, when attorney Johnny Cochran represented OJ Simpson's official police investigators as bad cops. The investigators' exact motives for targeting Simpson remained rather ambiguous; they were simply sinister, if shaped by racism and desire for notoriety.[17] Actor Denzel Washington, the lead in this genre's quintessential filmic representation, *Training Day* (2001), received one of the film industry's highest honors for his portrayal of a bad cop whose "nihilistic magnificence" and "underhandedness" left onlookers – both in the film and in its audiences – rapt in a state of puzzlement.[18]

After successfully gaining control of Congress by running explicitly against the Clinton Administration during 1994's midterm elections, the Republicans' increase in institutional authority appeared to reflect a similarly impressive increase in symbolic authority and trust vis-à-vis American voters. However, as the number and severity of their attacks on Clinton increased, the Republicans' tactics and subjects of scrutiny began to alienate the moderate swing voters who had helped them gain their new-found power.

During this time the president and his staff grew increasingly adept at shaping the political arena's dramatic landscape, and moved to formalize their processes of meaning production with the development of a new scandal management team (Woodward 1999: 275). In 1994 and 1995 several convictions resulted from the Whitewater investigations. While initially quite damaging politically, the Clinton Administration grew increasingly skilled at framing such convictions as inconsequential prosecutorial successes against obscure land developers and speculators. The convictions drew only scant coverage by national newscasts, and received most of their attention in late-night talk show monologues, which mocked Gingrich and the Republicans' repeated promises that Clinton's undoing was nigh. To the contrary, Clinton's symbolic framework began to improve, a process that was catalyzed by his masterfully presidential reaction to the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in April 1995.

Additionally, November and December of 1995 were dominated by narrative constructions of Clinton versus the Congressional Republicans in a battle over the federal government's budget. Clinton's handling of the stalemate led

the Republicans to take the extraordinarily unpopular step of officially shutting down all government services, twice. The powerful and emotionally charged performances Clinton delivered throughout these battles over the budget solidified a shift in the political arena's symbolic landscape. By the end of the battle over the budget, talk of "scandal fatigue" began to emerge to describe the shifting mood amongst the nation's moderate middle. Whereas during the prior two years Clinton was effectively coded as evasive and worthy of suspicion to many, the Clinton versus Republicans show-down marked the dramatic recasting of the Republicans in the political sphere's role of the bad cop. The Republicans' various investigative efforts were increasingly interpreted as less motivated by democratic ideals and more driven by counterdemocratic forms of partisanship. During this shift in symbolic landscape a critical plot-point occurred: Clinton began his intimate relationship with Monica Lewinsky three days into the government shut-down.

Independent Council, Ken Starr's investigative reach was expanded in 1996 by Attorney General Reno to include "Filegate"[19] and allegations of Clinton officials lying to Congress. This increase in Republican investigative power fueled the symbolic expansion of their villain framework and catalyzed what could be called the "Gingrich-ification" of Ken Starr. Undaunted by, or unaware of this trend, the Republicans continued to insinuate that the investigative efforts would "reveal" mortally damaging facts about the Clinton White House. Despite the periodic unearthing of White House improprieties and questionable past dealings,[20] none of these instances was symbolically transformed into the damning evidence the Republicans had been promising. As a consequence, (1) the Republicans' continual promises of a mortal blow fueled "scandal fatigue," (2) Starr's investigative expansion resulted in the symbolic linkage of his political motives with Newt Gingrich's, and (3) the Republicans were increasingly framed as bad cops, driven by counterdemocratic motives and by a personal dislike for Clinton.

A critical plot development occurred in 1997. As the investigations continued, an anonymous call was placed to Paula Jones's attorneys alerting them to Clinton's relationship with Lewinsky (retrospectively presumed to have been made by Linda Tripp). An important series of additional plot points followed that led to the public revelation of Clinton's involvement with Lewinsky. Lewinsky was subpoenaed by Paula Jones's lawyers, for instance. She also met with Clinton to "practice" for her deposition, was offered a job at Revlon by Clinton's friend, Vernon Jordan, and she shared a copy of a document titled "Points to Make in an Affidavit," containing instructions for responding to questions about the Kathleen Willey case, with her then friend, Linda Tripp. Shortly later, Tripp contacted Starr and agreed to tape conversations with Lewinsky about her relationship with Clinton. Starr then requested and was allowed to expand his

investigation to include possible perjury and obstruction of justice in the Jones case. FBI and US attorneys questioned Lewinsky and offered her immunity in exchange for testimony. And finally, on January 17, 1998, Clinton gave a deposition denying he had been in a sexual relationship with Lewinsky.

In the months to come, the Republican dramatic production worked to frame these events as part of a chain of discovery of facts about Clinton's true nature. They also sought to frame initial public reactions of shock and intense interest as constituting a natural response to what should be considered a clear transgression of sacred boundaries. The Clinton production team, on the other hand, and Democrats more generally, dramatically framed these events as part of a long-standing, secretive, villainously orchestrated plan to attack Clinton personally for political gain.

Monicagate's first phase

The social processes resulting from the news release of Clinton's possible relationship with Lewinsky appeared to take on a life of its own. The breach occurred on January 21, 1998, at 1:11 a.m. when Matt Drudge posted the headline "Blockbuster Report: 23-Year-Old, Former White House Intern, Sex Relationship With President" on his website. After learning of Drudge's web-posting, the *Washington Post* ran the story on the 21st as well with the headline "Clinton Accused of Urging Aide to Lie."

The news's rapid spread sparked massive, widespread shifts in attention among people working in political institutions and news media, and pulled citizens away from their mundane routines to center on a particular occurrence. One Administration official stated that an "air of unreality" had taken hold in Washington;[21] those in the Washington D.C. area were described as "flabbergasted" and "shocked beyond belief;"[22] and one commentator, reflecting on the qualitatively new tone in the nation's capital at the close of the event's first week, symbolically linked the event with Watergate, stating "Friday evening brought to close a week [not seen] since the darkest days of Watergate."[23]

Audiences actively engaged the emerging ritual-like process as well. Breaking from their routine affairs, people flooded Internet news websites, crashing many servers due to the heavy traffic, bought newspapers in record numbers, and tuned into cable news networks, which experienced dramatic increases in viewership.[24] E-civil spheres mushroomed online, as chatrooms filled with people seeking to discuss and debate the events.

Watergate continued to play a central role in the event's symbolic framing. Conservative critic William Safire invoked a piece of Watergate's naturalistic imagery, characterizing the atmosphere around Clinton as a "*firestorm* that [is] going to break out around him."[25] The metaphors Watergate and firestorm are

images of uncontrollable, natural forces. Safire's use of firestorm symbolically links Clinton with Nixon, and characterizes the press and public reactions as natural, uncontrollable, and furious reactions to the assumed corruption.

Sam Donaldson's spontaneous, oft-repeated response to the breach indicates the event's fused, ritual-like feel of irresistible momentum: "If he's not telling the truth, I think his presidency is probably numbered in days. This isn't going to drag out. We're not going to be here in three months talking about this . . . I sat here during Watergate, we all did. I am amazed at the *speed with which this story is going*."[26] Actively partaking in the telling of the story, Donaldson nonetheless describes the process as propelled by a momentum all its own.

Clinton was the central character in the initial stages of the incipient drama. In terms of *mis-en-scène*, the critics rendered him a lone figure at center stage. His physical performance in his initial interview with Jim Lehrer on *The News Hour* was described as "visibly shaken and unsteady in his responses;"[27] he appeared as though a "picture of isolation," and "withdrawn . . . secretive and evasive."[28] His verbal performance was framed critically as "legalistic and evasive," "carefully worded . . . cryptic, partial, and insufficient," and "dependent . . . so heavily on omission and factual elision."[29] Clinton was quickly framed a "counter-democratic" (Alexander and Smith 1993) character. He was cast in the image of a guilty man who was once thought of as heroic if flawed but had been revealed as an impulsive fraud.

Within the first couple of days after the news's release, polls registered dramatic changes in public opinion, indicating a substantive expansion of a ritual-like process and the fusion of audiences with the Republican drama.[30] The number of Americans who disbelieved both of Clinton's denials – of having an affair with Lewinsky and suborning her to perjure herself – rose substantially, from 28 percent disbelieving Clinton on January 21 to 62 percent disbelieving him on January 23. Desires for Clinton's resignation were on the rise as well, with 67 percent wanting his departure from office if the allegations were true, and 56 percent favoring impeachment if he refused to step down voluntarily (ABC News).

Actors in an incipient social drama respond to a breach and mounting sense of crisis by working to control the meaning, and thus the consequences of the news. They invoke symbols with great metaphoric reach, and try to discursively construct and embody favorable symbols, codes, and literary archetypes in their actions. Actors' control over the means of symbolic and emotional production, their access to power, and their approaches to establishing the drama's *mise-en-scène* contribute to the formation of audiences' interpretations.

The Republicans' dramatic intentions included encouraging ritualization, liminality, and a collective sense of being "out of time." Narratively and dramatically this involved establishing and maintaining narrative clarity and simplicity,

and a sense of narrative boundedness in which the beginning had just occurred with the "revelation" of the Lewinsky Affair. The subtext of their early efforts was that "we have discovered an evil in the social center, now we must expel it." Their narrative and dramatic efforts were also aimed at hiding the machinations that went into preparing and bringing the social drama into being. That is, they sought to hide their backstage efforts that went into bringing the drama to stage; or, put theatrically, to hide their multiple "investigative rehearsals" that contributed to the news's outing.

The Republicans sought to encourage spectators' "natural outrage" at the news. Durkheim's (1995) and Mary Douglas's (1966) work on the relation between the sacred and the profane suggests the public's shock was in some sense culturally predetermined. Both argue that the profane must be removed from a sacred center via ritual means. The US office of presidency is perhaps the most sacred symbol in the US's national cultural order. Clinton's actions of sexual indiscretion and alleged perjury, if judged by the broad consensus that followed the news, were initially interpreted as representing a profanation of that sacred center.[31] It must be reiterated, however, that in highly differentiated democratic societies the sense of flow that audiences experience when they are fused with a social dramatic production is never self-sustaining. It demands constant effort and performative style to maintain the representation of compelling substance. In this regard, the Republicans found themselves in a dramatic bind.

Despite signs of shock, outrage, titillation, and civic re-engagement across American publics, the breach could not sustain itself. Social dramas require that producers claiming interpretive authority and legitimacy engage in a continual process of narration. Yet producers are constrained by their emplotment in the developing social drama. Audiences interpret a producer's claims to non-partisanship, neutrality, and disinterestedness, for instance, vis-à-vis the claimant's character development in the drama thus far.

In January 1998, the Republicans were confronted with a social-dramatic paradox: to successfully pollute Clinton they needed to narrate the breach's meaning and dramatize Monicagate's consequences as representing a dire threat to the nation's political center. Yet, they were prevented from engaging the social dramatic battle for fear of further concretizing the bad cop image the Clinton team had so successfully attributed them to date. The genre posits that bad cops pretend to be heroes. They use their authority to manufacture crises so that they can benefit from appearing to resolve them. In more concrete terms, bad cops plant evidence only to claim to discover it. Once "discovered," the bad cop removes the social threat – the evidence and the framed criminal – and assumes the role of hero for having protected and restored what is sacred in society.

A memo sent to Congressional Republicans by party strategist Frank Luntz during the breach's first week indicates Luntz sensed he needed to warn Republican characters against playing into the bad cop genre's logic:

> If you comment, you will take a non-partisan, non-political situation and make it both partisan and political. Do not speculate. Do not hypothesize. Too many Americans justify the President's behavior because they dislike his accusers. Please don't add to that justification.[32]

To have fully engaged the breach and dramatized it as representing a crisis of democracy, the Republicans would have run the risk of portraying themselves as bad cops who had manufactured the evidence against Clinton only to have "discovered" it in order to reap the rewards of a new-found heroic status. Such actions would have solidified the Clinton team's well-developed narrative: that "Monicagate" simply represented the latest installment of Republican machinations to delegitimize the president. Yet, simply acting as if they were neutral onlookers would not prevent the Clinton team from dramatically situating Monicagate's news within a narrative of a long, secretive, meticulously orchestrated Republican plot to frame the president. Dramatically checkmated, the Republicans were unable to engage in dramatic contestation over the news's meaning and consequently they quite quickly lost narrative control over the incipient event. Within two weeks they were effectively coded and dramatically defined as unfit carriers of the ritual project.

The Democratic production faced no such dramatic restrictions. As the only character *en-scène* in this early phase, Clinton used his vast power and means of symbolic production to contest the veracity, and therefore the meaning of the allegations. He had at his disposal the media's unwavering attention and the symbolic props of dignity and grandeur afforded by the White House setting, which he employed masterfully. For instance, in what was scheduled to be a press conference on education policy on January 26, 1998 Clinton stood dramatically below an image of Teddy Roosevelt, "The Rough Rider," on horseback, and forcefully denied the charges to the riveted media and nation. Wagging his finger in scorn at his viewers, he famously declared, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky. I never told anybody to lie. These allegations are false."

Most critics raved about the performance, suggesting it seemed to flow naturally from Clinton's knowledge of and comfort in the truth. With "his eyes narrowed and his finger stabbing in the air,"[33] Clinton appeared "strengthened and energetic."[34]

> Clinton looked at the American people in the TV eye. He put on his most determined face and punched the air with his finger to drive his point home. There was none of the parsing of the facts that he used to cover his hindquarters in past scandals. No, these were direct, declarative sentences.[35]

Sympathetic and traditionally moderate critics reasoned the performance was too seamlessly compelling, its authenticity too perfectly embodied and delivered, to be the product of a consciously, intentionally deceptive actor. It

would demand an unimaginable will to deceive and unto hitherto unforeseen performative skills for Clinton to achieve felicity through falsity under such extreme conditions, critics assumed. Deception, it was believed, would have left a revealing trace. On the other hand, convinced that Clinton always lied, the Republican base marveled at the performance, reading the president's assertiveness as indicative of a certain degree of pathology.

Clinton received aid from a skilled supporting cast as well. In a powerfully dramatic intervention the following morning, Hillary Clinton appeared on NBC's top-rated morning show, the *Today Show*, and synthesized all of the elements of the Administration's dramatic strategy into a succinct, coherent plot. Up to this time Mrs. Clinton had been a polarizing figure. The core of the left championed her as a representation of how capable women could serve and improve the public sphere. The core of the right distrusted her and saw her as inappropriately presumptuous and ambitious in her role as First Lady. Neither of these audiences would be swayed by her *Today Show* appearance. Her performance as a loyal wife who believed and would defend her husband under such embarrassing circumstances, however, won her the respect of the critically important political middle still reeling from the just-released allegations.

During the interview the First Lady assumed the authoritative tone and demeanor of a drama's narrator, a role whose interpretive authority stems from its critical distance from, and narrative omniscience of, the action on center stage. Successfully taking on this role would allow Mrs. Clinton to appear as though she were capable of perspicaciously overseeing the event's overall plot, and would thus cast her as a neutral expositor in the eyes of the drama's followers.

She stated the plot simply and matter-of-factly:

> *This is the great story here*, for anybody willing to find it and write about it and explain it, is this *vast right-wing conspiracy* that *has been conspiring against my husband since the day he announced for president*. A few journalists have kind of caught on to it and explained it, but it has not yet been fully revealed to the American public. And, actually, you know, in a bizarre sort of way, this may do it.[36]

The First Lady's unproblematic access to the US's highest rated morning news show placed her face in the living rooms and kitchens of millions of people across the nation.[37] The timing was impeccable, though it was emphasized very early in the interview that her appearance had been scheduled weeks in advance and was to address a different subject. In contrast to her husband's performance the night prior, Mrs. Clinton entered people's lives unofficially, during their familiar routines, and she treated her audience as if she were a friend dropping in to discuss a personal problem. Her role and title of First Lady brought her added deference from the interviewer, and allowed her to enact her script without interruption, oppositional retorts, or the elaboration of counternarratives. Of course, it would be either bold or stupid dramatic practice to be interviewed by a hostile critic.

During her performance, the First Lady worked to shift the drama's *mise-en-scène* by emphasizing what her tone and demeanor suggested should be obvious to all witnesses, that "the great story here" was not about her husband but about his accusers. In this manner Mrs. Clinton helped shift the social-dramatic focus from Bill Clinton to his accusers while simultaneously drawing on systems of representation that framed the investigators as counterdemocratic villains.

The phrase "right-wing conspiracy" invoked imagery of a secretive, coordinated orchestration to oust her husband from office. Her wording, "against my husband," conjured imagery of the private sphere, thus emphasizing the sexual dimension of the accusations as opposed to the issues more directly related to Clinton's office. "Husband" instead of "the president" suggested that the accusers were taking aim at an unfair target, the family, which is perhaps the very hub of the private sphere.

Finally, Mrs. Clinton's use of the phrase "since the day he announced for president" framed the current events in the context of an ongoing, long-lasting historical effort. The First Lady's phrase countered the Republicans' dramatic intentions by pointing out that the allegations and "the real story" did not begin *that week*. Rather, her dramatic framing of the plot, suggesting that the story actually started long ago, functioned to erode the audience's sense of dramatic boundedness; to deflate spectators' senses of being "out of time" and in a "bracketed" moment. It further encouraged the audience to detach from the production to study it for signs of orchestration or manipulation. It suggested that if the audience members looked closely they would be able to see the elaborate history of backstage machinations and rehearsal efforts the accusers had engaged in. Mrs. Clinton's performance was orchestrated to play as an impassioned though reasoned request of audiences and media to interpret her husband's initial "evasions" as instances of restrained frustration. She asked onlookers to identify with and understand the hero's careful patience in the face of such personalized, counterdemocratic efforts. Her account invoked a romantic narrative of a reluctant hero, a kind of Robin Hood, a generally merry, peace-loving man, being forced to fight villainous conspirators seeking to harm him and his family.

Roughly twelve hours after his wife's performance, Clinton-the-accused entered one of the nation's most sacred physical spaces and delivered his State of the Union Address. Clinton's performance during this highly symbolic event capped Monicagate's first phase, and sealed his dramatic production's dominant, if tenuous narrative control over the event.[38] As *New York Times* columnist John Broder framed the evening's performance: "Few other politicians of his

generation – or any other – could have pulled off a performance like that of Mr. Clinton tonight . . . Mr. Clinton sailed forward into the stiff wind of adversity."[39] In one of the most watched Addresses in the late twentieth century, Clinton made no mention of the scandal or of Lewinsky. His words and physical demeanor evoked the script "I am going back to doing the work of the nation."[40] Counter to the Republicans', Clinton's script emphasized a return to the routine and mundane, and strove to further defuse the once ritualized atmosphere.

In addition to these performances, many of the Democratic production's lesser characters and sympathetic critics worked vigorously to discursively frame Clinton's accusers in a counterdemocratic light. Ken Starr, the Office of Independent Council, Linda Tripp, and Monica Lewinsky were all placed *en-scène* through this supporting cast's efforts.

The loose symbolic framework of bad cop that had dogged Independent Council Ken Starr began to crystallize under the pressure of repeated portrayals of him as an abusive investigator relying on strong-arm tactics. For instance, Harvard Law Professor Alan Dershowitz's direct linkage of Starr's tactics to those of overly aggressive police officers practically cast Starr in the lead role of a "good cop, bad cop" routine, in which the good cop leaves the interrogation room to allow Starr to "work the suspect over":

> Perhaps [Starr's actions] will get [public officials] – and the public – to think about the broad implications of arming prosecutors and the police with untrammeled authority to conduct stings, to record conversations and to coerce cooperation by threatening prosecution. No citizen should be targeted by a sting without a "sting warrant" based on probable cause. Nor should any citizen be subjected to the abusive tactics used against the President by Kenneth Starr.[41]

By the end of Monicagate's first phase Starr was coded as an extension of the Republican Party, enacting a conspiratorial plot to destroy the president politically and personally. Seeking to satisfy his personal and political interests, Starr was understood as relentlessly persecuting the president, stretching the law, and exceeding his mandate.

To paraphrase Derrida, nothing exists outside the coding. The Democratic production worked hard to dramatically frame the Office of Independent Council as a counterdemocratic institution that endangered the democratic ideals of the nation by granting a kind of ambiguous legal protection to the investigator's expansive use of his position's power. Anthony Lewis's Op-ed column in the *New York Times* stated this sentiment succinctly:

> I am sure of one thing. The Constitution was not meant to give us – and we should not want – a system of government in which a roving inspector general with *unaccountable power* oversees the President of the United States . . . Altogether, what we see in these events is the picture of an *exceptionally zealous prosecutor*. And we see one operating with *no meaningful restraints on his power*.[42]

As the first phase of Monicagate drew to an end, Democratic opinion-makers had largely succeeded at portraying the OIC as an unconstitutional character in the drama. Polls indicate that Clinton supporters and sizeable portions of the swayable political middle were beginning to consider the OIC a counterdemocratic institution that granted unlimited power and resources to an investigator that could assert his authority arbitrarily.

Once in place, the symbolic frameworks of Monicagate's breach and crisis phases remained remarkably steady over the subsequent months. The majority of skeptical, swayable publics that constituted the political center had settled into understanding Monicagate through the Clinton team's dramatic framework. Due to the Democratic production's dramatic and discursive efforts, the Republicans were not perceived as legitimate carriers of the ritual project to this sizeable majority. The machinations of their dramatic production had been rendered highly visible, their back-stage effectively brought to the fore, and their script rendered overly artificial and contrived. On the other hand, though now in the minority, the conservative base remained passionately anti-Clinton, insisted the president was lying, and interpreted the Clinton team's response as a farce that threatened the very foundations of American democracy.

Monicagate's middle phase

Public opinion trends steadied after the State of the Union Address and a polarization between two publics solidified. By the end of July a majority (57 percent) opposed Clinton leaving office under *any* conditions while a small but devout 35 percent supported continuing efforts to investigate and expel him. There were two downward shifts in anti-Clinton public opinion after January: pro-resignation sentiments decreased 20 percentage points, and pro-impeachment sentiments decreased 16 percentage points (ABC News poll, July 31, 1998). Yet, alongside these trends, at the end of July, 68 percent of the social drama's audience believed Clinton had an affair with Lewinsky and lied about it, an increase of 18 percentage points over the same time. These contrasting poll trends indicate an interesting dramatic dynamic took place between February and early August. A sizeable portion of the general public resisted identifying with the Republican dramatic production *despite* believing Clinton had lied about his relationship with Lewinsky, on the one hand, and that he had repeatedly, assertively lied about not lying, on the other. Starr's late July disapproval ratings hovered around 60 percent. These trends indicate the Clinton dramatic production's efforts succeeded during the previous six months, effectively vilifying Starr and further delegitimating the investigative process. As mentioned above, the Republicans were unable to engage in any vigorous dramatic dueling because the Clinton team had successfully sculpted the dramatic landscape such that vigorous Republican action would be read through the idioms of the

bad cop genre. By keeping the past six years of relentless symbolic attacks on the president by Republicans in Monicagate's script, the Administration's production essentially neutered the Republicans of any symbolic power and cast in doubt their right to perform and narrate.

Within this context, two micro-events in the drama's middle phase nonetheless functioned to bring publics back to considering the Republicans' discursive and dramatic offerings, and reinvigorated the event's initially ritually charged atmosphere. In particular, Starr's investigative pressure eventually led the Clinton production to have its star publicly admit to an "inappropriate relationship" with Lewinsky (performed on August 17). This dramatic confession placed Clinton back *en-scène* and infused the Republican drama with new energy. The confession reinvigorated the right's base, and caused those at the political center, who had decided to back Clinton because they did not trust his inquisitors, to reconsider their loyalty to a guy that had lied to them. Once powerfully deflationary, Clinton's "finger stabbing in the air" performance became his "wagging his finger in shame" performance, and was used forcefully by Republicans to parody Clinton's initial performative enthusiasm and to reiterate his "slickness," the strength of his skills at deception.

Less than a month later the Starr Report's release on the Internet and in book form revitalized the event's prior, substantively charged atmosphere as well. The Report's Internet debut on September 11 triggered another break from the mundane in people's everyday lives.[43] "Americans across the country tried to participate in this unprecedented kind of electronic town hall meeting," a reporter described, but "were shut out because of the overload on the computer network."[44]

The *New York Times* editorial page's reaction to the Report's contents framed Clinton in terms that could be found in any film textbook's discussion of the gangster genre's anti-hero:

> No citizen – indeed, perhaps no member of his own family – could have grasped the completeness of President Clinton's mendacity or the magnitude of his *recklessness*. Whatever the outcome of the resignation and impeachment debates, the independent counsel report by Mr. Starr is devastating in one respect, and its historic mark will be permanent. A *President who had hoped to be remembered for the grandeur* of his social legislation will instead be remembered for the *tawdriness of his tastes and conduct* and for the disrespect with which he treated a dwelling that is a revered symbol of Presidential dignity.[45]

Both of these micro-events reversed previous poll trends. Clinton's *job approval* rating dropped to 57 percent, tying its lowest mark set just after the scandal broke. Public calls to "just drop the matter" lessened substantially: down 17 percentage points from the prior month's poll, 47 percent of the public favored ending the investigation with the Report's publication. On the other hand, 51 percent favored further investigations and congressional hearings on impeachment (ABC News, September 14, 1998).

At the culmination of Monicagate's first phase, three audiences had merged into two when the majority of publics in the political center came to understand the event largely through the Clinton team's dramatic narrative. Polls indicate that Clinton's admission to having lied combined with the release of the Starr Report to encourage the audience of Clinton sympathizers to split into two audiences. Once again the public was constituted by three audiences, each with a different interpretation of what was taking place in the political arena. Polls also indicate that some of the skeptical centrists who had come to sympathize with the Clinton team's narrative disassociated from both parties' dramas, indicating there was a likely chance this drama would end without heroes of any sort.

Later in Monicagate's second, middle phase, on August 21, Clinton's taped testimony before the Grand Jury was aired on national and cable television. The tape's release ultimately backfired on its creators. Seeking a successful degradation ritual, the Republicans intended the tape to shame Clinton in front of the nation. The cinematography framed Clinton like a criminal before a tribunal. He was taped only from the waist up, similar in style to a classic "mug shot" of gangster film imagery. While reporting on the event varied across the political spectrum, the tape's airing was largely framed as an extreme, unjust attempt to publicly degrade Clinton. Though multiple publics witnessed the event, the tape's airing appeared to further delegitimate all parties involved and to fracture any ritual resubstantivization processes that followed Clinton's confession and the Starr Report's publication.[46] The footage and its ironic consequences for the Republican dramatic effort again illustrate the contingency of such events and the dramatic producers' limited ability to estimate how their production efforts will be received by various publics.

In the November midterm elections the Republicans not only failed to increase their 55-to-45 margin in the Senate, but the Democrats picked up five seats in the House. This Democratic gain represents the first time since 1934 that the president's party gained seats in a midterm election.

Monicagate's third and final phase

The House hearings and impeachment proceedings contained some of the most dramatic settings and formally ritualized proceedings of the entire event, yet the Republicans were still unable to get a broader audience to cathect with their production. From the outset Republican Representative Henry Hyde tried to infuse the proceedings with an atmosphere of grave solemnity, invoking

Roman law, the Magna Carta, the Constitutional Convention, and referencing the Civil War's battles of Bunker Hill, Lexington, and Concord.

Democratic Representatives Barney Frank (Mass.) and Charles Schumer (NY) resisted accepting the Republicans' impeachment script that called for solemnity, reverence, and gravity, by performing comedy. In opposition, Frank and Schumer turned the hearings into a farce by repeatedly cracking jokes and making disruptions that frequently had the House Democrats rolling with laughter:

> Franke: "Now, by the way, on that subject, my colleague from Arkansas challenged Mr. Craig before and said that the president never admitted to 'sexual contact' with Ms. Lewinsky; he used the phrase 'inappropriate intimate contact.' And I suppose they might have been having an inappropriate intimate conversation about which country they'd like to bomb together. (Laughter)."[47]

Though the hearings provided the Republicans the opportunity to intervene in Americans' lives more directly and forcefully than before, only a small portion of the American public tuned in the television to watch their production. The television-ratings story of the weekend was CBS's decision to break away from coverage of the impeachment vote to televise a football game between the New York Jets and the Buffalo Bills. When CBS cut away to the game, its ratings quadrupled to 12 million viewers, more than doubling CNN's highest spiked rating of the day at 5.3 million for Clinton's address to the nation.[48]

Conclusion

Political power is constrained by and must operate through symbolic, dramatic power. This is an analytic distinction; it does not necessarily follow that the two exist separately in the empirical world in any strong sense. Yet Monicagate demonstrates we must certainly not reduce symbolic power to political power, as the Republicans were unable to establish the event's master narrative despite the vast means of symbolic production at their disposal and their superior numbers in both Houses of Congress.

In this chapter I have demonstrated how cultural pragmatics contributes a theoretical explanation for how events enter into social existence. The theoretical framework offers a set of concepts for analyzing the processes through which highly differentiated, imagined communities constitute an event's reality. These processes take the form of agonistic competitions undertaken to mobilize solidarity and consensus around scripted narratives.

Cultural pragmatics accounts for how meaning, in the form of background collective representations, shapes social actors and audiences' interpretations in a deeply structural way. Yet it allows for contingency by reconciling culture's deeply constitutive power with social actors' abilities to creatively and agentically situate and strategize vis-à-vis the symbolic structures in which they are embedded.

Some earlier sociological analysts of Monicagate have argued that, "because no collective actions followed" Clinton's impeachment, "this symbolically most significant of events in our commonwealth *failed to occur* with the solemnity that would have allowed it to take its place alongside Watergate in the American political unconscious. It failed to induce despair, as it failed to induce shared indignation and togetherness" (emphasis in the original; Larson and Wagner-Pacifici 2001: 738).

My argument in this chapter, based not only on an alternative theory but on discursive and statistical data, contradicts these claims. Indignation and despair were felt, and togetherness was experienced, though perhaps not solely in the way that liberal sociologists might sympathize with or respect. But the theoretical lesson here is vital. Action is not the sole indicator of meaning. Because multiple audiences experienced Monicagate's events in several identifiable ways, analysts must be very careful not to conflate their own common-sense understandings of the event with those of the audience. Geertz (1983: 75) cautioned to be mindful of the taken-for-grantedness of common sense.

> There are a number of reasons why treating common sense as a relatively organized body of considered thought, rather than just what anyone clothed and in his right mind knows, should lead on to some useful conclusions; but perhaps the most important is that it is an inherent characteristic of common-sense thought precisely to deny this and to affirm that its tenets are immediate deliverances of experience, not deliberate reflections upon it.

Indeed, hermeneutics begins where common sense ends. In this abridged analysis of the Clinton era I have argued that political actors and audiences alike understood Monicagate through the sense-making structures of the codes of civil society (Alexander and Smith 1993), and through the tropes of popular film genres that historically have dramatized the social relations and practices of justice. While each cluster of agents experienced these cultural structures as commonsensical, they were culturally constructed and contingent.

It was through these collective representations that America's imagined community dramatically reaffirmed itself as real. Monicagate's clusters of agents expressed disbelief, anger, resentment, and even hatred for one another. Between the competing parties and skeptical audiences, however, a common code of civil discourse, and shared popular cultural tropes about cops and their prey, sustained the energizing moral fabric of democratic life.

Notes

1. Giesen's work on *epiphany* (ch. 11, this volume) establishes a theoretical framework for examining how social actors experience the sacred. In his empirical application

of the concept epiphany (ch. 8, this volume), Rauer examines how Brandt's kneefall before the Warsaw Memorial literally performed an interaction with the sacred, and initiated profound shifts in German collective identity as a result.

2. The normative tendency to reduce the significance of Monicagate is particularly strong after September 11, 2001. But this interpretive urge represents and reaffirms an important cultural sociological point. Understanding turn-of-the-century American life and collective identity requires us to treat this impulse as indicative of an important plot point in a narrative Americans tell themselves about themselves: contemporary civil discourse makes sense of an America before and after 9/11, which was not but now is serious, which was naïve but has been forced into a state of knowledge. Contemporary discourse indicates America believes it has been forced out of the Garden and made aware of the reality of evil. Post-9/11, many people look back on Monicagate and ask incredulously, "we were concerned about *that*?" This interpretive trend testifies to the fact that yes, we *were* concerned about *that*, and passionately enough to battle fiercely over defining what exactly *that* was, its seriousness, and what should be done about it. Far from being imagined or in some sense "not real," Monicagate continues, and will continue, to exercise influence over American collective sense making. Sociologically, representations diminishing Monicagate's seriousness (while empirically erroneous in their own right, in my opinion), must figure prominently in investigations of contemporary intra- and inter-national affairs.

   Most significant are two sociological facts. First, in many ways Monicagate infiltrated people's everyday lives to the extent that the event assumed constitutive status, effectively defining the year 1998. Vast amounts of data demonstrate the event became the preferred communal reference point for Americans in their everyday interactions: from quantitative data such as polls, cable-TV news' ratings, Internet website and chatroom traffic indicators, and newspaper space allotted to covering the event, to such qualitative forms as the content of late-night talk show monologues, newpapers' letters to the editor, and frequently overheard heated discussions amongst friends and strangers about "what Clinton was thinking" and what should constitute an impeachable offence. Second, from the cataclysmic quality of the event's inception to its tepid finale, it was meaningful, and is explicable because it was dramatically and narratively structured and lived.
3. See Schudson (1992: 155), and Schwartz (1998), on the persuasiveness of Alexander's account.
4. The combination of meaning's centrality with the reduction of symbols to commodities and instruments of power encourages the reduction of culture to practice. Social actors are represented as instrumentally orienting towards symbols as material tools to be used to dupe others in one's pursuit of desired ends. The theoretical contortion stems from trying to reconcile the centrality and persuasiveness of meaning with the need to reduce social actors to uber-agentic, savvy consumers of culture who are too jaded by culture's commodification to engage any symbolic performance of collective identity in the first place. Social actors are thus portrayed as influenced by the instrumental manipulation of symbols on the one hand, and maintained as too savvy and suspicious to buy into any symbolic production, on the other.

5. See Barthes (1977b), Schechner (1977, 2002), and Mukerji and Schudson (1991), for theoretical arguments that establish the need to examine popular cultural structures' influence in the creation of everyday understandings. See Christensen (1987), Gibson (1994), and King (1999), for empirical applications of this theoretical turn that demonstrate the interactive relationship between film and social life.
6. *Washington Post*, November 4, 1992. Clinton won 43% of the vote; Bush garnered 38%.
7. *New York Times*, November 4, 1992.
8. The authenticity of Clinton's populist image stemmed from an elegant symmetry between his campaign's selected means of symbolic production and a script that emphasized how the candidate's biography naturally demanded that he empathize with a public far removed from the world of Washington insiders. For instance, to highlight Clinton's differences from Bush Sr., – a distanced figure who seemed to personify the buttoned-down Washington establishment, who flew over the people's heads in Air Force 1, the archetypical symbol of governmental power – the Clinton campaign boarded a bus and headed into "America's heartland" (*Washington Post* July 18, 1992). During scheduled stops, the candidate who could "feel your pain" (*New York Times*, March 28, 1992) would toss a football with his running mate, and pledge to "give the country back" to ordinary citizens, who had been organized to appear as spontaneous audiences (*New York Times*, July 19, 1992).
9. The metaphor traveled from the Arkansas *Democrat-Gazette* across the Atlantic to the London *Times*, only to be picked back up in the United States by the *New York Times* shortly thereafter.
10. David Grann, *The New Yorker*, January 27, 2003.
11. In early July, 1993, the White House's report from its internal investigation was released.
12. Found dead on July 20, 1993 in Fort Marcy Park. Foster was the White House deputy counsel and longtime friend and business partner of the Clintons.
13. The *Washington Post* reported the Justice Department's investigative intentions in a front-page story on October 31, 1993, entitled "U.S. Is Asked to Probe Failed Arkansas S&L."
14. In terms of the "discourse of civil society," by 1995 the Clinton team recognized the need to change their scandal management techniques. Bob Woodward quotes Mark Fabiani, the publicity agent for Clinton's "Scandal Management Team" (a.k.a. "the rapid response team") stating, "look, we've got to build our reputation for openness" with the American public to both reduce the climate of suspicion and consequently to become more politically effective in terms of policy.
15. The *New York Times* reported that though the White House denied the election was a referendum on Clinton, many of the Republican victors had placed Clinton at the center of their campaigns for office (Berke, *New York Times*, November 10, 1994, A/1/6). "Morphing," a new advertising technique of slowly blending televised images together to form a new image, figured prominently in this election cycle. "In the Congressional races there'll be over 30 campaigns using some form of the morph and almost all exclusively using Clinton as the bad guy," said Dan Leonard, director

of communications for the National Republican Congressional Committee (quoted in *New York Times*, October 29, 1994, 1/9/1). See Sobchack's (2002) analysis of the effects of televisual montage on historical consciousness for an examination of the relationship between televised performances (and other forms of televisual symbolic manipulation) and audiences' understandings of the event's progression.

16. Bob Dole became Senate Majority Leader in the Senate and Newt Gingrich became House Speaker.
17. In this instance, even science's discursive hegemony was contained and controlled, as DNA evidence placing Simpson at the scene of the crime was narrated away through invocations of the bad cop genre's tropes. It was argued that Simpson's DNA was placed at the crime scene by bad cops investigating the double murder.
18. Elvis Mitchell, *New York Times*, October 5, 2001.
19. "Filegate" is the label given to the White House's improper procurement of hundreds of FBI files on Congressional Republicans and past presidential administrations' workers and advisers.
20. The Government Reform Oversight Committee released its "Travelgate" report criticizing the employees' firing and the Clintons' evasiveness in the investigation, for instance.
21. *New York Times*, January 22, 1998, A/25/1.
22. *New York Times*, Clines and Gerth, January 22, 1998, A/1/6.
23. *New York Times*, Broder, January 24, 1998, A/1/6.
24. MSNBC and FOX News posted 100% increases, and CNN recorded a 60% increase (*Boston Globe*, January 25, 1998, A/10; *Washington Post*, January 27, 1998, D/1).
25. *New York Times*, January 22, 1998, A/29/5.
26. ABC's *This Week*, January 25, 1998; emphasis added.
27. *New York Times*, Broder, January 23, 1998, A/1/6.
28. *New York Times*, Berke and Bennet, January 23, 1998, A/1/23.
29. *New York Times*, January 23, 1998, A/20/1.
30. The number of people believing Clinton had an affair with Lewinsky rose 20% in the first three days, and the number believing he had encouraged her to lie about the relationship rose 14% (ABC News, January 24, 1998). For the first time in his tenure, less than half the public (49%) believed Clinton had the "honesty and integrity required to serve effectively" as President (ABC News, January 29, 1998).
31. Given more space, I would argue that Clinton's symbolic framework is in part a product of the political and cultural battles of the late 1960s on the one hand, and more currently a product of the 1980s and 1990s culture wars on the other. It should be clear that I am not arguing that Clinton's actions in themselves, of necessity, compelled a particular public response.
32. Seelye in *New York Times*, January 24, 1998, A/8/3.
33. *New York Times*, Bennet.
34. *New York Times*, Broder.
35. *New York Daily News*, January 27, 1998, p. 28.
36. NBC News Transcripts, January 27, 1998; emphasis added.

37. NBC's *Today* show registered a 7.2 rating (percentage of the nation's 98 million homes with televisions) and a 29 share (percentage of sets in use) on January 27th, 1998, the day of Hillary Clinton's interview with Lauer. This was the show's second highest single-day rating since 1987. The previous high was set in 1989, the day after the San Francisco earthquake (*New York Daily News*, January 29, 1998, p. 4).
38. A nuanced distinction began to emerge in a majority of Americans' understandings of Clinton's self in late January, shortly after the Address. Clinton's *public self* became understood as autonomous enough from his *private self* to allow him to adequately perform the duties necessary to be President. Additionally, late January polls began to indicate the majority of Americans were willing and able to maintain a subjective distinction between these two selves, and that they were more concerned with Clinton's political than personal actions. After the event's first week approximately 66% of Americans favored Clinton's resignation if he committed either perjury or suborning of perjury, a full 25 percentage points greater than the 41% that supported his ousting if he had simply engaged in the affair (ABC News). It is my argument that this distinction may not have occurred or remained sustainable had Clinton continued to appear "visibly shaken," nervous, and evasive before his intently curious audiences and critics.
39. *New York Times*, January 28, 1998, A/1/6.
40. In addition to focusing on his Administration's accomplishments and plans, Clinton tried to cultivate the theme of the American people *getting back to work together* for the good of the nation. For instance: "This is the America we have begun to build. This is the America we can leave to our children – *if we join together to finish the work at hand*" or "we must work together, learn together, live together, serve together" (*Washington Post* online).
41. *New York Times*, January 28, 1998, A/25/2.
42. *New York Times*, January 26, 1998, A/19/5, emphasis added.
43. For instance, MSNBC's website more than doubled its previous web traffic record with more than two million people searching for the report before the web-managers could even get it fully posted.
44. *New York Times*, September 12, 1998, A/11/3.
45. *New York Times*, September 12, 1998, A/18/1, emphasis added.
46. The tape's airing invigorated the Republican base, with 63% of registered Republicans voicing a "strong desire" to see Clinton removed from office (ABC News, September 22, 1998). However, the tape inspired sympathy for Clinton from a majority of viewers with 63% of the public agreeing Clinton was justified in his anger towards his interrogators, 61% feeling it was wrong for Congress to release the tape, and 62% disapproving of the way Republicans were handling the Lewinsky issue (ABC News, September 23, 1998).
47. Federal Information Systems Corporation, Federal News Service, August 12, 1998.
48. *New York Times*, December 23, 1998, A/24/2. The many channels from which the ritual's would-be audiences had to choose contributed to reducing the potential for liminality that characterized Watergate's Hearings. The limited channels during

Watergate contributed to the sense that everyone was involved in and witnessing history as it was unfolding.

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