

PERSPECTIVES: AN OPEN INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

SECOND EDITION

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PERFORMANCE

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Learning Objectives

- Identify cultural performances and performances of culture in various settings.
- Explain the various reasons that anthropologists study performance.
- Describe the role of performance in both reflecting and contributing to social change.
- Define “presentation of self.”
- Articulate the relationship between performance and cultural constructions of gender.
- Analyze social conflicts using a theatrical lens.
- Differentiate between descriptive and performative utterances.
- Evaluate the outcomes of performance, especially as they relate to hegemonic discourses.
- Recall framing devices that are used to mark the boundaries of performance.
- Define intertextuality.

It's finally here – after weeks of waiting, your favorite band is playing in concert tonight! Driving in, parking, passing by all the vendors, and getting to your seats is all a swirl of sights, sounds, smells, and textures. Your views is temporarily blocked and then opens up again amidst the jostling bodies all around, you smell the cologne of someone nearby, and smoke on someone else, all as you yell over the opening band's tunes to steer your friends to

the correct seats. You'd set two of your friends up on a blind date for this concert, Jayden and Dakota, and from their grooming to their outfits to their flirtations banter both seem invested. The concert lives up to all your expectations! However, based on all the little cues—from leaning in towards each other to sideways glances—it looks like it was an even better night for Jayden and Dakota.

As you have learned in earlier chapters, what counts as a “concert” or a “date” (and the appropriate behavior for each) is part of the learned and shared system of ideas and behaviors that comprise culture. Just as in the concert described above, there are clear cultural performances—sporting events, shows, rituals, dances, speeches, and the like. At the same time, social life and interactions are also replete with culturally coded and performed nuances, such as the lingering eye contact of a successful first date. In other words, there are both cultural performances (such as concerts) and performances of culture (such as dating). This chapter looks at both, exploring the different ways culture is performed, and to what effects.

OVERVIEW

Performances can be many things at once. They can be artful, reflexive, and consequential while being both traditional and emergent.¹ As a result, each performance is unique because of its specific circumstances, including its historical, social, economic, political, and personal contexts. Performers' physical and emotional states will influence his or her performance, as will the conditions in which the performance takes place, and the audience to whom the performance is delivered. At the same time, however, every performance is part of a larger tradition, and the creator, performer(s), and audience all interact with a given piece as part of that larger body of tradition. Performance is consequential because its effects last much longer than the period between the rising and falling of a curtain. The reflexive properties of performance “enable participants to understand, criticize, and even change the worlds in which they live.”² In other words, performances are much more than just self-referential. That is, they are always both informed by and about something.

Despite the importance of performance in our social worlds, it was only in the mid-20th century that anthropologists embraced performance as a topic worth studying in its own right. The visual arts were given serious attention by anthropologists at an earlier date than was performance, in large part because of Western cultural biases towards the visual *and* because these tangible artifacts lent themselves to categorization and identification of cultural areas. In the 1950s, Milton Singer introduced the idea of **cultural performances** (discussed in the following section). Singer noted that his cultural consultants often took him to see cultural performances whenever they wanted to explain a particular aspect of Hinduism, which was the subject of his research.³ Being able to check his own hypotheses about the culture against these formal presentations, Singer determined that “these performances could be regarded as the most concrete observable units of Indian culture,”⁴ concluding that one could understand the cultural value system of Hinduism by abstracting from repeated observations of these performances. In other words, (1) cultural performances are an ideal unit of study because they reference and encapsulate a great deal of information about the culture that gave rise to them, and (2) such cultural messages become more accessible with multiple samples of these performances, i.e. as the researcher can compare and contrast the specifics between repeated performances of the same “performance.”

Singer's observation that analyzing performance could be a useful method for understanding broader cultural values was revolutionary at the time. Today, however, anthropologists are just as likely to

study performance for its own sake, exploring how performances become endowed with meaning and social significance or how cultural knowledge get stored inside performers' bodies.⁵ The field's increased openness to treating performance as a worthy area of inquiry reflects a shift within the field of anthropology from focusing on structures of society, which were presumed to be static, to the ongoing processes within society that sometimes maintain the status quo and at other times result in change.⁶ And while this is not the 'norm' for most anthropologists, some scholars who focus on performance in their research also stage performances for audiences in their own societies as a way of both sharing things that may not translate well to words and calling audiences to act on behalf of the people whose experiences they are representing.⁷

Cultural performance vs. Performing culture

Within the anthropology of performance, two concepts often get conflated: performing culture and cultural performance. Though they sound similar, the difference is significant. Richard Schechner, a performance studies scholar whose work frequently overlaps with anthropology, has provided a useful distinction between these terms. He differentiates between analyzing something that *is* a performance versus analyzing something *as* a performance.⁸ A cultural performance *is* a performance whereas **performing culture** refers to the ways in which our everyday words and actions are reflections of our own enculturation and can therefore be studied *as* performances, whether we consciously think of them in that way or not. An example of a cultural performance would be the concert mentioned at the start of this chapter, or Mexico's famed *ballet folklórico*. In essence, an authoritative version of 'the culture' is codified and presented to an audience who is largely expected to accept this interpretation. Of all the performance types discussed in this chapter, cultural performances are typically the most recognizable within a community. Their importance is highlighted by taking place at specific times and in specific places, with a clear beginning and end, and with the performers themselves expected to demonstrate a particular degree of excellence.⁹



Figure 1: Performance of ballet folklorico in Casa de la Cultura, Puebla, Mexico, 2013.

Cultural performances certainly include those things many of us in the West often think of as performances (e.g. concerts, plays, dances); however, it also includes things like prayer and ritual that we often classify as being part of religious practice. That some cultures, such as our own, make such a distinction fits with a tendency to see some practices as spurious and others as genuine, which is one of the reasons that anthropologists have only recently begun to seriously study the performing arts. Singer found that each cultural performance “had a definitely limited time span, or at least a beginning and an end, an organized program of activity, a set of performers, an audience, and a place and occasion of performance”¹⁰ —which is equally the case with religious and secular events. Cultural performances can be useful in preserving the heritage of a group, but in some cases it can also have the same effect as an anthropologist writing in the “ethnographic present,” i.e. it provides an artificially frozen (in time) representation of culture. For example, along the Costa Chica of Mexico, [artesa music](#) and the accompanying dance that is performed atop an overturned trough retains a strong association with the region’s African-descended population.¹¹ The instruments and rhythms used in this music index the African, indigenous and European cultures that gave rise to these blended communities and are thus representative of a rich and emergent tradition. However, in recent years the *artesa* has largely ceased to be performed at weddings, as was traditional, and performers are now paid to represent their culture in artificial settings like documentaries and cultural fairs. In any case, cultural performances are both informed by the norms of one’s community and signal one’s membership in those communities.

Performing culture, on the other hand, refers to the lived traditions that are always emergent as each new performance of cultural norms—whether popular sayings, stylish dressing, dining out, etc.—takes shape in the space between tradition and individuality.¹² If the concert noted above is a cultural performance, the dating behaviors of Jayden and Dakota exemplify the performance of culture. Thus, while no two dating scenarios are identical, within any given social group there are culturally informed codes for appropriate comportment and conduct. And dating is only one such example. The tension between

hegemony and **agency** means that at the same time as you can decide how you want to dress on any given day, you always do so relative to your own social situation: you dress differently at work, at home, at the beach, going out to a concert, going on a date, and at school. It is such everyday performances that we look at next.

EVERYDAY PERFORMANCE

Although when we think of the word “performance” we often think of special events like the concert described at the outset of this chapter, performance is a part of our everyday lives whether we consider ourselves to be “performers” or not. When Jayden and Dakota took extra care in their grooming, they were demonstrating, or performing, their interest in pursuing a romantic relationship. On the surface, these performances may seem inconsequential. A failed performance might result in an unfulfilling evening, but there will be few long-lasting consequences. However, when we look at the patterns of these everyday performances, we can learn a great deal about a culture and how members of a particular group are expected to behave and present themselves to others. Indeed, the entire subfield of visual anthropology is largely predicated on the notion that “culture can be seen and enacted through visible symbols embedded in behavior, gestures, body movements, and space use.”¹³

Presentation of Self

In any given society, there is a specific range of behavior that “is neither too expressive nor too inexpressive” to be considered to be normal.¹⁴ Everything else is considered putting on an act. Often we describe people who fall outside of this range as ‘fake.’ Even within that ‘normal’ range, however, people are constantly engaged in the task of impression management. Within college classrooms, for instance, research has been done on how quickly students form opinions of their professors. When research subjects viewed just two seconds of a professor’s teaching, they made the same conclusions about the professor’s effectiveness as did students who had taken an entire semester-length course with that individual.¹⁵ Everything from the professor’s appearance to tone of voice, word choice, and even posture conveys a certain sense of who he or she is. As members of our society, we become adept at not only making judgments about who people are based on these cues, but we also become skilled at manipulating others’ opinions of us.

Sociologist Erving Goffman coined the phrase **presentation of self** to refer to the ways in which people manage the impressions of others.¹⁶ The reasons for adopting a particular presentation of self are varied. A couple that aspires to be upwardly mobile may subsist on ramen noodles in the privacy of their apartment, but spend conspicuous amounts of money on fine food and wine in the company of those that they want to impress. Alternatively, a political candidate from a very wealthy family might don work clothes and affect a working class accent in order to appeal to voters from this demographic, or make a political appearance at a “working class” bar or pub rather than a country club.

It is important to realize, however, that in many cases people are not being intentionally deceptive when they adopt a role. Just because you may act differently at home, at school, and at work does not mean you are “faking” any one of these. Rather, you act differently based on different social and cultural contexts. This is a normal part of social life and one person plays many roles during the course of his or her life. Goffman thus notes that at some times this impression management is intentional, and at other times it is a subconscious feat we pick up as part of our enculturation.

Explicitly using theatrical language to discuss this kind of social act, Goffman distinguishes between front and back spaces. Front spaces are carefully constructed arenas designed to control the audience's perception of the actors, while back spaces are private zones wherein actors can do away with pretense. The front includes the setting, the physical makeup of the stage including furniture, décor, and other props,¹⁷ all figuratively—if not literally—setting the stage for social activity. For example, although both are designed to seat tens or even hundreds of people and sometimes serve them wine, a restaurant is typically distinguishable from a church in how the seating is arranged, the kind of music that is played, and in the artwork adorning the walls. In this sense, performances of self tend to be spatially grounded. A waiter performs his role when he steps into the restaurant, but can step out of that role when leaving at the end of his shift.

Another important component of these performances is the **personal front**, the aspects of one's costume that are part of, or worn in close association with, the actor's body.¹⁸ Clothing, physical characteristics, comportment and facial expressions all contribute to one's personal front. Some of these traits, like an individual's height, are unlikely to change from one performance to the next. Others, like a priest's collar, a doctor's white lab coat, a ballroom dancer's dress, or a waiter's convivial smile, can be changed at will. Changes in the personal front affect the audience's interpretation and understanding of what role an individual is playing, often connected to their belief in the "actor's" sincerity.

Congruence between the setting and personal front helps the audience (whether one person, thousands, or even more) quickly—and often accurately—understand the role being played by the actors in front of them. Yet actors' performance must still live up to these expectations. Indeed, it is the mismatch between expectation and execution that typically marks one as unsuccessful. The college professor described above may be a leading expert in her field, for instance, with encyclopedic knowledge of the course topic, but if she stutters, speaks too softly, or struggles to quickly answer students' questions, they may erroneously misjudge her expertise. Judging her performance of expertise a failure, her actual competence may be overlooked. In some roles, the work being done is largely invisible to the audience. These individuals must take special care to dramatize the work being done. Imagine, for example, a security guard at a concert like the one Jayden and Dakota are attending. If everything goes according to plan, the security guard will not have to break up any fights or physically remove anyone from the concert. If a fight were to break out, a smaller individual, male or female, who is trained in martial arts might be better suited to diffusing the situation, but security personnel are often large men with an imposing presence because this better matches public expectations. Most of the security guard's evening will pass uneventfully and he could just as easily keep an eye on things while sitting still, but he often will still stand with his arms folded sternly across his chest, or he may walk purposefully around the perimeter of the area he is monitoring to make his presence known, and is likely to make a big show of craning for a better view of certain areas even if they are not hard to see. These overt performances of security guard's competence are not absolutely necessary for him to do his job, but through their visibility discourage concert attendees from misbehaving.

It is not only the audience who may have doubts about the actor's ability to convincingly perform a role. Social actors differ in the degree to which they themselves believe in the part they are playing.¹⁹ Some, those that Goffman calls "sincere" performers, believe in the role that they are playing. Some begin as sincere performers, but eventually become cynical. Religious personnel sometimes fall into this category; they lose some degree of sincerity as the secrets behind the religious ceremonies are demystified.²⁰ Others begin as cynical performers and grow into their roles, eventually becoming sincere. This is often the case with someone new to a profession. In the beginning, he or she may feel like a fraud and worry about being discovered, but over time the individual's confidence grows until the role feels natural.

Case Study: Curated Personas Online

You are not having a good day. You slept through your alarm, so you skipped your morning yoga class...which happens more often than not. You didn't have time to shower, so you sprayed some dry shampoo into your hair, threw on the pants you wore yesterday, and made it to class with about a minute to spare. The professor spent most of the class going over last week's exam, and while you haven't yet checked your grade online, you can already tell that you did not do well. After class, you go to the food court for lunch and take out your phone, scrolling through social media just to pass the time. Sydney posted a pic of herself trying on the new bikini she bought for her upcoming Spring Break trip with the hashtags: #fitnessmotivation #gottalose #countdown. "As if Sydney had any weight to lose. I bet *she* never skips yoga," you think to yourself. Then you see a picture of your best friend Mac holding an acceptance letter to a prestigious medical school with the caption: "Now I can relax and just get B's all semester." You're happy for Mac, of course, but at the same time a little jealous. You have no idea what you're going to do after graduation, and you have to work your tail off to get B's. During all of this, you seem to have forgotten that while your history test did not go well, you're doing extremely well in German and your most recent painting was accepted for a juried exhibition. Psychologists use the term *social comparison theory* to explain the ways in which we compare ourselves to those within our social spheres in order to evaluate our own accomplishments and standing. This doesn't have to be a negative thing. Self-evaluation can provide us with insights into what we really excel at. Your friend may be a science-whiz who will skate through medical school whereas you have more facility in languages and the arts. Excessive comparison, however, can have an effect on an individual's self-esteem.²¹

Thanks to the rise of social media, we receive a steady stream of our friends' and family members' accomplishments. Not only do we get these constant updates, but what people choose to present on social media is highly curated. People tend to post pictures that conform to their idealized sense of self: well-behaved and neatly dressed children suggest that someone is a good parent, glamorous vacation photos suggest that the poster is successful and cosmopolitan, and a smiling post-run photo points to good physical health and self-care. In reality, children are messy and often misbehave, that vacation may be the result of scrupulous economizing in other aspects of life, and that run probably included some painful, unsmiling miles. But our social media presences are perfect examples of Goffman's presentation of self. It is a show put on for others as well as for ourselves, a story we tell about who we would like to be.

Performance of Gender

As you may recall from the Gender and Sexuality chapter, gender is defined by our culture rather than by our biology. Gender theorist Judith Butler's term "gender performativity" was coined to reference how it is only through individual performances of gender identity that "gender," as a social construct, is created. Butler's key point (first used in 1990 and expanded on in 1993) is that it is only through ongoing, stylized repetition that any act comes to be seen as gendered.²² In other words, while we all make specific choices at any given time—such as how Jayden and Dakota decide to dress for their date—it is as people do things in patterned ways over time that certain versions get typified as "male" or "female." Phrases such as "act *like* a man" or "throw *like* a girl" provide good examples: it is through similarity to how "men" or "girls" are seen to typically act/perform, that a particular behavior gets culturally coded as a gendered representation. Certainly specific individuals may be seen to do things in a particularly (or perhaps stereotypically) masculine or feminine way: how do you know how "men" or "women" are supposed to behave? More accurately, what makes one way of sitting, or standing, or talking a "feminine" one and another "masculine"? The answer is that what counts as masculine or feminine may differ between sociocultural milieus, but in every case, how people do things constitutes gender in everyday life.

In many ways, this notion—that gender is created and replicated through patterned behavior—expands on Mauss's classic formulation that, far from simply natural, techniques of the body are also culturally learned and performed.²³ Although walking or even swimming may seem to be a 'natural' movement of the body, various cultures do these things differently and one must learn to walk or swim according to the norms of her or his culture. Gender is similarly learned. For instance, if you

showed up to the first day of class and all of the guys with facial hair were wearing sundresses, you would probably notice. Why? Because, as Butler pointed out, it is through patterned activity that gender gets constructed and a bearded man in a sundress deviates from the expected pattern of male attire. While this may be a particularly obvious example, the mechanism is the same—for everything from how you walk and talk, to your taste in clothing, to your hobbies. In Western contexts, for instance, athletic prowess is typically coded as masculine. But as Young²⁴ suggests, it is impossible to throw *like* a girl without learning what this entails. The phrase is not meant, for instance, to refer to the skills of pitcher Mo'ne Davis who, at 13-years old, became the first Little League player to ever appear on the national cover of [Sports Illustrated magazine in August 2014](#).²⁵ Young's point, by extension, is twofold: (1) that "girls" only throw differently from "boys" insofar as they are taught to throw differently; and (2) that what counts as throwing "like" a girl or a boy is itself a learned evaluation. Taken a step further, several scholars have looked at the performance of gender in a variety of sports settings, including women's bodybuilding,²⁶ figure skating,²⁷ and competitive ballroom.²⁸ In each case, some aspect of femininity gets over-performed—such as through blatant makeup and costuming—to compensate for the overt physicality at odds with stereotypical views of more passive femininity.²⁹

As anthropologist Margaret Mead³⁰ first publicized over 80 years ago, what counts as culturally appropriate conduct for men and women can be very different across cultural settings. More broadly, Serena Nanda³¹ has provided an updated survey of cross cultural gender diversity. Two issues are particularly important here: (1) that the Western gender binary is far from universal (or accurate); and (2) that behaviors are always performed within—and hence contingent upon—specific contexts. For example, Nanda's work in India³² shows the possibility of performing a third gender. Similarly, in contrast to Western models which cast sexual orientation as fixed (e.g. heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, etc.), Herdt's work among the Sambia in Papua New Guinea³³ provides a counter-example wherein personal sexuality varies for boys and men by life stage. Perhaps the most compelling case for the performance of gender concerns the Brazilian *Travesti*, transgender male prostitutes who, despite female names, dress, language, and even bodies—achieved through silicone injections and female hormones—identify themselves as men.³⁴ As these cases help demonstrate sexuality is different from gender but, like gender, sexual orientation and sexuality are also performed in both daily life and at moments of heightened saliency such as pride parades and similar events.

Case Study: Small Town Beauty Pageants

"Oh to be the Milan Melon Queen, the Reynoldsburg Tomato Queen, or even the Circleville Pumpkin Queen, these are the dreams that childhood is made of!"

Beauty pageants provide communities with the opportunity to articulate the norms of appropriate femininity both for themselves and for spectators alike. Pageant contestants are judged on their ability to perform specific markers of conventional femininity. In local pageants associated with community festivals (i.e. an end in and of themselves as winners do not progress on to larger regional and national competitions), contestants are expected to "perform...a local or small town version" of this ideal according to performance studies scholar Heather Williams.³⁵ In these settings, success is predicated on demonstrating one's poise and confidence as a representative of the community.³⁶ This is different from those competing in regional, state, and national competitions like *Miss America*, who often spend years being groomed for competition and developing a stage presence meant to transcend small town ideals of femininity. A striking difference between the national pageants and many local ones is the presence of a swimsuit competition in the former. While this could be because local organizers are reticent to objectify the young women of their own community or because of small town conservatism, anthropologist Robert Lavenda points out that the town is not necessarily seeking to crown the most beautiful contestant, but the one who will best represent the community and their values.³⁷ Judges evaluate contestants not on their physical attractiveness per se, but on how well their "presentation of self" aligns with the community's views of who they are.³⁸

In his research, Lavenda found several commonalities shared by the contestants. Though the competitions are generally open to young women ranging in age from 17-21, the majority had just finished high school, making them all part of the same cohort leaving childhood and entering adulthood. All had been extremely active in extracurricular activities and all were going on to pursue post-secondary education. Furthermore, because they needed sponsors in order to compete, the local business community had vetted all in some way. Whereas contestants at the national level have private coaches and have trained independently for their competitions, contestants in local pageants often work together for weeks if not months before the festival, learning how to dress, walk on stage, and do their hair and makeup. The result is a homogenized presentation of self that fits with community expectations, wherein the ideal contestant should "represent a golden mean of accomplishment that appears accessible to all respectable girls of her class in her town and other similar small towns."³⁹ When a winner is chosen who does not represent these qualities, or whose behavior goes against the prevailing values of the community, the audience often becomes upset, sometimes alleging corruption in the judging.⁴⁰ While the competition is ostensibly about the contestants and their ability to perform a certain ideal of femininity, it is also a demonstration of "the ability of small towns to produce young women who are bright, attractive, ambitious and belong – or expect to belong – to a particular social category."⁴¹ At least for the period of the competition, any unsuccessful performances of the feminine ideal are pushed out of sight and out of mind.⁴² *This, the community tries to show, is what our women are like.*

Social Drama as Performance

Whereas Goffman used a theatrical metaphor to analyze how individuals change their presentation of self based on their scenic backdrop—front stage versus backstage—anthropologist Victor Turner was more interested in the cast of characters and how their actions, especially during times of conflict, mirrored the rise and fall of action in a play.⁴³ As already noted, everyday life is comprised of performances, yet some moments stand out as are more dramatic or theatrical than others. When a specific social interaction goes sufficiently awry, tensions arise and the social actors involved may find it necessary to make sure others understand precisely where the expected social roles have been breached. Such situations are what Turner called "metatheatres," and are most clearly seen in and described as social dramas: "units of aharmonic or disharmonic social process, arising in conflict situations."⁴⁴

A social drama consists of four distinct phases: breach, crisis, redress or remedial procedures, and finally either reintegration or recognition and legitimation of an irreparable schism.⁴⁵ A breach occurs when an individual or subgroup within a society breaks a norm or rule that is sufficiently important to the maintenance of social relations. Following the breach, other members of the community may get drawn into the conflict as people begin to take sides. This is the crisis phase of the social drama. Often-times such crises reignite tensions that have been lying dormant within the society. The redressive or remedial procedures used during the next phase of the social drama can take a number of forms. It is a reflexive period in which the community takes stock of who they are, their communal values, and how they arrived at this conflict. The various procedures used during this phase may be private, such as sage advice being handed down from elders to the parties most centrally involved in the conflict. Other procedures may be very public, such as protests in the town square, formal speech making, or public trials. The Salem Witch Trials would be one example of a public means of redress. This phase might also include payment of reparations or some form of sacrifice. The fourth phase can take one of two forms. If the redressive actions were successful, the community will be reintegrated and move beyond the schism (at least until another breach occurs). If the redressive actions were not successful, the community will fracture along the lines identified during the crisis phase. In smaller societies characterized by a high degree of mobility, this may take the form of individuals physically moving away from one another. In other groups, other barriers to interaction will be erected. Social dramas are important events within communities and may eventually become the source material for other kinds of performances such as narrative re-tellings or commemorative songs, plays, etc., all of which serve to further legitimize the outcome of the social drama.⁴⁶

Case Study: Establishing a New *Capoeira* Group

Capoeira is an Afro-Brazilian martial art that combines music, dance, and acrobatics with improvisational sparring. The tradition bearers of *capoeira* kept it alive despite persecution from both the colonial Portuguese government and the Brazilian government until the mid-1930s. Even after this date it was largely associated with marginalized segments of the population. However, in the 1970s, several Brazilian *capoeiristas* began demonstrating and teaching their art abroad. This sparked international interest in *capoeira* and the demand for teachers in nations like the U.S. continues through the present. In many cases, these teachers are apprentices to more established *mestres* (masters) in Brazil and maintain ongoing relationships with them. While these teachers may continue to operate satellite groups under the primary *mestre's* direction for years, sometimes tensions can erupt between the *mestre* in Brazil and the teachers abroad. This is precisely what happened with a group referred to here as *Grupo Cultural Brasileiro* (GCP). The *mestre* of GCP authorized one of his top students to begin teaching *capoeira* classes in a Midwestern U.S. state. Eventually, demand for classes grew to the point that this teacher could operate classes in two towns within this state and two of his own students were given the opportunity to run classes in new locations. All of these satellite groups were affiliated with the GCP, wearing shirts with the GCP logo, and the *mestre* periodically visited the U.S. to give classes to the American students. Unbeknownst to most members of the group, their teacher and the *mestre* had begun having a falling out after one of these visits. The *mestre* asked his student for a small sum of money (approximately \$2,000) to do some repairs on the primary training facility in Brazil. The teacher agreed that this was a worthwhile expenditure, but insisted that they needed to discuss this with the U.S.-based board of directors before he could send the funds. Feeling that his own authority was being slighted, the *mestre* demanded that certain personnel who he viewed as obstacles be removed from the board. When the teacher in the U.S. explained that this was not possible according to the group's bylaws, the *mestre* demanded that the group stop wearing his group's logo. According to Turner's model, this would be considered the breach. In the next several weeks, an emergency board meeting was called to determine the proper course of action. The *mestre* called his student's protégés who were already teaching on their own, essentially asking them to take sides. The members of the group were made aware of this crisis at one of their weekly classes when they were told to turn their t-shirts inside out so that the old logo would not show. From that point on, they were not permitted to wear any of their old t-shirts. Although mediation was considered and both the *mestre* and his student spent considerable time talking about the situation with various members of the community, remediation was unsuccessful and resulted in a schism. The Midwestern students convened with their teacher, discussed their group's values, and decided upon a new name and symbols that would represent their group in the *capoeira* community at large. Now nearly ten years later, the two groups continue to operate independently.

CONSTITUTING SOCIAL REALITY

In many cases performances produce social realities. Imagine, for example, a political protest song that moves people to action, resulting in the overthrow of a government regime. Similarly, performance can provide people with a template for action. Whether realistic or not, for instance, people may model their own relationships after those they observe on television, and some famous quotations from films get absorbed into everyday use and language. Yet there are some performances that stand out as more likely to shape social reality than others.

Performativity

While many performances can be accomplished without words—mime and dance being but two obvious examples—language is often more than just an important part of day-to-day interactions, but gets used instrumentally (that is, to accomplish a specific task) in its own right. While many utterances are merely descriptive (e.g. “that was a great concert!”), others are actually actions that bring about an outcome just by virtue of being spoken. As a way of distinguishing between such utterances that actually *do* something from those that merely describe, linguist J.L. Austin coined the term **performativity**. For example, compare the following two sentences:

“We hereby bequeath our vast fortune to our darling daughter.”

“The girl inherited money from her parents when they died.”

The first sentence is a performative because it causes something to happen. It transfers money between persons. The second sentence is merely descriptive. It shares information, which may or may not be factual, about an event that occurred independently.

The person making a performative utterance must be genuine in her intentions to carry it out and have it ratified by her interlocutors (i.e. the co-participants in the speech event in question). A mother might say to her son, “I promise we will get ice cream after the dentist appointment.” Making such a promise is a performative utterance because it creates a social contract, but her son may or may not believe her depending on prior experience. Likewise, if one were to make a bet, the other party involved must acquiesce to the terms. If a man says to his friend, “I bet you \$10 that Jones will win the election,” the bet is only ‘on’ if his friend agrees. If he declines to take the bet or just stays silent, the friend cannot collect on the \$10 when Jones does in fact win the election.

Another common performative utterance occurs at wedding ceremonies. Consider the following proclamation:

“Now that you have pledged your mutual vows, I, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the state, declare you to be wed, according to the ordinance of the law.”

Although wedding ceremonies are typically multifaceted, often including a procession of the individuals to be wed, the lifting of the veil, etc., this proclamation is a culminating moment in which the two individuals are legally joined in matrimony. Without these words being spoken, the ceremony would, in fact, be incomplete.

Aside from the performative declaration included in the officiant’s words, there is another important element. The officiant references the authority that he or she has been granted by the state to make this declaration. Without this authority, the marriage would not have taken place. A group of children playing could stage a wedding and say the exact same words as the officiant, but one child’s utterance would not result in his or her playmates becoming married. In Austin’s terminology, this would be an “unhappy utterance”⁴⁷: it is a failed performance because the parties involved did not have sufficient authority to bring the action into reality. To provide a parallel example, a lawyer declaring a defendant guilty is only an opinion whereas the same decree by a judge or jury (in the correct setting) is what actually “makes” a person guilty under the law. Similarly, a police officer’s statement “you are under arrest” makes this so. Ignoring the officer is a crime in itself (evading arrest), whereas the same statement made by a friend carries no social significance. The ability of an utterance to shape society is thus dependent on the words said, the context in which they are said, and the legitimacy and authority of the speaker to speak those words. While performative utterances occur in many situations, they are particularly common in ritual.

Ritual as Performance

A Cuban woman is experiencing disharmony in her home. Her husband has become abusive, she struggles to put food on the table, and one of her children has left home and begun living on the streets. To find a solution for her problems, she consults with a priest of the syncretic religion *Santería*. In the consultation room is an alter with candles, statues of the gods and goddesses, and bowls filled with food offerings. The priest is dressed in white, as is customary, and wears several beaded necklaces that correspond to the deities with whom he is most closely associated. To use Goffman’s phrasing, both the

setting and personal front are in congruence, assuring the woman that this consultation is genuine. To perform the divination, the priest tosses cowry shells on the table and asks the woman a series of questions based on what the shells reveal. He listens to her answers, throws the shells again, and fine-tunes his questions until he is able to focus on the crux of her distress. The flow of their dialog is similar to that seen in Western-style psychological counseling, but the ritual specialist performs his expertise through the use of religious paraphernalia.

The Religion chapter of this text introduced the concept of rituals and explained several of their functions—from rites of passage to rites of intensification. The goal of this section is not to repeat this content, but rather both (1) to call attention to ritual as an area of interest to anthropologists who deal with performance, and (2) to highlight how a focus on performance can be a useful lens for viewing and understanding both secular and religious rituals. Whether a concert, play, opera, or religious event, rituals are often public displays of a culture's values and expectations. Typically part of the redressive phase of a social drama (such as legal sentencing), rituals can also exist apart from this (such as a holiday celebration). Many times, they happen in religious contexts (see the chapter on Religion), but may occur in other circumstances as well, like a graduation ceremony. The key here is that rituals are inherently performative—that is, merely talking about or watching a video recording of one doesn't *do* anything, whereas participating in a ritual makes and marks a social change. Whether stoic or extravagant, efficacy rather than entertainment is the chief concern of ritual, and it is in being performed that they give shape to their social surround.

Case Study: Performing Ethnography

Although ethnographies are written to engage their readers in the lived experience of a particular group, such engagements are often limited. The reader cannot actually feel what it is like to live in a Ndembu village or smell the herbs being prepared for an Afro-Brazilian Candomblé ceremony. Victor and Edith Turner created a teaching method called "performing ethnography" as a way to help their students gain a deeper, kineshetic understanding of what it is like to participate in the ritual life of another culture.⁴⁸ In this methodology, students prepare for a ritual by reading relevant ethnographies and often meeting with anthropologists who have done work in the group whose ritual is being performed. As students prepare their roles, they are forced to seek out additional information on the culture that helps them understand how to behave appropriately. Beyond providing a reason to seek out pertinent information, this process also helps students think more critically about the presentation of information in ethnographies; especially as any gaps in the author's descriptions become apparent. Modeling an experiment after the Turners' example, Lauren had students in one of her classes perform an American, Christian wedding ceremony. Obviously, no single ceremony can be representative of all weddings within this tradition, but participants walked away from the activity claiming that it gave them a better sense of what it is like to participate in a ritual such as this and how the various roles articulate to move the couple from one social status to another. As the Turners point out, this requires that the ritual, a very serious event, be conducted within what they call a "play frame."⁴⁹ Even though the woman who played the role of the minister in Lauren's classroom had actually been ordained, this play frame negated the action that would otherwise have been brought about by her performative utterances (see above). The Turners have also used this method to have students better understand rituals from other cultures, like a coming of age ceremony from the Ndembu of Africa. It is questionable whether or not anyone without first-hand experience can truly understand what it is like to be an initiate in such an important ritual, and is highly doubtful that all members of that society experience the ritual in the same way. Yet having students reflect on their feelings as they enacted these rituals provided the Turners with new hypotheses for explaining how and why these rituals function to bridge childhood and adulthood, hypotheses that could then be tested through further fieldwork.⁵⁰

Political Performance

Performance has serious consequences for social reality. Performance often gets used to reinforce the status quo. For example, during World War II, children in the Hitler Youth organization were encouraged to sing songs related to Germany's supremacy and Hitler's vision for an Aryan nation.

Requiring children to give voice to this ideology brought them inline with the goals of those in power. Indeed, many civil rituals are part of such **hegemonic discourses**, wherein the very parameters of social thought and action are unquestioningly (and usually invisibly) dictated by those in authority. Singing the national anthem before sporting events provides yet another example.

On the flipside, performance can also be used to resist the status quo. This kind of performance can be as small as the rolling of eyes behind a professor's back or as grand as outright political uprisings. In 1968, U.S. Olympians Tommie Smith and John Carlos wore black armbands and black socks and raised their clenched fists into the air while standing on the podium in Mexico City. They were protesting the continued marginalization of people of color within the U.S. and used their platform as world-class athletes to call attention to their message. In more recent times, several athletes have engaged in similar performances. Colin Kaepernick's choice to kneel during the national anthem before National Football League games outraged many fans and political leaders, but sent a powerful message regarding ongoing racial inequalities. His performance has been replicated by professional, collegiate, and high school athletes across the U.S.⁵¹

BOUNDED PERFORMANCES

Although we are all performing a particular role, or roles, at any given time, there are moments of heightened **reflexivity** that are more particularly recognizable in our vernacular as being 'performance.' These performances, like a play or a concert, are special because they are marked off from everyday activities. They are bounded and analyzable. They are also ephemeral and even when fixed on film or through movement notation (such as Labanotation script, a system for recording dance movements), the interaction and feedback between a particular audience and performer(s) only happens "in the moment" once. Such performances—because they are known and understood to be bounded—often serve as moments of heightened consciousness. Jayden and Dakota, introduced at the start of this chapter, pay a lot of attention to their first date precisely because they know that it is the only first date they will ever (be able to) have with each other. Given such frames of heightened awareness, performers essentially hold a mirror up to society and force audiences to come to terms with themselves as they are, as they once were, or as they could become.

Training/Rehearsal

Even ritual specialists, who seem to give flawless performances whenever they are moved to do so—whether by the divine, the moment, the stars, or else what—spend years mastering their craft. Unfortunately, performance scholars have largely focused on final performances at the expense of due attention to performers' preparations. Performance studies pioneer and scholar Richard Schechner, in particular, has advocated for a more holistic study of performance production, which includes studying the training, workshops, rehearsals, warm-ups, performance, cool-down, and aftermath involved in the performance process.⁵² It should be noted, however, that not all cultures have the same steps in producing a performance so typical of Western milieus.⁵³

One of the primary purposes of rehearsal or training is to instill in the performer an embodied understanding of the art's form or technique. Adherence to such forms gives performances their versatility and longevity.⁵⁴ Technique thus serves as a conservative force within a performance genre, as each generation of performers learns to replicate the postures and movements of their predecessors.⁵⁵ Yet this is not to suggest that performance traditions are unchanging. Indeed, as individuals master the form and are seen as legitimate tradition bearers, they are given more and more latitude to play with the form and introduce innovations of their own—innovations which, in turn, may or may not be reproduced in the future by their own protégés.

Some training requires an entire lifetime. In the Japanese performance tradition of Noh, for example, training traditionally begins when an actor is around five years old.⁵⁶ Because such actors have learned all of the necessary roles, there is little need for a cast to rehearse a drama in its entirety prior to performing it. This kind of training is also seen in classical Indian dance and other forms in which adherence to tradition is the norm. Other forms of performance, in which audiences expect a continually changing repertoire of pieces, require more rehearsal prior to the performance. The amount of training a performer undergoes may be similar to that seen in Noh (ballet dancers, for example, undergo extensive training for a relatively short career), but the novelty of each performance piece also requires intensive study of the new choreography prior to opening night.



Figure 3: Ballet dancers warming up before Prix de Lausanne, 2010.



Figure 2: Actor donning mask at a Noh workshop in Copenhagen, Denmark, 2010.

Whereas performers are held accountable for actual performances that happen in front of an audience, rehearsals do not count in the same way.⁵⁷ Rather, rehearsals typically allow for an element of playfulness absent from performances.⁵⁸ It is in this light that Schechner likens rehearsals to the rites of separation that occur in rituals.⁵⁹ In his view, rehearsals are removed in space and time from the rest of society, enabling performers to acquire the requisite skills and knowledge they need to create a transformative, liminal, experience for themselves and the audience when the performance happens 'for real.' The spaces in which training and rehearsals take place are also thus important. Writing of the ballet studio, performance studies scholar Judith Hamera writes, "as surely as ballets are made in these spaces, the spaces themselves are remade in the process, becoming, perhaps through the repetition of this epitome of classical technique, a kind of Eden both inside and outside of everyday space and time."⁶⁰ This construction can be a concrete process: the floors are scuffed by the dancers' feet and the barres bowed by the weight of novices learning to plié. At the same time, however, this can be a more metaphorical transforma-

tion. The sacrifices of time and energy made by the dancers sanctify the space. Even if the rehearsal

space is merely a parking lot, an empty field, or someone's living room, the actions and intentions of those within the space give it meaning.

Framing Performance

Imagine sitting down with a group of young children. Their attention is focused on their teacher, who sits at the front of the room. There are many clues that story time is about to take place – the children have moved from their desks to the floor and they've been told to sit quietly with their hands in their laps – but the unequivocal sign is when the teacher says, "Once upon a time, in a land far, far away..." This is a familiar formula to most people who have grown up in American culture. It lets the audience know that a fairy tale is about to begin and it also indicates that the speaker is assuming responsibility for a suitable performance of the tale. With such a simple phrase, the participants in this interaction have been cast in specific roles with clearly defined responsibilities. How will the story end? Most of us already know. The protagonist(s) will live "happily ever after." This too is a formulaic phrase, in this case one that signals the conclusion of the performance. These are what Richard Bauman calls framing devices, cues that "signify that the ensuing text is a bounded unit which may be objectified."⁶¹

Such frames are metacommunicative in the sense that they offer layered information about how the ensuing message is to be interpreted. Something that is metacommunicative communicates about communication. All of the following can be considered framing devices: special codes, figurative language, parallelism, special paralinguistic features, special formulae, appeal to tradition, and even disclaimer of performance.⁶² Special codes are associated specifically with a particular type of performance. For example, today the terms "thee" and "thou" are rarely heard outside of the reading of religious texts or fantasy genre fiction. Hearing these terms signals to the listener that they are encountering religious speech or another old text, such as a Shakespearian play. Figurative language refers to illustrative words and phrases like similes and metaphors that convey a great deal of meaning in just a few words. For example, to call someone "a wolf in sheep's clothing," alludes to a predator masked as prey, and no one familiar with the idiom would actually imagine this as a reference to a four-legged predator wearing a wool costume. Parallelism is the repetition of sounds, words, or phrases, which can be used as a memory device or build momentum. President Obama's repetition of "yes we can" in his campaign speeches is a good example of this. Special paralinguistic features include the special ways in which words can be delivered, such as an auctioneer's signature speed of delivery. Special formulae are stock phrases that give the audience information about the beginning or ending of a performance, such as the phrase "once upon a time." Appeals to tradition, like saying "this is how my dad always tells the story," not only frame a performance, but also puts it into an intertextual (see below for more on intertextuality) relationship with past performances. Finally, disclaimer of performance—denying that one has the competence to perform—actually calls attention to the fact that a performance is about to occur or has just occurred. All of these, whether used alone or in combination, give the audience the authority to judge the performer and serve to make the performance distinguishable from the flow of events that both precede and follow it.

Meaning Making

Typically, there are three primary interests involved in constructing the meanings of bounded performance events: the author, the artist(s), and the audience, all of whom may or may not be the same people

in different settings and situations, and for whom those meanings may or may not be quite different. Anthropologists use the term **polysemy** (derived from the Greek words for “many” and for “sign”) to describe such settings, situations, or symbols wherein a single form can convey many meanings. This is certainly the case for performance events, whereby the same form can be used in a variety of ways depending upon the creators’ and/or performers’ intentions and the audiences’ framework for receiving and interpreting the piece.⁶³ Should the artists intentionally subvert the author’s intentions, the audience might interpret the performance as ironic rather than sincere. Similarly, should an audience fail to understand the author’s intention, the message will likely fall flat, or at least be received quite differently than intended by either author or performer.

Both the author of a performance and the artists who turn the author’s vision into a reality often hold an ambiguous position within society. While they may be admired for their skill, they may also be feared for their ability to transform social realities and disrupt the status quo.⁶⁴ In some cases, the author and artist is the same individual. An individual performing a monologue that she herself wrote would be an example. It is also possible to have a group of artists that collectively author a work, as is the case with the performance group [Pilobolus](#).⁶⁵ In other situations, the author creates the work of art and it is performed by one or more artists. A ballet that is created by a single choreographer but performed by a troupe of dancers would be an example of this scenario. The dancers’ roles in this situation is to faithfully carry out the vision of the choreographer, though this may or may not happen. It is also possible for artists to carry out a performance with only a vague sense of who the author is, such as is the case when individuals recite folktales or proverbs that have been handed down across generations.

Audiences are groups of individuals who cooperate with the performer by temporarily suspending the normal communication rules of turn taking,⁶⁶ who have collectively gathered for a specific purpose. Since each person comes into the situation with their own background and experiences, however, this means that “the audience” does not receive any performance uniformly. Similarly, as part of the context for any given performance, the audience helps to construct the meaning of that performance. Part of this construction involves the audience’s evaluations based on the formal features of the genre, and against which the audience holds performers responsible for demonstrating competence within that particular genre.⁶⁷ To give a quick example, different evaluative criteria are employed to assess the acting involved in a drama versus a comedy. In in-person settings, artists are often influenced by the audiences for whom they are performing. A politician, for example, might phrase her key points differently for different audiences or choose different jokes that will resonate with the demographic at hand,⁶⁸ hoping that her performance will be judged in a positive light. Or, even if not pre-planned, a comedian may need to adjust her set depending on the audience at a given show.

Linked to the issue of audience, then, is also that of setting. Experiencing a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* outdoors under a tent is very different from experiencing the same play in a historic theatre like The Globe Theatre in London (a reproduction of the Elizabethan era theatre where many of William Shakespeare’s plays were staged). So too, seeing the three-act opera Verdi’s *Rigoletto* in the very coliseum in Verona, Italy where it was first performed cannot be anything but a different experience from seeing the same opera staged at a local theatre. More than simply context, the setting is also important in terms of access. Performances taking place in public areas, like parks or downtown squares, will be more accessible, while attendance at performances in theatres and opera halls will be limited to those with the time and money to spend on such luxuries. Similarly, and as discussed previously, the visual cues within a performance space are often important in signaling whether or not a performance is actually occurring. Should you see a couple arguing loudly in the park, wildly gesticulating and drawing bystanders into their conflict, it is possible that you have stumbled onto an avant-garde theatre company production but the lack of framing (a stage, curtains, audience seats, etc.)

adds to the ambiguity of the scenario. Perhaps it is genuinely (and only) a couple having a falling out?

Clearly then there are many possible outcomes of a performance. While sometimes performances are staged simply for entertainment value—in and of itself an important component of human life—oftentimes there are additional motivations behind the creation and performance of these pieces. For example, performance can be used to assert the distinctiveness of a particular ethnic group. In other cases, performance can be used to argue for the racial harmony of the nation-state (however far short this declaration may fall from reality). Carla Guerron-Montero describes how this works in Panama,⁶⁹ which gained its independence from Colombia in 1903. The U.S. assisted with the Panamanian separatist movement and shortly thereafter helped complete the construction of the Panama Canal. In order to distinguish itself from both nearby Colombia and the U.S., middle-class intellectuals in Panama have consistently looked to Spain as the legitimate source of their identity. In these elites' romanticized view, the ideal Panamanian is a rural, Hispanic (Spanish and indigenous) peasant. The peasant form of dress, the pollera, and music, the tipica, are used to symbolize a unified national identity, one that prides itself on being a racial democracy. Along these lines, and as performed through numerous everyday enactments, Panamanian national discourse holds that mestizo (mixed) identity is normative and they contrast themselves with other Latin American countries that have racial inequalities. Still, because lived life is always more complex than any single narrative, Afro-Panamanians still contend with and suffer from discrimination.⁷⁰

Case Study: Theatre and Public Health Education

The approach known as Theatre of the Oppressed was chiefly promoted by Augusto Boal, who was in turn influenced by Paulo Freire's work on liberator education among oppressed peasants in Brazil. Boal used this term to refer to performances that engaged the audience in such a way that they would be transformed and moved to transform the oppressive conditions of their societies. Though originally conceived of in terms of political action, the Theatre of the Oppressed has found many applications within public education. For example, performance studies scholar Dwight Conquergood spent time working in Thailand at the Ban Vinai refugee camp to help develop a health education program.⁷¹ He started a performance company among the Hmong refugees that used traditional forms like proverbs, storytelling and folksong to produce skits about health problems in the camp. Conquergood was wary of merely coopting local performance traditions and using them to force Western ways of thinking on the refugees.⁷² This would establish a hierarchical model of education that implies knowledge can be simply transferred from one who knows to one who receives. Rather, he wanted to engage the refugees in a dialog about how they could collectively improve the health conditions of the camp. Early on in his work with the refugees, the village was threatened by a potential rabies outbreak. When instructed to bring their dogs to vaccination sites around the camp, the refugees failed to comply, not understanding the urgency of the situation or how the vaccines would help. Conquergood's group of actors worked together to create a parade, dressing up as animals that held important places in the Hmong belief system and playing music to catch the villagers' attention. When people came out to see the parade, the chicken, an animal known for its divinatory powers, shared information about rabies and the importance of vaccinating dogs. Not only was the vaccine program then successful, it also provided an opportunity for the villagers to give the actors constructive criticism about their performance. These critiques increased the cultural relevance of future performances and made the villagers more invested in the activities of the theater troupe, further increasing their likelihood of success.

Recontextualized Performances

Performances can and do happen in new and changing contexts, outside their original social circumstances. In line with Geertz's understanding of cultures as "texts," the term intertextuality is often used to describe the network of connections between original versions and cases extracted from their social context and reinserted elsewhere. The conventional relationship between text and performance

is that “the text is the permanent artifact, hand-written or printed, while the performances is the unique, never-to-be-repeated realization or concretization of the text.”⁷³ A “text,” as discussed within the anthropology of performance, can therefore be symbolic work that is interpretable by a community including but not limited to literature, speech, painting, music and film. It is the source material. The relationship between text and performance is mediated by many factors including previous experiences with the text, the learning of the lines, rehearsals, directorial license and other contextual factors.

Folklorist and anthropologist Richard Bauman asks what storytellers accomplish by “explicitly linking” their tales to prior iterations of the source material.⁷⁴ In short, doing so situates each performance in a web of relationships with previous performances. This, in turn, may add to the performer’s credibility, demonstrating that he or she is connected in some way to these other performers or at least that the performer is knowledgeable of other, past performances. For example, a man singing a lullaby to his child might preface his song by explaining that this is a song his father sang to him, and that his father’s father sang before him. Doing this not only places the man singing in a genealogical relationship with past performers, it also places the audience, the child, into that genealogy as well.

Alternatively, explicitly linking a current performance with a prior one might invert what we think we know about the past performance, as is seen with parodies.⁷⁵ In such cases, the term “intertextual gap” can be used to refer to how significantly one departs from a faithful replication of the original source.⁷⁶ A direct quotation of another’s words, such as a town crier relaying a king’s decree, would have a very narrow intertextual gap. A parody that references an original source in order to mock it, such as the 2014 film *A Million Ways to Die in the West* or the 1974 film *Blazing Saddles* that both poke fun at ‘Westerns,’ would have a large intertextual gap. Source material that is taken from one genre and used in another, such as a popular proverb being turned into a song lyric, would also have a large intertextual gap. Deliberate manipulation of these gaps, or the recontextualization of source material, changes their role, significance, and impact in a performance.

Case study: Intertextuality and the *Coloquio*

The *coloquio* studied by Bauman and Ritch⁷⁷ is a nativity play performed in Mexico, which dates back to the 16th Century. Although often associated with the Christmas season, Bauman and Ritch report witnessing these performances at the culmination of important community events in other seasons as well. These plays are long, often lasting from twelve to fourteen hours, and involve a significant number of community members who volunteer their time to act, direct, and produce the spectacle. In preparation, after parts are assigned, the actors set themselves to the task of learning their lines. The words are already familiar to the actors, as they have attended such plays since childhood, and actors often model their own delivery upon that which they have witnessed in the past. There are six or seven rehearsals leading up to the formal public performance. Each rehearsal is a full run-through, with no opportunity to stop and rework a scene that is poorly done. There is, however, a prompter reading from the script who will help the actors with their lines if necessary, thereby assuring a very narrow intertextual gap. When relying on the prompter’s cues, the actors echo back these words, reinforcing a narrow intertextual gap. Yet there is one character that offers an exception. In the written version of the script, the Hermit is a very pious character. In the performance, however, the Hermit is a comic figure. The Hermit rarely knows his lines and thus relies on the prompter’s cues, but instead of echoing them back faithfully, he intentionally substitutes words for comic effect. He alone among the performers is allowed to significantly depart from the script, creating a large intertextual gap that introduces humor into the performed version where it was absent in the written one—and in a way that would be impossible to sustain across multiple enactments of the play if ever “frozen” in a script. A joke, after all, can only be funny so many times before it becomes boring.

Performance Communities

Cultural performances are both informed by the norms of one’s **community of practice** and signal

one's membership in those communities.⁷⁸ The study of performance is not limited to what happens on the stage or within the limits of what Bauman calls frames; rather, studying performance can enable us to see the studio, dojo, etc. as a space in which identity is formed through both accommodating to and resisting dominant discourses even as they are inscribed on the body.⁷⁹ In large, industrialized societies, people often elect to become part of smaller communities of practice around which they build their identities. Each community of practice has its own “folk geography,” to borrow the phrase performance scholar Judith Hamera⁸⁰ uses to describe the shared knowledge of where to shop for dance related paraphernalia or which medical practitioners in town best understand the dancers' body. But these folk geographies are more all-encompassing than this. They are global geographies that include the historical markers redolent with meaning for a particular community, the locations of key teachers, and everything else that a practitioner needs to know to navigate the community.

Sociologist Howard Becker's⁸¹ exploration of “art worlds” is similar, highlighting how the obvious activity—whether painting or playing a musical instrument—is contingent upon and contextualized by a larger community who provided the materials, training, venues, and audience for all such art practices (this concept has been extended by Wulff to the “ballet world,”⁸² and by Marion to the “ballroom world”⁸³ and “salsa world.”⁸⁴ More than just suggesting that performances happen within communities, the point is that communities emerge and grow around specific performance practices. Indeed, for something to become its own style—for it to become a genre rather than simply individual variation—other people have to become involved.

[Brazilian zouk](#), as a dance form, coalesced in Brazil around 30 years ago, making its way to Europe 20 years ago, and North America 10 years ago. Now, there are numerous events (including festivals, congresses, marathons, and retreats) around the world, involving a variety of shared practices, headliners, DJs, and participants. Whether painting, music, dance, or theater, new styles emerge only when and if variations find an appreciative audience, and then get copied or modified by others. Over time, however, and as styles grow in popularity and are shared more broadly, both broader and deeper cultural elaborations may ensue—such as the broadly shared activity of salsa dancing as both worldwide phenomena and local practice.⁸⁵

Performance in the Age of Globalization

Globalization refers to a condition in which communications and interactions with people in vastly different geographical locations has been sped up and increased by virtue of ever-faster and more ubiquitous communication and transportation technologies. Globalization is not a new phenomenon, but has been greatly intensified within the past several decades, creating linkages between producers and consumers, artists and audiences, which were not possible in the past. As this chapter has pointed out, performance is a multifaceted phenomenon that touches all aspects of social life, but is particularly relevant to the global mediascape as articulated by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai,⁸⁶ which he defines as the flow of media across national borders. Examples of the global mediascape include American teenagers watching Bollywood films that were produced in India, a Brazilian telenovela (soap opera) being shown in Mozambique, or a Prague newspaper that is sent to family members living and working in Saudi Arabia. Globalization also helps explain why some performance genres which were once very local traditions, like tango (originally from Argentina) or samba (originally from Brazil), are now internationally recognized, practiced, and celebrated.

In modern globalized society, many performance genres have become unmoored from their cultural origins. It is one thing to consume these performances as spectators, but it is another to become a par-

ticipant in these performance communities, leading to issues and questions of authenticity and appropriation. For example, is it acceptable for a middle-class white American woman to perform an art like *capoeira* (see case study above) that was traditionally associated with poor Afro-Brazilian males? Many individuals within the community do see this as acceptable, and embrace anyone who is willing to dedicate themselves to the art. Others, however, are more reluctant to adopt this inclusive philosophy. Individuals in this camp may argue that Afro-Brazilians endured years of suffering in service of preserving their art and therefore deserve to remain in control of its future. Similar debates surround other performance genres with strong connections to ethnicity, such as jazz, blues, hip-hop, or rap.

International interest in local performance forms also gives rise to questions of intellectual property. For example, the Mbuti people of the central African forests believe that song is the appropriate medium for communicating with the forest and alerting it to their needs.⁸⁷ Song is also pleasurable for the Mbuti and is associated with social harmony.⁸⁸ In short, song, especially the *hindewhu* or ‘hoot-like’ sound that is made with an indigenous musical instrument, has an important role in the worldview of this and related groups. Recently, however, this music has been transported out of the forest and into the mainstream, and anthropologist and ethnomusicologist Steven Feld has traced the use of this sound to one of Madonna’s songs, *Sanctuary*, and to Herbie Hancock’s song *Watermelon Man*.⁸⁹ Hancock had apparently developed his song after hearing the *hindewhu* on an ethnomusicology recording that was released in 1966. When then asked about the appropriateness of using this signature sound out of context and without permission, Hancock said, “this is a brothers kind of thing,” implying that their shared African ancestry made it okay for him to co-opt Mbuti musical heritage.⁹⁰ The central issue here is not whether or not Hancock’s particular claim to shared heritage justifies his use of the *hindewhu*—although that is a valid question in and of itself—but, rather, the main issue is one of what rights, if any, people have over the use, reproduction, and alteration of their own cultural performances. With world beat music remaining popular, and many indigenous people becoming savvier in protecting their cultural and intellectual rights, such issues will only continue to become more pressing.

Finally, globalization has also given rise to new performance types. For example, there are now numerous and regular performances specifically staged for media consumption and distribution, such as politicians and celebrities staged photo opportunities. Similarly, there are now performances that do not exist outside of their mediated states—or, looked at from the other side, performances that only exist as mediated ones—such as online-only campaigns, protests, and movements. Even if different from previous cultural configurations, a focus on performance facilitates understanding such emerging forms and practices. All of culture is always changing, albeit not all at the same rates or in the same ways, and performance is no exception. Amidst the ongoing expansion of modern technologies, then, the significance of performance in globalized contexts is central to anthropology’s ultimate commitment to holistic understanding. Indeed, even as one technology or format becomes commonplace, new options arise as people make, post, and share videos, construct profiles and albums, and build social networks across a plethora of online and mobile applications. As sites of personal presentation and social action, these are all now sites of both cultural performances and performances of culture.

CONCLUSION

The band takes a final bow and exits the stage. The lights come up and people begin streaming out of the auditorium. One performance has ended, but a multitude of others continue. The security guard continues to strut

importantly, ensuring that everyone behave themselves. A woman smiles demurely as a man makes a show of opening the car door for her. And Jayden promises to call Dakota sometime next week.

This chapter has highlighted the many different kinds of performances that interest anthropologists. Linked to anthropology's holistic approach, there are connections to topics from many earlier chapters including ritual (Religion) and gender (Gender and Sexuality). As you have seen here, however, explicit attention to various performance-based frameworks helps unpack much of the learned and shared patterns of idea and behavior that constitute human experience and living. We started the chapter noting that performance can be many things all at once, and that is indeed both how and why it matters so much to cultural experience. As you have read, cultural performances are those events that most readily fit with Western ideas of performance: they are clearly defined moments of heightened salience for some feature of a culture's values or social structure. These performances call attention to issues that might otherwise go unnoticed by audience members, often inspiring reflection or instigating action. Cultural performances can also be used to preserve aspects of a culture or facilitate cultural revitalization. Performing culture, on the other hand, refers to the many diverse ways in which individuals both reflect and create cultural norms through their daily activities, interactions, and behaviors. Culture does not, and indeed cannot, exist simply as an abstract concept. Rather, it refers to the actual patterned flows—that is the ongoing performances—of real people's lived lives.

Anthropologists who study performance are thus interested in many of the same topics as other anthropologists: gender, religion, ritual, social norms, conflict, and the like. Performance, however, provides an alternative perspective for exploring and understanding these issues. Rather than studying ritual from a structural-functional perspective, for example, focusing on performance allows anthropologists to better identify and understand dramaturgical structure and how communities use performance to accomplish the work of a ritual. In short, anthropologists of performance are interested in the product of social life, but also, and just importantly, its many processes.

(P.S. Good luck Jayden and Dakota!)

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between studying something that *is* performance and studying something as a performance? Why is this distinction important?
2. What is the role of performance in reflecting social order and values on the one hand and challenging these and leading to social change on the other? Provide examples of each.
3. Explain the relationship between performance and cultural constructions of gender.
4. How are descriptive and performative utterances different from each other, and what role to each play in verbal performance?
5. What roles do performances play in everyday life, especially as these relate to hegemonic discourses?

GLOSSARY

Agency: An individual's ability to make independent choices and act upon his/her will.

Community of practice: A group of people who engaged in a shared activity or vocation, such as dance or medicine.

Cultural Performance: A performance such as a concert or a play.

Discourse: Widely circulated knowledge within a community.

Hegemonic discourses: Situations in which thoughts and actions are dictated by those in authority.

Hegemony: Power so pervasive that it is rarely acknowledged or even recognized, yet informs everyday actions.

Performativity: Words or actions that cause something to happen.

Performing culture: Everyday words and actions that reflect cultural ideas and can be studied by anthropologists as a means of understanding a culture.

Personal front: Aspects of one's clothing, physical characteristics, comportment, and facial expressions that communicate an impression to others.

Polysemy: Settings, situations, and symbols that convey multiple meanings.

Presentation of self: The management of the impressions others have of us.

Reflexivity: Awareness of how one's own position and perspective impact what is observed and how it is evaluated.

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