

## PERFORMATIVITY

Richard Schechner

### A Term Hard to Pin Down

Performativity is everywhere - in daily behavior, in the professions, on the internet and media, in the arts, and in language. It is a term very difficult to pin down. The words "performative" and "performativity" have a wide range of meanings. Sometimes these words are used precisely. But more often they are used loosely to indicate something that is "like a performance" without actually being a performance in the orthodox or formal sense. "Performative" is both a noun and an adjective. The noun indicates a word or sentence that does something (I will explain this shortly). The adjective inflects what it modifies with performance-like qualities, such as "performative writing" (see **Phelan box**).

Peggy **Phelan**

#### *Performative Writing*

Performative writing is different from personal criticism or autobiographical essay, although it owes a lot to both genres. Performative writing is an attempt to find a form for "what philosophy wishes all the same to say." Rather than describing the performance event in "direct signification," a task I believe to be impossible and not terrifically interesting, I want this writing to enact the affective force of the performance event again, as it plays itself out in an ongoing temporality made vivid by the psychic process of distortion (repression, fantasy, and the general hubbub of the individual and collective unconscious), and made marrow by the muscular force of political repression in all its mutative violence. (...)

Performative writing is solicitous of affect even while it is nervous and tentative about the consequences of that sollicitation. Alternately bold and coy, manipulative and unconscious, this writing points both to itself and to the "scenes" that motivate it.

1997, *Mourning Sex*, 11-12

"Performativity" is an even broader term, covering a whole panoply of possibilities opened up by a world in which differences between media and live events, originals and digital or biological clones, performing onstage and in ordinary life are collapsing. Increasingly, social, political, economic, personal, and artistic realities take on the qualities of performance. In this sense, performativity is similar to what I called "as" performance in chapter 2.

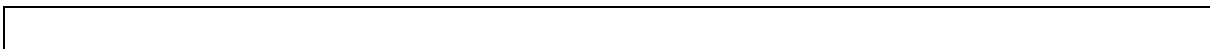
In performance studies, performativity points to a variety of topics, among them the construction of social reality including gender and race, the restored behavior quality of performances, and the complex relationship of performance practice to performance theory. Some of these topics are covered in other chapters; some will be dealt with here. In fact, performativity is a major underlying theme of this book taken as a whole. Understanding performativity can be helped by examining certain key terms, theories, and artistic practices:

- Austin's performatives
- Searle's speech acts
- Simulations
- poststructuralism
- constructions of gender
- constructions of race
- connections between performativity and performance art.

### **Performatives and Speech Acts**

The concept of the performative was explained by linguistic philosopher J. L. Austin in lectures delivered in 1955 at Harvard University (posthumously edited and published as *How to Do Things with Words*). Austin coined the word "performative" to describe utterances such as, "I take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife" or "I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*" or "I bet you ten dollars it will rain tomorrow" (see **Austin box 1**).

### **J. L. Austin**



### ***The Performative***

The term (...) "performative" is derived, of course, from "perform" (...): it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action. (...) The uttering of the words is, indeed, usually a, or even *the*, leading incident in the performance of the act

1962, *How To Do Things With Words*, 6-8

In these cases, as Austin notes, "To *say* something is to *do* something." In uttering certain sentences people perform acts. Promises, bets, curses, contracts, and judgments do not describe or represent actions: they are actions. Performatives are an active part of "real life." Even when the heart says "no," if the tongue says "yes" a performative occurs. If the tongue says "I do" at the wedding or "I bet \$100" at the poker table, the act sticks. Many performatives combine physical acts and words - pushing chips onto the table, signing the wedding contract, etc. A performative is "infelicitous" (to use Austin's word) if uttered in inappropriate circumstances. Saying "I name you *The Richard*" and smashing a champagne bottle against the bow of a ship I have no business christening does not make it so. The utterances of characters on a stage are also infelicitous.

Characters swear, bet, and marry, but the actors do not. The performative utterances of actors speaking as characters are, according to Austin, "parasitic (...) etiolations of language" (see **Austin box 2**).

### **J. L. Austin**

#### ***Theatre the Parasite***

(...) a performative utterance will (...) be *in a peculiar* way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. (...) Language in such circumstances is in special ways - intelligibly - used not seriously, but in ways parasitic upon its normal use - ways which fall under the doctrine of *etiolations of language*. All this we are excluding from consideration. Our performative utterances (...) are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances.

1962, *How To Do Things With Words*, 22

In his own way Austin, like Plato, bans the poets. But within a generation, Jacques Derrida brings them back by pointing out that all utterances are infelicitous. To Derrida, speech in the theatre is a "determined modification" of a "general iterability" (see **Derrida box 1**).

Jacques **Derrida**

*Successful Performatives are Impure*

For, ultimately, isn't it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, "non-serious, // citation (on stage, in a poem/ or a soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality - or rather, a general iterability -without which there would not even be a "successful» performative? So that - a paradoxical but unavoidable conclusion - a successful performative is necessarily an "impure" performative (...)?

1988 119721, "Signature/ Event, Context," in *Limited Inc.*, 17

By 1972, when Derrida wrote this, the uses of Austin's "performative" had expanded exponentially. Given the collapse of categories that marks the postmodern period, it is not surprising that Austin's term took off on its own in a protean manner (see **Parker and Sedgwick box**).

Andrew **Parker and**  
Eve Kosofsky **Sedgwick**

*Defining "Performative"*

(...W)hile philosophy and theatre now share "performative" as a common lexical item, the term has hardly come to mean "the same thing" for each. Indeed, the stretch between theatrical and deconstructive meanings of "performative" seems to span the polarities of, at either extreme, the *extroversion* of the actor, the *introversion* of the signifier. (...)n another range of usages, a text like [Jean-François] Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* uses "performativity" to mean an extreme of something like *efficiency* -while, again, the deconstructive "performativity" of Paul de Man or J. Hillis Miller seems to be characterized by the *dislinkage* precisely of cause and effect between the signifier and the world. At the same time, it's worth keeping in mind that even in deconstruction, more can be said of performative speech acts than that they are ontologically dislinked or introversively nonreferential. (... The performative is marked by] the torsion, the mutual perversion, as one might say, of reference and performativity.

1995, *Introduction to Performativity and Performance*, 2-3

One of those first to expand Austin's performatives was **John R. Searle** (1932-), who in the 1960<sub>s</sub> asserted that the basic unit of communication was the "speech act" (see **Searle box**).

**John R. Searle (1932-)** : American philosopher who was a student of J. L. Austin at Oxford University in the 1950<sub>s</sub>. Searle developed Austin's ideas in *Speech Acts* (1969) and *Expression and Meaning* (1979). His more recent work concerns theories of consciousness and artificial intelligence

John R. **Searle**

### *Speech Acts*

The unit of linguistic communication is not, as has generally been supposed, the symbol, word or sentence, or even the token of the symbol, word or sentence, but rather the production or issuance of the symbol or word or sentence in the performance of the speech act. To take the token as a message is to take it as a produced or issued token. More

precisely, the production or issuance of a sentence token under certain conditions is a speech act, and speech acts (...)are the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication.

1969, *Speech Acts*, 16

Yet, like Austin before him, Searle separates "normal real world talk" from "parasitic forms of discourse such as fiction, play acting, etc." Searle and Austin take this position because they don't recognize that art can be a model for rather than a mirror of life. But many people have been for quite some time very aware of the collapsing differences between "fiction" and the "real" This is not only, or even mostly, a matter of theory, but a practice in performance art, media, film, the internet, experimental theatre, and the visual arts. In fact, notions of performativity permeate culture.

Popular films of the late 1990s, such as *Wag the Dog*, *The Truman Show*, *Ed TV*, and *The Blair Witch Project* explore the very porous membrane separating the "real" from the "staged." The movies are fictions about dissolving the differences between the real and the fictional. Reality television goes much further. Shows such as *Survivor* strive to erase the distinctions between the real and the staged. *Survivor* contestants were drawn from the public (not stars) and marooned on a desert island. Each week the group voted on who to throw out until there was only one person left, the Survivor-winner of a million-dollar prize. By August, 2000, more than 30 million viewers tuned in.

What were they getting? The thrill of the real, sexiness, type-casting, unpredictability, and the amateur status of the contestants - the "That could be me!" factor? Cameras were always rolling, even if manned by the contestants. The film was edited in the network studio facilities to ensure a high level of drama and the expurgation of "inappropriate" material. Contestants knew that if a real emergency arose, they would be evacuated. Because their own votes, would determine who the final survivors would be, tensions rose as the weeks went by. What *Survivor* contestants were enacting was not improvised theatre, exactly; nor was it real life, exactly.

In the midst of all this a "really real" life drama exploded on the scene. Dr. **Ronald S. Shemanski** (1942-), the only doctor stationed at the Rothera Research Station, Antarctica, diagnosed himself with a serious gall-bladder problem. A made-to-order media event was at hand. Brave pilots volunteered to fly from southern Chile to Antarctica in wintery

darkness, land on snow, rest briefly, and evacuate the ailing medic. (He later had his gall bladder removed and his heart arteries unclogged.) Millions watched this "real-life" survivor narrative. Shemenski himself told CBS news hours after arriving in Chile, "If I had my druthers, I'd be at the Pole. But the window of opportunity to get me out was now. I couldn't sit around and wait." Because Shemenski-type opportunities come only once in a blue moon, media producers will cook up new Survivor look-alikes until public interest in the genre diminishes. By that time, some other kind of performance will emerge into the spotlight.

**Ronald S. Shemenski (1942-):** American physician whose rescue from Antarctica made headlines in early 2001,

Sponsoring "real -life" adventures to gain market share and increase revenues is not new. The genre developed hand-in-glove with the growth of newspapers, magazines, and other media that sprang up to create and then satisfy an appetite for vicarious excitement. In the nineteenth century there was the additional thrill of participating in the "fruits" of colonialism. Take, for example, the manufactured expedition into central Africa of British adventurer **Henry Morgan Stanley** (1841-1904), assigned by *The New York Herald* to find "missing" explorer **David Livingstone** (1813-73). After months of looking, Stanley located Livingstone in 1871 at Ujiji on Lake Tanganyika. At the moment of first meeting, Stanley tells us he spoke the famous one-liner, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume." But did he, actually? we have only Stanley's word for it. Stanley's expedition was cooked up and exploited by *The Herald*, who owned and published Stanley's account. The colonial practice of entering the .exotic," "Primitive," or "unknown" (to the West) continues to this day under the auspices of such organizations as the National Geographic Society. Because treating human societies in the manner of the nineteenth- to mid-twentieth century adventurers is no longer appropriate, attention has refocused on wildlife and the challenges of "nature" - the lifecycle of a pride of lions on the Serengeti, the perils of scaling Mt. Everest, or the challenge of raising unbroken dinnerware from the Titanic. The impulse remains the same while vastly improved technology allows for better "on-the-scene" participation by distant viewers.

**Henry Morgan Stanley (1841-1904) :** English travel writer and explorer who conducted a highly publidized

(and successful) search through Central Africa in 1870-71 to find fellow English explorer **David Livingstone (1813-73)**

The news programs about the Shemanski rescue had a lot in common with the Stanley-Livingstone story and with entertainment programs. The Shemanski story suited our times: condensed, episodic, and visual. News came via airplane and satellite, rather than through trekking and hand-delivered manuscripts. There was the "human interest" side of things, controlled reports of dangers and progress, a growing tension about the outcome, and a happy ending. *Survivor* had all this plus the thrill of a sports-like elimination contest. Not "real sports," but rather more like professional wrestling with its over-stuffed heroes and villains cheered and jeered by deliriously excited fans. Over time, *Survivor* viewers picked their favorites to love, pity, admire, and hate. Is the contest real or rigged? We know that the outcome of a stage drama is settled before the curtain rises. The public expects sports to be untampered with -although the cricket scandal of 2001 and the ongoing mess around steroid-use throws into doubt the legitimacy of all sports.

The fact is, the tons of money in play on television, and the fierce struggle among networks for viewer share, have eroded the walls once separating "entertainment," "news," and "sports." It's all entertainment now - ironically, that's where "reality" is located. What is true of TV is doubly so on the internet, where 24-hour webcams broadcast a continuous stream of "reality" (see **figure 5. 1**).

### [Insérer figure 5. 1](#)

fig 5.1. The view one day in 2001 from an always-broadcasting Amsterdam webcam. The image changes every 30 seconds. Take a look yourself at [www.xs4all.nl/~shs/webcam.html](http://www.xs4all.nl/~shs/webcam.html). Of course, there are hundreds of other webcams to choose from.

Here there are fewer taboos than on television. Sex and nakedness are big attractions. But almost anything will do. The prototype of this genre of entertainment was the months' long broadcast of the ongoing lives of the Loud family of southern California in 1971. People asked then, and the question remains salient, does the presence of the camera change behavior or convert someone's home from a "real-life" venue into a "theatre"? It is a sociological application of Heisenberg's indeterminacy principle where the observation

affects the outcome. The Louds and *Survivor* are managed by the networks. But the little guy is in on the action too. Starting in the mid- 1990s there arose a profusion of internet sites such as "JenniCam" (see figure 5.2).

### Insérer figure 5.2

fig 5.2. Jenni makes a face for the camera - her webcams are always turned on. Check Jenni out at [www.jennicam.org](http://www.jennicam.org). But to see the pictures at a faster rate you have to join. As Jenni says on her homepage, "JenniCam is not suitable for children."

Although Jenni says she is not an actress or entertainer, on her site she advertises the *JenniShow*, a bi-weekly video webcast hosted by Jenni herself (see **Ringley box**).

### Jennifer Ringley

#### *JenniCam*

JenniCam is, to put it simply, a sort of window into a virtual human zoo. My name is Jennifer Ringley, and I am not an actor, or dancer, or entertainer. I am a computer geek with the good fortune to be able to work from home. I design, code, and administer this website and manage the company that keeps the site alive.

(... ) The "JenniCam" is a series of cameras located throughout the house Dex and I live in, cameras that take images of my house all day long, every day. (...) So feel free to watch, or not, as you desire. I am here to be loved or hated. I am here simply to be me.

2001, from [www.jennicam.org](http://www.jennicam.org)

Viewers can send emails to Jenni, who reads them during the show. Many of these "real-life" sites are "subscriber only"- you have to pay to watch - converting "just living, life" into a business. Sometimes others are paid to watch us, even if we do not want to be watched, using surveillance cameras installed by corporations and police. The panopticon was first a means for guards to surveil prisons. Does the ubiquity of the looking eye make the world into one vast prison (as Hamlet believed Denmark to be)? Viewing the output of these cameras - sometimes even broadcasting footage on television or over the internet -

converts ordinary or illicit actions into "performances for the camera." Almost anyone can avail themselves of a "photo op" once reserved for stars and politicians. Where will the line separating private from public be drawn? Can it be drawn anywhere? The line is disappearing, if it has not already vanished. These are situations addressed, but by no means resolved, by theories of performativity.

## **Postmodernism**

Performativity as understood by performance studies exists as part of, or in close relation to, the postmodern. One of the decisive qualities of postmodernism is the application of the «performance principle" to all aspects of social and artistic life. Performance is no longer confined to the stage, to the arts, and to ritual. Performativity is everywhere linked to the interdependence of power and knowledge. An early authority on postmodernism, Jean-François Lyotard, argues that power depends on the optimization of performance (in the business and technical senses.), a kind of performativity that is self-legitimizing (**see Lyotard box**).

Jean-François Lyotard

### ***Performativity and Power***

This is how legitimation by power takes shape. Power is not only good performativity, but also effective verification and good verdicts. It legitimates science and the law on the basis of their efficiency, and legitimates this efficiency on the basis of science and law. It is self-legitimizing, in the same way a system organized around performance maximization seems to be. Now it is precisely this kind of context control that a generalized computerization of society may bring. The performativity of an utterance, be it denotative or prescriptive, increases proportionately to the amount of information about its referent one has at one's disposal. Thus the growths of power, and its self-legitimation, are now taking the route of data storage and accessibility, and the operativity of information.

The relationship between science and technology is reversed. (...) Research funds are allocated by States, corporations, and nationalized companies in accordance with this logic of power growth. Research sectors that are unable to argue that they contribute even

indirectly to the optimization of the system's performance are abandoned by the flow of capital and doomed to senescence. The criterion of performance is explicitly invoked by the authorities to justify their refusal to subsidize certain research centers.

1984, *The Postmodern Condition*, 47

Theorist **Linda Hutcheon** (1947-) takes the opposite position. Focusing not on business, government, or technology but on postmodern art, Hutcheon sees artists continuing the subversive project of the historical avant-garde by undermining the basic principles of bourgeois liberalism (see **Hutcheon box**).

**Linda Hutcheon (1947-):** Canadian literary critic, cultural theorist, and professor of English at the University of Toronto. Author of *Narcissistic Narrative* (1985), and *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988).

Linda Hutcheon

### *Postmodern Human-made Truths*

Postmodern art similarly asserts and then deliberately undermines such principles as value, order, meaning, control, and identity that have been the basic premises of bourgeois liberalism. Those humanistic principles are still operative in our culture, but for many they are no longer seen as eternal and unchallengeable. The contradictions of both postmodern theory and practice are positioned within the system and yet work to allow its premises to be seen as fictions or as ideological structures. This does not necessarily destroy their "truth" value, but it does define the conditions of that "truth." Such a process reveals rather than conceals the tracks of the signifying systems that constitute our world - that is, systems constructed by us in answer to our needs. However important the systems are, they are not natural, given, or universal. The very limitations imposed by the postmodern view are also perhaps ways of opening new doors: perhaps now we can better study the interrelations of social, aesthetic, philosophical, and ideological constructs. In order to do so, postmodernist critique must acknowledge its own position as an ideological one.

1988, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 13

**Fredric Jameson** (1934-) believes that in postmodern times "the market has become a substitute for itself and fully as much a commodity as any of the items it includes within itself" (see **Jameson box**).

**Fredric Jameson (1934- )**: Marxist cultural critic and professor of Comparative Literature at Duke University. Author of *The Political Unconscious* (1981) and *Postmodern or the Cultural of Late Capitalism* (1991)

Fredric Jameson

### ***What is Postmodernism?***

So, in postmodern culture, "culture" has become a product in its own right; the market has become a substitute for itself and fully as much a commodity as any of the items it includes within itself: modernism was still minimally and intentionally the critique of the commodity and the effort to make it transcend itself. Postmodernism is the consumption of sheer commodification as a process. (...) Culturally, the precondition [of postmodernism] is to be found (...) in the enormous social and psychological transformations of the 1960s. (...The] economic preparation of postmodernism or late capitalism began in the 1950s, after the wartime shortages of consumer goods and spare parts had been made up, and new products and new technologies (not least those of the media) could be pioneered. On the other hand, the psychic *habitus* of the new age demands the absolute break, strengthened by a generational rupture, achieved more properly in the 1960s.

(...)As the word itself suggests, this break is most often related to notions of the waning or extinction of the hundred-year-old modern movement (or to its ideological or aesthetic repudiation). Thus abstract expressionism in painting, existentialism in philosophy, the final forms of representation in the novel, the films of the great *auteurs*, or the modernist school of poetry (...) all are now seen as the final, extraordinary flowering of a high-modernist

impulse which is spent and exhausted with them.

(...The) fundamental feature of (...) postmodernism [is] the effacement (...) of the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture, and the emergence of new kinds of texts infused with the forms, categories, and contents of that very culture industry so passionately denounced by all the ideologues of the modern (...).

Nor should the break in question be thought of as a purely cultural affair: indeed, theories of the postmodern - whether celebratory or couched in the language of moral revulsion and denunciation - bear a family resemblance to all those more ambitious, sociological generalizations which, at much the same time, bring us the news of the arrival and inauguration of a whole new type of society, most famously baptized "postindustrial society" (...) but often also designated consumer society, media society, information society, electronic society or high tech, and the like.

1991, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, x, xx, 1, 2-3

These views are not easily reconcilable with each other - but this ability to embrace contradiction and eclecticism is a hallmark of the postmodern.

Therefore, it is not easy to summarize postmodernism because it means one thing to dancers, several other things to cultural critics and philosophers, and still something else to architects. Defining and theorizing the postmodern began in the turbulent 1960s with attacks on the "master narratives" of modernism: the nation-state, natural law, rational logic, patriarchal authority, mandatory coherence, and beginning-middle-and-end stories. But after the deconstruction of the master narratives, then what? Fragmentations, pastiche, relativism, local truths, delight in contradictions?

On the one hand, the media rush in with a host of temporary master narratives." Pundits galore make sense out of the day's events, especially political and economic news. Anchors intone, and feature reporters dramatize, the presentation of ordinary life. The arts themselves take a back seat because ordinary life is framed so "artistically." Authored dramas are relegated to public networks or less viewed specialty channels. Widely watched news channels propagate tug-the-heart human-interest stories even as they make the ups and downs of the stock market into a soap-opera cliffhanger. Instead of this resulting in a

single narration or even a coherent bundle of narrations, the media offer hundreds of fragmented stories and compressed dramas. Television commercials are 15- or 30-second mini-dramas, exquisite from the technical point of view, emotional and convincing - but ultimately empty except in stimulating the urge to buy. Surfing the internet brings viewers into contact with multiple texts and links, most sporting hyperactive banner ads blinking or beeping for interaction.

Recognizing, analyzing, and theorizing the convergence and collapse of clearly demarcated realities, hierarchies, and categories is at the heart of postmodernism. Such a convergence or collapse is a profound departure from traditional western performance theory. From Plato and Aristotle forward, theorists have agreed that theatre "imitates," "reflects," "represents," or "expresses" individual actions and social life. As Hamlet told the Pavers, the purpose of theatre is "to hold the mirror up to nature." Representational art of all kinds is based on the assumption that art and "life" are not only separate but of different orders of reality: life is primary, art secondary. But developments in photography, film, and digital media overturned traditional theories. Questions arose concerning exactly what was an original" - even if there could be such a thing as an original.

Before photography, there was "nature" and there was painting." Copies could be made of paintings, but these constituted either authorized reproductions or forgeries. With the advent of photography came the negative (which was not the photo but that from which the "positive" or photograph was made). How could either a negative or a positive made from the negative be an original? And if a particular positive was an original, which one - the first made from the negative, the best from a technical point of view?~ A question that was relatively easy with regard to painting became very troubled in photography. **Walter Benjamin (1892-1940)**, writing about "the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction," took up this problem. If there were no original, there could be no "presence," no unique existence," and no "aura" surrounding the art work (see **Benjamin box**). This demystification of art - and by implication of all cultural products, including the state and religion - was not at all bad. It created the possibility for a transfer of power from elites to the masses.

<p><b>Walter Benjamin (1892-1940):</b> German left essayist and intellectual who committed suicide while fleeing from the Nazis. His writings – including <i>illumination</i> (1968), <i>Understanding Brecht</i> (1973), and <i>Reflections</i> (1986) – were collected well after his death.</p>
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Walter Benjamin

***Authenticity, Presence, Aura***

In principle, a work of art has always been reproducible. Manmade artifacts can always be imitated by man. Replicas were made by pupils in practice of their craft, by masters for diffusing their works, and finally, by third parties in the pursuit of gain. Mechanical reproduction of a work of art, however, represents something new. (...)

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. This includes the changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in its ownership. (...)

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction (...). And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object.

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term "aura" and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence.

1969 (1936) *Illuminations*, 218, 220-1

But Benjamin had no sense of the further complications introduced by digital media and bio-technology. If reproduction threatens the "authority of the object," think how much

greater the threat to that authority when there is no original at all. Digital images are not present, emit no aura, and cannot be authenticated. That is because these images are actually binary codes capable of generating any number of identical images or anything else specified by the program. Cloning is roughly the same idea applied to biology. In all these cases - the painting, photo, digital image, clone – “nature” still exists as separate from, or at least prior to, whatever comes after. But these classic distinctions between “nature” and “art” are getting more difficult to make. It is not only changes in philosophical theories that blur the boundaries. “Integration” is a powerful movement at the highest levels of centralized power. Big business long ago moved in to control the means of information production. On the margins dissident individuals can put up what they want on their own websites. But the “means of digital production” are owned and controlled by a very few - a true corporate- military-government complex. It is not easy to tell whether experimental artists are resisting or aiding the corporations. Some of the most creative performance artists are pushing the conflation further, experimenting with “cyborg” bodies (amalgams of the biological, the mechanical, and the digital). I will discuss some of these experiments at the end of this chapter.

## **Simulation**

What Benjamin was leaning toward, but what he did not possess the theoretical tools to explore, was “simulation.” With simulation representation ends, and reproduction (cloning, digital and biological) takes over. Jean Baudrillard foresaw this in the early 1980s (see **Baudrillard box 1**).

Jean Baudrillard

### ***The Phases of Imaging***

These are the successive phases of the image:

- it is the reflection of a basic *reality*
- it masks and perverts a basic reality it
- masks the *absence* of a basic reality
- it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.

In the first case, the image is a good appearance -the representation is of the order of sacrament. In the second, it is an *evil* appearance - of the order of a spell. In the third, it plays at *being an* appearance - it is of the order of sorcery. In the fourth, it is no longer in the order of appearance at all, but of simulation.

1983, Simulations, 11-12

Simulation as the concept continues to evolve in the twenty-first century is closely related to "reality" television and internet sites. A simulation is neither a pretense nor an imitation. It is a replication of . . . itself as another. That makes simulations perfect performatives. A cloned sheep or a U-2 song distributed digitally over the internet is not a "copy" but an "original" in a theoretically infinite series. Or it is a "copy" in a theoretically infinite series. There is no difference between "copy" and "original." The decision about whether to call the digitized data an original or a copy is a matter of ideology, not of any difference between the so-called original and the so-called copy. One can determine the "first" in chronological and even legal terms, as the courts have done; but this determination depends on knowledge outside the simulation. There is nothing, in it that tells whether it was first, fifth, or . . . nth.

A simulation is not the enactment of a fiction, as when an actress plays Ophelia. It is not even a scam over the internet where thousands are convinced of the existence of a little girl dying of leukemia who really didn't exist or of a CBS billboard seen by tens of millions which also didn't exist (see **Kuczynski box and Hafner box 1**).

Alex Kuczynski

### *Simulated Billboard Advertising*

Inserting digital images has become increasingly common in sports and entertainment

programming - usually to insert advertising and corporate logos and first down markers in football (...). News show logos that appear real are being inserted on the sides of structures, like the General Motors building, on the back of horse-drawn carriages in Central Park, in the fountain outside of the Plaza Hotel, and (...) in the center of Wollman [ice-skating] Rink.

In some instances, the logo clearly resembles a large billboard advertising CBS news. "We were looking for some way to brand the neighborhood with the CBS logo," said Steve Friedman, the executive producer of "The Early Show." (...) "It's a great way to do things without ruining the neighborhood. Every day we have a different way of using it, whether it's logos or outlines. And we haven't even scratched the surface of its uses yet." Mr. Friedman said that the practice did not press the boundaries of ethical guidelines for CBS News.

2000, "On CBS News, Some of What You See Isn't There", 1-2

Katie Hafner

### ***Death and Life on the Internet***

On May 14 (2001), Kaycee Nicole Swenson, an effervescent 19-year-old, died from complications surrounding leukemia, which she had been battling for nearly two years. From her home in Kansas, Kaycee, an unyieldingly optimistic high school basketball star, had chronicled her remissions and relapses in her online diary, or weblog, which she had dubbed "Living Colours."

For nearly a year thousands of people went to the site to follow her travails. Many came to feel as if they knew her, and a few talked with her regularly on the phone. Some sent her gifts. Others with cancer spoke of her as an inspiration. (...)

Hundreds of people (...) were crushed by the news of her death. "So many people reached

out to this beautiful girl who was so positive in the face of adversity» said Sandra Mitchell, a screenwriter in Indianapolis.

But Ms. Mitchell was one of the first to cast doubt on what turned out to be an intricately detailed fabrication. A few days after the death announcement, Debbie Swenson, a 40-year-old homemaker, confessed to having invented the life and death of Kaycee. Ms. Swenson, who has two teenage children and lives in Peabody, Kan., a small town about 50 miles northeast of Wichita, had posed as Kaycee's mother. (...)

Ms. Swenson's fabrication was constructed so expertly and made so emotionally compelling that even when faced with evidence that it was not true, many people who were sophisticated Internet veterans set aside their skepticism and continued to believe it. Others put their online expertise to work to ferret out the truth about the fictitious Kaycee. (...)

Ms. Swenson said that she believed the Kaycee character had been more helpful than harmful. "A lot of people have problems," she said. "I know I helped a lot of people in a lot of different ways." She could be right. So compelling was Ms. Swenson's creation that powerful online connections were made among those who believed in the Kaycee persona and among those who pulled it apart.

[John Halcyon] Styn, whose gifts to the fictitious Kaycee had included a care package filled with hats to cover her head during periods of baldness, said that he refused to become cynical in the incident's unsettling wake. (...) "The fact that she wasn't really there doesn't mean that thousands of people weren't able to trust and give love to a stranger. The fact that the Internet is a medium where people can feel those things is encouraging."

2001, "A Beautiful Life, an Early Death, a Fraud Exposed," 1-2, 5

These are hoaxes. A simulation is not a hoax but something in which the appearance in itself is the actuality. It is possible, of course, to progress from pretending to acting to performing to simulating. As Baudrillard points out, a person pretending to be sick knows she is not really, sick, but someone simulating sickness actually produces the symptoms of the illness and in so doing "is" sick (see **Baudrillard box 2**). Once the symptoms appear

there is no, way to tell someone who is "sick" from someone who is sick. The quotation marks can be added only, extrinsically (by knowing that a simulation is taking place). Phenomenologically, the distinction between real and feigned disappears - but in a peculiar way. In the simulated illness, and like cases, the imaginary causes the actual. As I will point out in the next chapter, this is not so different from what shamans undergo. The shaman does not feign the illness she suffers in sympathy with the patient – the shaman simulates the illness with such thoroughness that she gets sick herself.



Jean BaudriIard

***Feigning To Have What One Doesn't***

To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't. One implies a presence, the other an absence. But the matter is more complicated, since to simulate is not simply to feign: " Someone who feigns an illness can simply go to bed and make believe he is ill. Someone who simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms" (Littre). Thus, feigning or dissimulating leaves the reality principle intact: the difference is always clear, it is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the difference between the "true" and "false," "real" and "imaginary." Since the simulator produces "true" symptoms, is he ill or not? He cannot be treated objectively either as ill, or as not ill.

1983, Simulations, 5

This process can be outlined as:

[Insérer graphique 119](#)

(real life → pretending → acting on stage → simulating → real life)

On the page, the progression moves from left to right, but actually the system loops back into itself with the extreme right, "real life," equal to the extreme left, "real life." The

shaman - or any performer similarly self-convinced - performs with such intensity and conviction that she transcends the pretense that first characterizes her performance. One pretends, then acts, then simulates, then arrives back at real life. A kind of experiential mobius strip is performed. Is this second real life "real life" and not real life? How can one tell? This can be a legal-ethical question as much as a philosophical one, as can be seen in a child pornography case argued before the US Supreme Court in 2001 (see **Liptak box.**).

Adam Liptak

### *Is Simulated Sex Too Real?*

In the science-fiction thriller *The Matrix*, Keanu Reeves confronts a future in which computer-generated virtual reality is not only indistinguishable from ordinary experience but also has powerful real-world consequences. Last Monday (22 January 2001), the Supreme Court announced that it would follow Mr. Reeves into the virtual realm by agreeing to hear a case concerning whether uncannily realistic digital simulations of children involved in sexual activity should have real-world consequences of up to 30 years in prison.

The federal law in question criminalizes the creation or possession of fake but sometimes startlingly exact images of children in sexual settings. The Supreme Court will decide whether the law is constitutional and whether, as the American Civil Liberties Union put it in a friend-of-the-court brief, "there is a real difference between touching children sexually and touching computer keys to create images."

The question is a variation on one that has often been before the courts in the digital era: do perfect replicas require different rules? So far, in contexts like the controversy over Napster and the banning of computer code allowing decryption of DVD's, the courts have tended to answer yes. In other words, the better the simulation, the more likely it is to be illegal. (...)

Neither the courts nor the experts foresaw the quality of modern digital simulations and the ease with which they can be distributed over the World Wide Web. These developments have caused courts to shut down file-sharing services

like Napster and to forbid Internet publications from even linking to Web sites containing code allowing DVD's to be copied.

These technical advances also caused Congress to ban simulated child pornography, based on the indirect real-world consequences of the simulations. The sponsors of the 1996 law said real children are hurt by fake pornography because simulated images may be used to entice real children into participating in sexual activity. They also argued that simulated images may be traded for real ones, thereby driving the market for child pornography generally, and that virtual pornography whets the sexual appetites of pedophiles. (...0

Scholars question whether the justifications offered for the law are real or a pretext for suppressing troubling speech. "The fundamental problem," said Prof. Eric M. Freedman, a First Amendment specialist at Hofstra Law School, "is that the statute goes beyond regulating the use of real children in the production of pornography and attempts to suppress the idea of juvenile sexuality. It proceeds on the premise that the underlying idea is so pathological that it should be banned from public discourse."

Joan E. Bertin, the executive director of the National Coalition Against Censorship, agreed. It is implicit in the law, she said, that: 'If you're a viewer, you're a doer.' We don't subscribe to the notion that by looking at or considering an idea that you necessarily endorse it."

2001, "When is a Fake Too Real? It's Virtually Uncertain," 1-2

These individualized simulations are not the only kind. Other simulations include elaborately designed entertainment environments such as Disney World with its simulated Mexico, China, Italy and so on (see **figure 5.3 and Baudrillard box 3**).

[Insérer fig. 5.3](#)

Fig 5.3. Disneyworld in Florida features very sanitized, and commercialized, versions of Mexico, China, Italy, and other nations The structures are mostly facades, suitable for photographing, leading to interiors that contain restaurants and stores.

Jean Baudrillard

*Disneyland is Simulated*

Disneyland is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulation. To begin with it is a play of illusions and phantasms: Pirates, the Frontier, Future World, etc. This imaginary world is supposed to be what makes the operation successful. But what draws the crowds is undoubtedly much more the social microcosm, the miniaturized and religious reveling in real America, in its delights and drawbacks. I ... I

The objective profile of America, then, may be traced throughout Disneyland, even down to the morphology of individuals and the crowd. All its values are exalted here, in miniature and comic strip form. Embalmed and pacified. E . . .1 Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the "real" country, all of the "real" America, which is Disneyland E . . .1. Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real [ . . . 1.

1983, Simulations, 23-25

However, Disney and like theme parks are not much more than stage or movie sets reconfigured to satisfy consumers. So much so that some of the most popular sites are simulations of movie sets, or even working movie sets, as at Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida. Here entrepreneurs designed a simulating machine that simulates a simulating machine. But who's fooled? At a somewhat more sophisticated level of simulation are restored villages such as Colonial Williamsburg or Plimoth Plantation that not only claim to look like what the sites once "really were," but employ trained "interpreters" to replicate historical persons who once lived there (**see figure 5.4**). Here the purpose is to trade on a national nostalgia in the garb of education. But only children are fooled - and even they not for long.

#### Insérer fig. 5.4

Fig 5.4. A view of Plimoth Plantation, where "it is always 1627» (as the Plantation's website announces). Plimoth is a reconstruction of the Pilgrim settlement in Massachusetts. A reconstruction rather than restoration because none of the original structures survive and the Plantation is near but not exactly at the spot where the Pilgrims lived in the 17th century. Photograph from the 1980s by Richard Schechner.

Where twenty-first century simulations are most effective is at the level of corporate operations, military war games, and scientific experiments. Here simulations are replacing actual events because simulations are cheaper and more reliable than real life, while either yielding reliable information about real life or having known effects on real life. Of course, in movies simulated settings, effects and characters are commonplace. Some of these, as in video games, announce their unreality; but many present themselves as actual. As in the child pornography case before the US Supreme Court, it is not possible for a viewer to detect a difference between a "picture of...X and a "picture that is simulated." In these situations the performative is primary.

Japan, barred by its post-second World War constitution from fielding an army, wages simulated war instead. In an exercise conducted on Mt. Fuji in 2000, 300 Japanese soldiers engaged 100 invading enemy. Commanders watched the battle over closed-circuit television, monitoring every move and exchange of fire. The soldiers were actually on the mountain, but everything else - small arms, artillery, mines, and mortars - was controlled by the computer program. "This was one of the most overwhelming exercises of my career, "an officer said". When you see your soldiers being killed and injured one right after the other, it adds a sense of realism to the drill," The US Army also uses simulations extensively. Hundreds of soldiers in different locations can engage in a tank battle on the same virtual battlefield with experts from computer science and Hollywood to perfect simulations of emotionally stressful situations in order to train soldiers to deal with peace-keeping operations and terrorist threats (see **Hafner box 2**). If the simulated can seem real, the opposite is also true - the real can appear to be simulated. Many commentators noted that real war - as fought by the US against Iraq in 1992, or the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 - is like a videogame, with "smart bombs" missiles launched from distances of hundreds of miles, and under very realistic conditions. The army is also working damages "assessed" (scored) by satellite observation.

Katie Hafner

*Emotional Simulations for the Military*

ARINA DEL REY, Calif. - On a quiet street in a village in the Balkans, an accident suddenly puts an American peacekeeping force to the test. A Humvee has hit a car, and a child who has been injured in the collision lies unmoving on the ground. A medic leans over him. The child's mother cries out. A crowd of local residents gathers in the background. How they will react is anyone's guess. A lieutenant arrives at the scene and is confronted by a number of variables. In addition to the chaos unfolding in the village, a nearby unit is radioing for help. Emotions - not only the lieutenant's own and those of his sergeant, but also those of the panicked mother and the restive townspeople - will clearly play a role in any decision he makes.

This seven-minute situation is a simulation, generated on a large computer screen with sophisticated animation, voice synthesis and voice recognition technology. It is the product of about six months of work here by three research groups at the University of Southern California: the Institute for Creative Technologies, largely financed by the Army to promote collaboration among the military, Hollywood, and computer researchers; the Information Sciences Institute; and the Integrated Media Systems Center. The only human player is the lieutenant. The rest of the characters, including the sergeant who has been conferring with the lieutenant, have been generated by the computer. (...)

Such simulations are still experimental. But when they are ready, they will be used at bases around the country to train soldiers and officers alike to make decisions under stress. The University of Southern California exercise illustrates the latest challenge among researchers: to focus on the more unpredictable side of the human psyche, simulating emotions and the unexpected effects that panic, stress, anxiety and fear can have on actions and decisions when an officer or a soldier is deep in the fog of war.

"How does a hand-grenade explosion a few feet away from you motivate you if you've just been marching 16 hours in tremendous heat?" asked Dr. Barry G. Silverman, an engineering professor at the University of Pennsylvania. Of course, video and computer games are the closest most people come to experiencing situations like that. In fact, Dr. Silverman said one of his students had recently asked him why he even bothered with his

research when there are games like "Age of Empires," Microsoft's popular warfare strategy series. The similarities, Dr. Paul S. Rosenbloom, a computer scientist who is deputy director of the Intelligence Systems Division at the Information Sciences Institute, acknowledged, are obvious. "You're in an environment and interacting with characters trying to accomplish something," he said. "The difference is in the underlying technology."

But there are also important distinctions. Simulations like those he works on, he said, are more concerned with trying to understand how people really react in a variety of circumstances. "It can react appropriately to you under a wide range of things you might do and essentially intelligently adapt its behavior," he said. "There are no computer games that have anywhere near that flexibility. There aren't characters who have a deep understanding of a situation." (...)

The growing interest among researchers in these kinds of simulations comes with the rise in computer processing power and the growing sophistication of psychological theories. [ ... I Dr. Silverman said that not only have new theories emerged on the role of emotions in decision-making, but computer processing has also become fast and inexpensive enough that computers are able to do the complex calculations necessary to model behavior. "The agents can now think in real time and react and have emotions in real time," he said. But the degree to which emotions can be simulated depends on the type of behavior being modeled. The effect of stress or sleep deprivation, for instance, is better understood than, say, panic, fear or anxiety. (...)

The exercise simulating the Balkans mission is one step toward introducing emotional individuals into a situation so people can be trained for complex tasks like peacekeeping duties. (...) To enhance the realism, the Institute for Creative Technologies, with a \$45 million grant from the Army, has built a theatre here with a screen that wraps around roughly half the room. Three projectors and a sound system make the theater so realistic and directional that it can trick the listener into believing that a sound's source is coming from anywhere in the room.

After completing the exercise, a trainee receives an evaluation, said Dr. Bill Swartout, the institute's director of technology. "Depending on the path you took, a particular tape is played," he said. Because there are only a few possible paths in this version of the simulation, he said, it is possible to record the evaluations in advance. As the simulation

becomes more sophisticated, there will be more choices for the lieutenant, and software will put the story together on the fly. (...)

In one project Dr. Silverman is working on, the human player is the leader of a squad guarding a checkpoint at a bridge. All the other participants are simulations. In the exercise, a school bus approaches, filled with women and children. The bus also holds armed terrorists who are planning an attack. "Throughout the ages," Dr. Silverman said, "we have been taught that emotions are the opposite of rationality and that cold logic is devoid of emotions." But new research shows that most decisions are guided by emotions, he said. "It's ironic, but to build realistic, clever software agents, we are giving them emotions and the capability of emotionally reacting to events and actions."

Dr. Silverman is optimistic about how quickly the new direction in research will prove effective. "It's definitely coming together," he said. "We're at the early stage, and there's a lot more theory than data. It's very easy to program a theory, but much harder to ground that in data and say this actually duplicates how people behave. But the field is moving rapidly forward."

But Dr. Richard W. Pew, a principal scientist at BBN Technologies in Cambridge, Mass., and an expert on military simulations, is less optimistic: "I'm not sanguine that in the next five years we'll be there. People are complicated. You never do exactly the same thing twice. Every situation you face is always a little bit different, so trying to build a model that can reflect the importance of that context is where the challenges are." To make further advances, Dr. Pew said, will require closer cooperation between psychologists and computer scientists. "If we want to be more successful with computer models, we need to go deeper into the psychology of how people perform," he said. "Because many of the models are ginned up by computer scientists who don't know anything about human behavior."

2001, "Get Hold of Yourself Lieutenant," *The New York Times*, 21 June.  
From *NY Times* website.

The most extensive use of simulations is in science. During 1999 and 2000, *Science*, the journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, published 138 articles reporting research based on simulations used across the whole range of scientific inquiry from genetics, climatology, and molecular biology to astrophysics, medicine, earthquake prediction, and lots more. In fact, simulation has become the most important single tool in scientific research, prediction, and teaching. The rise of simulation is tightly joined to the increasing speed, reduced size, visual abilities, and number-crunching power of computers - computers that "Perform better. «The result is a conjunction of commercial, military, scientific, and academic operations where the "Performance principle" is a concatenation of theatre, power, and know- ledge. The leading Players include corporate executives, university officials, military brass, and government bureaucrats. The workers - those crunching data into information, developing new simulations, participating in experiments and training - are professors, soldiers, scientists, and a few artists.

### **Poststructuralism/Deconstruction**

Postmodernism and poststructuralism are the bases for academic theories of performativity. These are at odds with the uses of performativity in business, science, and the military. The scholars who developed Austin's ideas were vehemently anti- authoritarian. They wanted to use notions of performativity to subvert established authority. But what's happened is that the techniques of performativity - simulation especially - have been eagerly taken up by the most powerful groups in society and used to enhance their power and control over knowledge. At the same time, academics today still use notions of performativity to subvert authority. How this contradiction will be resolved is not certain.

Postmodernism and poststructuralism must be understood in relation to each other. Postmodernism is a practice in the visual arts, architecture, and performance art. Poststructuralism, a.k.a. "deconstruction," is the academic response to postmodernism. Poststructuralism, a discourse in cultural, linguistic, and philosophical circles began in France in the 1960s both as a revolt against "structuralism" and in sympathy with the radical student movement that culminated in the strikes and insurrections of 1968. Poststructuralism has never totally lost touch with its radical beginnings, though (as we will see) this has also proven to be a burden as the rest of the world moves on.

Structuralism, closely associated with the "structural linguistics" of **Ferdinand de Saussure** (1857-1913) and **Roman Jakobson** (1896-1982), and led in the 1960s and 1970s by **Claude Lévi-Strauss** (1908- ), took as its main program the discovery of universal unconscious structures of language, mind, and culture (see **Lévi-Strauss and Ehrmann boxes**).

**Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913):** Swiss linguist, whose posthumously published *course in General Linguistics* (1916, Eng. 1959) lays the foundation of structural linguistics, as well as of structuralism more generally.

**Roman Jakobson (1908-):** Russian-born linguist. Author of *Fundamentals of Language* (1956), *Studies in Verbal Art* (1971), and *Main Trends in the Science of Language* (1973).

**Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-):** French anthropologist, a key figure in the development of structuralism. His works include *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949), Eng 1969), *Structural Anthropology* (1958, Eng. 1963), *The Savage Mind* (1962, Eng. 1966), and *The Raw and the Cooked* (1964, Eng. 1969)

## Claude **Lévi-Strauss**

### *The Universal of Structuralism*

if, as we believe to be the case, the unconscious activity of the mind consists in imposing forms upon content, and if these forms are fundamentally the same for all minds - ancient and modern, primitive and civilized (as the study of the symbolic function, expressed in language, so strikingly indicates) - it is necessary and sufficient to grasp the unconscious structure underlying each institution and each custom, in order to obtain a principle of interpretation valid for other institutions and other customs, provided of course that the analysis is carried far enough.

1963, *Structural Anthropology*, 21

## **Jacques Ehrmann**

### ***What is Structuralism?***

What is structuralism? Before being a philosophy, as some tend to see it, it is a method of analysis. Even as such its many facets and different uses make it a subject of various interpretations, debate, even polemics. No simple or single definition applies to it except in very general terms. One could say a structure is a combination and relation of formal elements which reveal their logical coherence within given objects of analysis. Although structuralism can hardly be subsumed in some overall formula, or be given any label which will identify it for public consumption, we can say it is first of all, when applied to the sciences of man, a certain way of studying language problems and the problems of languages.

1966, Introduction to special issue of *Yale French Studies* on Structuralism, 7

The structuralists often worked by analyzing cultural practices both "diachronically" (over time) and "synchronically" (as a single structural unit). A favorite device of the structuralists was the use of "binary opposites" to characterize the dialectical tensions of a social system. The poststructuralists deplored the desire to universalize and the use of binary opposites. Both of these, they believed, reduced complex situations to over-simplified models. Furthermore, the poststructuralists felt that structuralism buttressed the status quo socially, politically, and philosophically. Poststructuralists opposed all notions of universals, originals, or firsts. To poststructuralists, every act, every idea, is a performative.

Poststructuralists regard each phenomenon as part of an endless stream of repetitions with no "first voice" of ultimate authority (see **Foucault box 1**).

Michel Foucault

*A Secret Origin, an Already-Said*

We must renounce two linked, but opposite themes. The first involves a wish that it should never be possible to assign, in the order of discourse, the irruption of a real event; that beyond any apparent beginning, there is always a secret origin - so secret and so fundamental that it can never be quite grasped in itself. Thus one is led inevitably (...) towards an ever-receding point that is never itself present in any history; this point is merely its own void; and from that point all beginnings can never be more than recommencements or occultation (in one and the same gesture, this *and* that). To this theme is connected another according to which all manifest discourse is secretly based on an 'already-said; and that this 'already said' is not merely a phrase that has already been spoken, or a text that has already been written, but a 'never-said,' an incorporeal discourse, a voice as silent as a breath, a writing that is merely the hollow of its own mark. It is supposed therefore that everything that is formulated in discourse was already articulated in that semi-silence that precedes it, which continues to run obstinately beneath it, but which it covers and silences. The manifest discourse, therefore, is really no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say; and this 'not-said' is a hollow that undermines from within all that is said. The first theme sees the historical analysis of discourse as the quest for and the repetition of an origin that eludes all historical determination; the second sees it as the interpretation of 'hearing' an 'already-said' that is at the same time a 'not-said.' We must renounce all those themes whose function is to ensure the infinite continuity of discourse and its secret presence to itself in the interplay of a constantly recurring absence. We must be ready to receive every moment of discourse in its sudden irruption; in that punctuality in which it appears, and in that temporal dispersion that enables it to be repeated, known, forgotten, transformed, utterly erased, and hidden, far from all view, in the dust of books. Discourse must not be referred to the distant presence of the origin, but treated as and when it occurs.

*1972, The Archeology of Knowledge, 25*

In their insistence on process, poststructuralists are Heraclitean and Nietzschean - everything is in flux. The flux of experience and history is the battleground for an ongoing power struggle. Who has the authority to speak in the "father's voice" - except there is no father. Just as the Wizard of Oz proves to be an illusion, a magic show manipulated by an ordinary man, so do the great icons of societal power. ( An insight that **jean Genet**

(1910-86) expressed as early as 1956 in *The Balcony*.) Unstable "iteration" -repetition, but not quite exactly -replaces stable representation. But by the turn of the new millennium, this idea ran smack into the practice of digital and biological cloning. Thus, on the one hand, postmodern repetition and recombination; on the other, poststructuralist *différance* (to be discussed soon).

**Jean Genet (1910-86):** French playwright and novelist whose works include *The Maids* (1948, Eng. 1954), *Our Lady of Flowers* (1948, Eng. 1949), *The thief's Journal* (1949, Eng. 1959), *The Balcony* (1956, Eng. 1958), and *The Blacks* (1958, Eng. 1960).

Although their discourse is principally about language and takes the form of essays and books, poststructuralists have a very broad view of what constitutes language. "There is nothing outside the text," Derrida wrote. But the "text" in Derrida's theory is all of human culture. "Writing," as Derrida has it, comprises an all-inclusive array of cultural expressions and social practices. By "writing" Derrida means more than graphic inscription and literature. He means the entire system of "inscribed" power: laws, rituals, traditions, politics, economic relations, science, the military and the arts (see **Derrida box 2**).

## Jacques **Derrida**

### ***"Writing-" and "Deconstruction"***

If we take the notion of writing in its currently accepted sense - one which should not - and that is essential - be considered innocent, primitive, or natural, it can only be seen as a *means of communication*[ ... *I extending* enormously, if not infinitely, the domain of oral or gestural communication. (...)

Once men are already in the state of "communicating their thoughts," and of doing it by means of sounds 1, the birth and progress of writing will follow a line that is direct, simple, and continuous. (...)

The representational character of the written communication - writing as picture, reproduction, imitation of its content - will be the invariant trait of all progress to come. (...) Representation, of course, will become more complex, will develop supplementary ramifications and degrees (...).

A written sign is proffered in the absence of the receiver. How to style this absence? (...) This distance, divergence, delay, this deferral (*différance*) must be capable of being carried to a certain absoluteness of absence if the structure of writing, assuming that writing exists, is to constitute itself. (...) My communication must be repeatable - iterable - in the absolute absence of the receiver (...). Such iterability – (*iter*, again, probably comes from *itara*, *other* in Sanskrit, and everything that follows can be read as the working out of the logic that ties repetition to alterity) structures the mark of writing itself, no matter what particular type of writing is involved (...). A writing that is not structurally readable - iterable - beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing. (...)

The possibility of repeating and thus of identifying the marks is implicit in every code, making it into a network that is communicable, transmittable, decipherable, iterable for a third, and hence for every possible user in general. To be what it is, all writing must, therefore, be capable of functioning in the radical absence of every empirically determined receiver in general. And this absence is not a continuous modification of presence, it is a rupture in presence. (...) What holds for the receiver holds also, for the same reason, for the sender or producer. To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a sort of machine which is productive in turn, and which my future disappearance will not, in principle, hinder in its functioning, offering things and itself to be read and to be rewritten. (...)

(T)he traits that can be recognized in the classical, narrowly defined concept of writing are generalizable. They are valid not only for all orders of "signs" and for all languages in general but moreover, beyond semio-linguistic communication, for the entire field of what philosophy would call experience, even the experience of being: the above-mentioned "presence." (...)

Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the current sense of this opposition), in small or large units, can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner

which is absolutely illimitable. This does not imply that the mark is valid outside of a context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center or absolute anchoring. (...)

We are witnessing not an end of writing that would restore (...) a transparency or an immediacy to social relations; but rather the increasingly powerful historical expansion of a general writing, of which the system of speech, consciousness, meaning, presence, truth, etc., would be only an effect, and should be analyzed as such. (...)

Deconstruction cannot be restricted or immediately pass to a neutralization: it must, through a double gesture, a double science, a double writing - put into practice *a reversal of the classical* opposition and a general *displacement of the system*. (...) Deconstruction does not consist in moving from one concept to another, but in reversing and displacing *a conceptual order* as well as the nonconceptual order with which it is articulated.

1988, *Limited Inc.*, 3, 5, 7-9, 12, 21

Derrida views cultures as constructed sets of relations, historically founded and always contested. Inscribed power performs its privileges by means of established authorities - police, courts, the military, priesthood, scientists, teachers, and critics. It's no accident that the word "authority" includes the word "author. » The writing produced by the authorities is not "transparent" - a windowpane through which one sees the "true," the "real," or the "natural." All writing enacts agendas of power. Writing doesn't serve power, but the other way around: who writes performs authority. Yet all authority, whatever its proclamation of eternity and universality, is temporary: "inalienable rights," "the 1,000-year Reich," "all roads lead to Rome" - no "writing" is either first or final.

That is because behind every writing are other writings. New writing tries to erase or co-opt what came before, but is never wholly successful. To Derrida, cultures are palimpsests of official and counter-hegemonic graffiti. Every writing is a power struggle (see **Derrida box 3**). Even simple binaries such as "day/night," "white /black," "man/ woman" inscribe power. In Western languages, by reading the term on the left first we perform its authority over the term on the right. To reverse terms is to perform a new power relation: "black/ white" is different than "white/ black." From this perspective, history is not

a story of "what happened" but an ongoing struggle to "write," or claim ownership, over historical narratives. Yet every narrative, no matter how elegant or seemingly total, is full of holes, what Derrida calls "aporia" - open spaces, absences, and contradictions. Nothing can be totally erased. These aporias leak various pasts and alternatives into the present order of things.

**Palimpsest:** A document or art work that has been repeatedly written or drawn on, the partly erased, then written or drawn on again, so that the previous writings leave a still visible trace on the writing surface. Thus a palimpsest contains and expresses its own history of being inscribed on.

**Hegemonic:** Exerting dominance or control, usually by or on behalf of the state, religious body, corporation, or other established power.

Jacques **Derrida**

***Writing and Power Never Work  
Separately***

Fostering the belief that writing *fosters* power (one can, in general, and one can write if occasioned to), that it can ally itself to power, can prolong it by complementing it, or can serve it, the question suggests that writing can *come (arriver)* to power or power to writing. It excludes in advance the identification of writing as power or the recognition of power from the onset of writing. It auxiliarizes and hence aims to conceal the fact that writing and power never work separately, however complex the laws, the system, or the links of their collusion may be. (...)

Writing does not come to power. It is there before hand, it partakes of and is made of it. (...) Hence, struggles for *powers* set *various* writings up against one another (*les luttes pour les pouvoirs* opposent *des écritures*).

1998 E19791, from *Scribble (writing-power)*, in  
*The Derrida Reader*, 50

The authorities - "those who author" - attempt to make the present take on the appearance of being the outcome of an inevitable process (fate, destiny, historical necessity). But this smooth continuity - a knowable past that determines a stable present leading to an inevitable future - is a fiction. The past is full of holes; the present is provisional, the future not known. All historical narratives are haunted by 'what/who is erased, threatened by what/who demands representation. The struggle to write history, to represent events, is an ongoing performative process.

In order to show the unstable, performative quality of writing, Derrida coined the word *différance* (French), meaning "difference" + "deferral" - otherness plus a lack of fixed or decided meaning.

**Différance:** A noun coined by Jacques Derrida *emphasizing the double meaning of the French verb *différer* - "to differ" and "to defer. "Différance" - a difference and a deferral - marks the slippage between a word as such and what the word refers to. *Différance* has entered English and is used without quotation marks.*

Because writing is always contested, a system of erasing as well as composing, meaning cannot "be" once-and-for-all. Meaning is always performed: always in rehearsal, its finality forever deferred, its actuality only provisional, played out in specific circumstances. This "playing out" is related to Nietzsche's "will-to-power" (see chapter 4). As play acts, performatives are not "true" or "false," "right" or "wrong." They happen. Furthermore, writing in the poststructuralist sense consists of "iterations"- quotations, repetitions, and citations. Derrida emphasizes that language in general and speech acts in particular depend on an active estrangement, an encounter with "otherness." This is very close to Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect). In Brechtian theatre, the actor stands beside herself and beside the events enacted - doing and showing at the same time (see figure 5. 5).

[Insérer fig 5.5](#)

Fig 5.5. Charles Laughton, an actor Bertolt Brecht admired, performing in Brecht's *The Life of Galileo* in the Beverly Hills Coronet Theatre, 1947. Photograph by Ruth Berlau. Copyright the Bertolt Brecht Archive, Berlin.

The Brechtian performer is not lost in the role, or entirely empathetic with the situation (I will discuss this kind of acting more thoroughly in the next chapter). Brecht argued that art is not a mirror held up to nature but a hammer with which to shape it.

## **The Diffusion of Poststructuralism**

From the 1980s onward, poststructuralism spread far beyond France. For English speakers, the most influential French poststructuralists are Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Giles Deleuze (1923-95), and Félix Guattari. Very important as well, though not strictly speaking poststructuralists are Jean Baudrillard, Guy Debord, and Jacques Lacan. In the UK and North America poststructuralism drew on and soon enough merged with theories of the performative conceived by Austin and richly elaborated by **Judith Butler** (1956-) - Whose ideas I will have more to say about later in this chapter. Many adherents of the poststructuralist approach were also drawn to the **Frankfurt School** of critical studies and their intellectual allies, men such as **Theodor Adorno** (1903-69), **Max Horkheimer** (1893-1973), **Jürgen Habermas** (1929-), **Herbert Marcuse** (1898-1979), Walter Benjamin, and Bertolt Brecht. This set up a fruitful convergence of poststructuralist, Marxist, and Freudian thought - which fed a wide range of theories and "studies" -gender, cultural, postcolonial, race, queer, and performance. What unites this diverse and even sometimes self-contradictory collection is both an identification with the subaltern, the marginalized, and the discriminated against and a desire to sabotage, if not directly overthrow, the existing order of things.

**Judith Butler (1956-):** American philosopher and queer theorist whose work has concentrated on developing a theory of gender performativity. Her books include *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies that Matter* (1997).

**The Frankfurt School** of social science and cultural studies emerged in Germany during the 1920s and 1930s. Its members included **Theodor Adorno (1903-69)**, **Max Horkheimer (1895-1973)**, **Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979)**. Despite its name, the Frankfurt School was neither a school nor limited to Frankfurt. The term is used to designate a group of cultural critics who applied Marxist thought to the arts and popular culture. With the rise of the Nazis, many adherents of the Frankfurt School emigrated to England and the United States. Their ideas deeply influence the radical social movements of the 1960s and beyond.

**Subaltern:** Literally, subordinate, of low rank. Often used to indicate the oppressed or marginalized status of persons or groups in the Third World.

The core operation of poststructuralism is "decentering," an attack on every kind of hegemony, authority, and fixed system - philosophical, sexual, political, artistic, economic, artistic. Poststructuralists subvert the First Performative of Western and Islamic cultures, God's Utterances in *Genesis*, "God said . . . and there was!" (Derrida, though French, grew up Jewish in Arab Algeria. His early cultural experiences are Semitic, European, and colonial.) Poststructuralists also undercut Aristotle's notion of a First Cause. On these originary Spoken Presences, Derrida pours acidic puns and ironies. Derrida's attacks are consonant with Foucault's renunciation of the "secret origin" and the "already- said." Foucault wanted to undermine the idea that history proceeded as a continuous stream of causal events. He proposed instead seeking the "ruptures" and "transformations" that continually throw up "new foundations" (see **Foucault box 2**). The poststructuralists challenge not so-called facts, but how knowledge itself is manufactured, performed, and written (in the Derridean sense). As a consequence, the term "performative" now includes everything from doable acts of the body, to imaging of all kinds, and writing as such.

Michel Foucault

***Threshold, Rupture, Break, Mutation,  
Transformation***

And the great problem (...) is not how continuities are established, how a single pattern is formed and preserved, how for so many different, successive minds there is a single horizon, what mode of action and what substructure is implied by the interplay of transmissions, resumptions, disappearances, and repetitions, how the origin may extend its sway well beyond itself to that conclusion that is never given -the problem is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of lasting foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations. What one is seeing, then, is the emergence of a whole field of questions, some of which are already familiar, by which this new form of history is trying to develop its own theory: how is one to specify the different concepts that enable us to conceive of discontinuity (threshold, rupture, break, mutation ' transformation)? By what criteria is one

to isolate the unities with which one is dealing; what is a science, what is an *oeuvre* [work]? What is a theory? What is a concept? What is a text? How is one to diversify the levels at which one may place oneself, each of which possesses its own divisions and form of analysis? (...) In short, the history of thought, of knowledge, of philosophy, of literature seems to be seeking, and discovering, more and more discontinuities (...).

1972, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 5-6

### **Problems with Poststructuralism**

Despite its highly developed political consciousness and its analysis of, and sympathy with, the plight of the marginalized and disempowered, poststructuralism is not a mass movement with a direct impact on the vast majority of people. Poststructuralists are mostly sequestered in the ivory tower, the "tenured radical" phenomenon. The authorities both within academia and outside it don't worry much about poststructuralists disrupting the status quo. In fact, an ironclad status quo has developed within poststructuralism. Ironically, poststructuralism is ruled by the works of (mostly dead) authors. The relatively few writings and ideas that constitute the poststructuralist canon are continually recycled inside a closed hermeneutical system.

The causes of this situation are not difficult to locate. Once the "disturbances" of the 1960s, were snuffed out, many defeated radicals took refuge in academia, where they won in theory what was not accomplished in the streets. Addressing other poststructuralists and their students, poststructuralist writing grew complex and arcane, cleaving a bigger and bigger space between the movement and the larger public. Even as the range of subjects studied expanded -including all aspects of popular culture - direct contact with the people decreased. Upon graduation, most students left poststructuralism behind. The few who continued to hold the torch became young professors. What had started as an effort to change society ended as an academic "tradition" dependent on the aforementioned canon of anti-canonical authors.

Neither the corporations, government, nor university officials messed with what was happening. Why bother? Unlike the disruptions of the 1960s, the new radicals kept their activities confined to "discourse" - writings, seminars, petitions, art works; well-regulated

protests, and so on. These were all cultural products that made the universities appear "liberal" and open to the widest diversity of opinion. An increasingly totalizing global system could easily tolerate or even exult in displaying the products of this liberalism. In fact, the more liberal the academic system was, the better it could control any radical impulses that might arise. At the level of governance, power was increasingly centralized in deans, presidents, and boards of trustees. The universities -public as well as private- corporatized bigtime in management style. The whole relation to "campus radicals" took on a quality of play -performative play. Absorbed into academia with its own strict rules of tenure, promotion, and administrative control, the revolution in thinking and society envisioned by the poststructuralists was largely reduced to and transformed into game playing.

Yet I wonder how much of the poststructuralist program has been accomplished. Isn't there much more acceptance of diversity in European and North American cultures? Haven't women, people of color, and Jews gotten further in these societies than ever before? Aren't unpopular opinions heard more often? Haven't school curriculums been thoroughly revised and expanded? What about the street demonstrations against the World Trade Organization? Or AIDS walks and the many other manifestations of minoritarian values and desires? Community-based performance gives voice to those who were not previously heard. Much of this can be credited to the long-term impact of poststructuralism. But be careful about confusing "tolerance" and "good management" with actual change. In the United States, at least, the diversity of behavior and opinion has not yet been tested against a serious economic recession or depression. Not to mention large -scale war. It's easy to be "generous" when times are good. It takes hard times to bring out the need for scapegoats. Time will tell.

### **Constructions of Gender**

If history is an open project, and social reality the interplay of conflicting performatives, how does this affect circumstances thought to be fixed biologically or by unshakable traditions, gender and race, for example? Is a person "woman" or "man," "of color" or "white" because genetics says so or because of social arrangements? This is not a question of how people are treated or how much power they have. A revolution, or other engine of change, could result in women or people of color taking power without shaking the supposedly inherent differences between the sexes and the races. The "performative

inquiry" includes but also seeks beyond changes wrought by social action. The performative inquiry asks, what constitutes individual identity and social reality; are these constructed or given; and if constructed, out of what? The questions are begged, of course: once one deems gender and race (plus all other social realities) "performative," the answer is that these consist not of naturally determined operations but of something built and enforced by means of "Performance" in the senses I used to describe that word in chapter 2. Even "nature" is not natural, or prior, but a humanly constructed concept designed (consciously or unconsciously) to accomplish human ends. This argument could be, and has been, applied to many areas of human activity. Here I will explore it as it pertains to gender and race.

Judith Butler develops the assertion of French existential writer **Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86)** that "One is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman" (see **Butler box 1**). That is, one's biological sex ("female" or "male") is raw material to be shaped through practice into the socially constructed performance that is gender ("woman" or "man"). Of course, these binaries are much too simple, but for the moment let us stick with them. Each individual from an early age learn to perform gender-specific vocal inflections, facial displays, gestures, walks, and erotic behavior as well as how to select, modify and use scents, body shapes and adornments, clothing, and all other gender markings of a given society. These differ widely from period to period and culture to culture - indicating strongly that gender is constructed (see **Acting the part of a woman box**). To perform these "successfully" give a person a secure place within a given social world. To refuse to perform one's assigned gender is to rebel against . . . "nature."

**Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86):** French feminist, existentialist philosopher, and novelist. Her best-know non-fiction text is *The Second Sex* (1949, Eng. 1953), which called for an end to the myth of "the eternal feminine". Other works include *The Mandarins* (1954, Eng. 1953) and *Force of Circumstance* (1963, Eng. 1965)

Judith **Butler**

*Gender is Performative*

(... T)he body is a historical situation, as Beauvoir has claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing a* historical situation. (...)

The act that gender is, the act that embodied agents *are* inasmuch as they dramatically and actively embody and, indeed, *wear* certain cultural significations, is clearly not one's act alone. Surely, there are nuanced and individual ways of doing one's gender, but *that* one does it, and that one does it in *accord with* certain sanctions and proscriptions, is clearly not a fully individual matter. (...) The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense- an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again. (...)

Gender reality is performative, which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed. (...) If gender attributes (...) are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal. The distinction between expression and performativeness is quite crucial, for if gender attributes and acts, the various ways a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted as part of the strategy by which the performative aspect of gender is concealed. (...)

Gender reality is performative, which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed.

1988, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 521, 524-28

## **Acting the Part of a Woman**

*1860, Anonymous*

Some ladies walk so as to turn up their dresses behind, and I have seen a well-dressed woman made to look very awkward by elevating her shoulders slightly and pushing her elbows too far behind her. Some hold their hands up to the waist, and press their arms against themselves as tightly as if they were glued there. Others swing them backward and forward as a businessman walking along the street. Too short steps detract from dignity very much, forming a mincing pace; too long steps are masculine.

*1860, Complete Rules of Etiquette and Usages of Society, 3-4*

### **2001, Cara Birnbaum in Cosmopolitan**

How do you work everything from tone of voice to body language to dazzle anyone instantly -from a hot stud to a cold-as-ice job interviewer? (...) It's crucial that your nonverbal cues, including gestures and posture, work overtime to put you in the best possible light. (...) To score some guy candy: Subtly tilt your head and pivot your body whenever he does. If he pauses to loosen his tie, stop for a second to moisten your lips. It's all about showing him you're enchanted enough to be tracking his every move. (...) Start by adjusting your voice so that it matches his energy level. If his tones are enthusiastic, enthuse back. If he sounds mellow, you should too. It will only take a few minutes for a man to make up his mind that you're just like him. Once you've established that, you can be yourself.

June, 2001, "How to Wow Anyone you Meet," 148-49

As Butler points out, there are "nuanced" and "individual ways" of playing one's gender, but whatever these are, a person performs her or his gender in accordance with already inscribed performatives. Butler very specifically compares gender roles to rehearsed theatrical performances that follow known scripts which survive the particular actors of the moment. In this Butler is applying the "all the world's a stage" metaphor enunciated by Shakespeare and explored in our own time by Erving Goffman and his many followers. Where Butler makes her own contribution is in her application of notions drawn from

poststructuralism's theory of performatives. Butler argues that gender as performed in contemporary Western societies enacts a normative heterosexuality that is a major tool for enforcing a patriarchal, phallogentric social order (**see Butler box 2**). Thus Butler politicizes non-heterosexual (queer, gay, lesbian, drag, etc.) sexuality and positions these behaviors in opposition to the hegemonic male-dominated/defined social order. In other words, to become gay is to enact a radical politics along the order of "the personal is the political."

## Judith **Butler**

### Compulsory Heterosexuality

To guarantee the reproduction of a given culture, various requirements, well established in the anthropological literature of kinship, have instated sexual reproduction within the confines of a heterosexually-based system of marriage which requires the reproduction of human beings in certain gendered modes which, in effect, guarantee the eventual reproduction of that kinship system. As Foucault and others have pointed out, the association of a natural sex with a discrete gender and with an ostensibly natural "attraction" to the opposing sex/gender is an unnatural conjunction of cultural constructs in the service of reproductive interests. Feminist cultural anthropology and kinship studies have shown how cultures are governed by conventions that not only regulate and guarantee the production, exchange, and consumption of material goods, but also reproduce the bonds of kinship itself, which require taboos and a punitive regulation of reproduction to effect that end. (...) My point is simply that one way in which this system of compulsory heterosexuality is reproduced and concealed is through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with "natural" appearances and "natural" heterosexual dispositions.

(...) The contention that sex, gender, and heterosexuality are historical productions which become conjoined and reified as natural over time has received a good deal of critical attention not only from Michel Foucault, but Monique Wittig, gay historians, and various cultural anthropologists and social psychologists in recent years. (...)

The transformation of social relations becomes a matter, then, of transforming hegemonic social conditions rather than individual acts that are spawned by these conditions. (...) Just as within feminist theory the very category of the personal is expanded to include political structures, so there is a theatrically-based and, indeed, less individually-oriented view of acts that goes some of the way in defusing the criticism of act theory as "too existentialist."

Which leads to those who refuse to perform their assigned heterosexual gender roles. It is to be at the least an "oddball," maybe an actor or dancer. Or, if the refusal is more radical, to be "queer," or "butch" or "femme," a "drag queen," bisexual or transsexual - or any other gender possibility that is outside hetero- orthodoxy. Butler and others who adhere to her point of view believe that gender is "real" only insofar and in the specific ways it is performed. She also makes the very important distinction between performing against the dominant code in a theatre and doing so in the street. Much more is permitted onstage than off. Offstage there are no conventions of the theatre to protect a drag queen from ridicule or worse (see figure 5.6). Even remaining in the closet, being "quietly gay," as it were, is no protection against attacks ranging from stares and verbal abuse to murder. Unorthodox gender performatives are not merely affronts to patriarchy; they challenge long-standing Western philosophical distinctions between appearance and reality. If one wears and can to some degree change what one "really is" then what about the existence of a settled identity or an indwelling eternally abiding soul?

[Insérer fig. 5.6](#)

fig 5.6. A drag queen at the annual Gay Pride March, Melbourne. Photograph by Robert franC15. Copyright Hutchison Library.

### **Constructions of Race**

If gender is performed, what about race? Does one "become" black, white, brown, red, or yellow in the same way that one becomes a woman or man? Does skin color, a set of facial features, hair, or any single attribute, or combination of attributes, indicate that a person belongs to one race or another? Are there any dependable markers of race? Skin color and all other "racial features" are extremely variable across populations.

Race is akin to ethnicity, a human cultural feature. As a cultural feature, race matters. But the importance of race as a cultural category cannot be sustained by its often purported basis in "nature." Visible marks of race are unreliable. To take "blacks" and "whites" as an instance, many so-called "whites" have darker skin than many so-called "blacks." Other visible markers such as hair texture, eye and nose shape, and so on are also unreliable - not only in relation to "black" and "white" but also with regard to other groups. Jews have sometimes been designated as a race with specific facial characteristics (big noses, thick lips, dark eyes), sometimes as a religious group with no particular racial markers. But what about under the skin? Biologists and anthropologists agree that race has no basis in genetics or biology (see **Marshall box**).

Eliot **Marshall**

***There is No Such Thing as "Race"***

Genetic diversity appears to be a continuum, with no clear breaks delineating racial groups. Last year, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) completed a contentious 4-year review of the racial and ethnic categories that will be used to define the U.S. population in federal reports, including the 2000 census. It finally settled on seven groupings: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian (added after OMB received 7000 postcards from Hawaiians) or Other- Pacific Islander; White; Hispanic or Latino; and Not Hispanic or Latino. The categories could have enormous implications -from the distribution of government resources to political districting to demographic research. But as far as geneticists are concerned, they're meaningless.

"Ridiculous" is the word cultural anthropologist John Moore of the University of Florida, Gainesville, uses to describe such racial typing. This view is based on a growing body of data that indicates, as Moore says, that "there aren't any boundaries between races." Geneticist Kenneth Kidd of Yale University says the DNA samples he's examined show that there is "a virtual continuum of genetic variation" around the world. "There's no place where you can draw a line and say there's a major difference on one side of the line from what's on the other side." If one is talking about a distinct, discrete, identifiable population, Kidd adds, "there's no such thing as race in (modern) Homo sapiens." Indeed, the American Anthropological Association urged the government last year to do away with racial

categories and, in political matters, let people define their own ethnicity. (...0

Anthropologists have long objected to the stereotypes that are used to classify human populations into racial groups. But the most potent challenge to such groupings has come from genetic studies of human origins. The field was "transformed" in the late 1980s, says anthropologist Kenneth Weiss of Pennsylvania State University in University Park, by an analysis of variations in mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) begun by Rebecca Cann of the University of Hawaii, Manoa, Mark Stoneking of Penn State, and the late Allan Wilson of the University of California, Berkeley. These researchers reported that diversity in mtDNA genes was two to three times greater in Africa than in Europe or the rest of the world. Assuming that the rate of change in mtDNA was fairly constant, they concluded that Africans' mtDNA was older than that of non-Africans, and that modern humans originated from a small population that emerged from Africa and migrated around the globe.

1998, "DNA Studies Challenge the Meaning of Race," 654

Because race is a cultural construct, racial identifications change in reaction to culture-specific historical forces. For example, throughout much of US history, people were placed in, and placed themselves in, very definite racial categories. But with the numbers of multiracial and multicultural children growing, and the influx of millions of people from Latin America and Asia, the categories began to collapse. In the 2000 US census, more people than ever before identified themselves as "multicultural" or refused to categorize themselves racially. Even the shift in nomenclature is important. As late as the 1970s words such as "black," "Negro," or "colored" were in general use. But today one speaks mostly of "African Americans," pointing to culture and geography rather than color. Other groups that formerly were identified by color are also now marked by nationality or ethnicity ("Chinese" or "Japanese," not "yellow," "Native American," not "red," "Indian" or "South Asian," not brown). Despite this, racial categories tied to visible markers persist and have very important effects. Ironically, even after color as a racial marker has been dispensed with, the general term "people of color" continues to be widely used. Race may not be real scientifically, but it is strongly operative culturally.

In addition, specific stereotyped looks and behaviors are associated with certain groups. The stereotypes often disparage "the Other" as inferior or, oppositely, too powerful.

Sometimes, particularly in relation to Jews, the hated group is felt to be both inferior and too powerful. Frequently, stereotypes jumble race, ethnicity religion, and nationality. Stereotypes abound, aimed at just about every group, including "WASPs," white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Nor is being victimized an inoculation against disparaging others. Targeted groups turn around and target other groups. The whole matter is further complicated when certain stereotypes are embraced by those they are meant to stigmatize, transforming the would-be attack into a positive cultural expression. For example, many African Americans enjoy the humor of **Eddie Murphy** (1961-), buy tickets to Blaxploitation movies, and help make rapsters into super stars. With regard to rap and hip-hop, there are strong feelings both for and against. For some, rap and hip-hop are energetic manifestations of youthful African American men's culture. For others the music is violent, sexist, and gynophobic. This division of opinion is not wholly along racial or gender lines. And if this were not enough of a complication, there's also a lot of crossing over. **Eminem** (1976-) is visibly white, but his music and presentation of self are black. In fact, "black style" dominates mainstream American pop music and is a strong influence on other areas of American culture. But this does not inhibit African Americans from adopting elements of "white culture." There is in the US no dominant racial "way to be" comparable to what Butler terms "compulsory heterosexuality." Instead, there is an enormous amount of cultural - racial mixing.

**Eddie Murphy (1961-):** American actor and comedian. Films include *48hrs* (1982), *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984), *The Nutty Professor* (1996), and its sequels.

**Eminem (1976-):** American rap artist, born Marshall Mathers. Hit songs include 'Way I Am' (2000)

**Adrian Piper** (1948- Conceptual artist and philosopher whose work innumerous media, including live performance, focuses on issues of race, racism, and racial stereotyping Adrian Pipper: *Retrospective* (1999) is a comprehensive overview of her art. works. Many of Piper's writings are published in the two-volume collection *Out of Order, Out af Sight: Selected writings in Meta-Art and Art Criticism 1967-1992* (1996).

**Adrian Piper** (1948-) theorizes race both in her writings and in performance. Piper, a philosopher specializing in Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), is also a conceptual artist whose performance art and installations focus on racism, racial stereotyping, and xenophobia. One of her best-known works is *Cornered* (1988), a video installation that begins with Piper, dressed in dark clothes, a string of pearls around her neck, seated in the corner of a room at a table, hands folded, looking directly at the camera (see **figure 5.7**).

[Insérer fig. 5.7](#)

Fig. 5.7. *Cornered*, a video installation, 1988. Photograph courtesy of Adrian Poper.

The TV set on which Piper's image appears is itself placed in the corner of the gallery with an overturned table in front of it. The set up suggests both being cornered (that is, trapped) and some kind of violent overturn. After a pause, the light-skinned Piper begins. "I'm black. Now let's deal with this social fact and the fact of my stating it, together." Piper's inaugural challenge is a "speech act," a performative. She goes on. "If I don't tell you who I am, then I have to pass for white. And why should I have to do that? The problem with passing for white is that it is not only that it is based on sick values, which it is. It's also that it creates a degrading situation in which I may have to listen to insulting remarks about blacks made by whites who mistakenly believe there are no blacks present. That's asking a bit much. I'm sure you'll agree." Assuming a white spectator, for the next 30 minutes Piper, earnestly but with cutting irony, dissects the emotional impact, social practices, and legalities of racism in America.

Piper never raises her voice. She develops her points with impeccable logic. She does not speak directly, of enslavement, lynching, and segregation or give graphic examples of American racism. Her anger is understated. Presenting herself in a manner that confounds stereotyping, Piper dissects what constitutes racial identity. She asserts that according to commonly accepted beliefs that race is "in the blood," everyone in the USA has between 5 and 20 percent black ancestry. "Most purportedly white Americans are in fact black. (...). The chances are really quite good that you are, in fact, black. What are you going to do about it?" Sarcastically, Piper invites the viewer to tell friends and employers that s/he is black. Or, Piper suggests, why not take advantage of "affirmative action" programs designed to assist blacks? Or stay silent or discredit the research or dismiss *Cornered* as just another "art experience." Piper corners the viewer, concluding the 20-minute piece with the

challenge, "Now that you have this information about your black ancestry, whatever you do counts as a choice. So, what are you going to do?" In *Cornered* and many other of her works, Piper probes the shifting ground that barely supports socially constructed racial categories. Take, for example, the Angry Art "calling card" Piper gives to people who make racist remarks or let them pass unchallenged when made by others (see figure 5.8). When someone who "looks" black "acts" white, or vice versa, the person may be accused of "passing" - pretending or performing a self that one has no legitimate claim to given the racist constructions of contemporary Euro-American society (see **Piper box**). But as Piper points out, the very concept of racial classification is an instrument of racism. Race, like gender, is constructed.

Dear Friend

I am black.

I am sure you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark. In the past, I have attempted to alert white people to my racial identity in advance. Unfortunately, this invariably. Causes them to react to me as pushy, manipulative or socially inappropriate. Therefore, my policy is to assume that white people do not make these remarks even when they believe there are no black people present, and to distribute this card when they do.

I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me.

Fig 5.8. An "Angry Art" card Adrian Piper gives to people who make racist remarks or do not intervene when others do so, 1986. Card courtesy of Adrian Piper.

Adrian **Piper**

*On Passing and Not Passing*

It was the New Graduate Student Reception for my class, the first social event of my first semester in the best graduate department in my field in the country. I was full of myself, as we all were-, full of pride at having made the final cut (...). I was a bit late, and noticed that many turned to look at - no scrutinize - me as I entered the room. I congratulated myself on having selected for wear my black velvet, bell-bottomed pantsuit (yes, it was that long ago) with the cream silk blouse and crimson vest. (...). The most famous and highly respected member of the faculty observed me for a while from a distance and then came forward. Without introduction or preamble, he said to me with a triumphant smirk, "Miss Piper, you're about as black as I am."

One of the benefits of automatic pilot in social situations is that insults take longer to make themselves felt. (...). What I felt was numb, and then shocked and terrified, disoriented, as though I'd been awakened from a sweet dream of unconditional support and approval and plunged into a nightmare of jeering contempt. (...) Finally, there was the groundless shame of the inadvertent impostor, exposed to public ridicule or accusation. For this kind of shame, you don't actually need to have done anything wrong. All you need to do is care about others' image of you, and fail in your actions to reinforce their positive image of themselves. Their ridicule and accusations then function to both disown and degrade you from their status, to make you as not having *done* wrong but as *being* wrong. (...)

And I experienced (then, and at other times] that same groundless shame, not only in response to those who accused me of passing for black but also in response to those who accused me of passing for white. This was the shame caused by people who conveyed to me that I was underhanded or manipulative, trying to hide something, pretending to be something I was not, by telling them I was black, like the art critic in the early 1970s who had treated me with the respect she gave emerging white women artists in the early days of second-wave feminism, until my work turned to issues of racial identity; she then called me to verify that I was black, reproached me for not telling her, and finally disappeared from my professional life altogether. (...)

But I've learned that there is no "right" way of man-aging the issue of my racial identity, no way that will not offend or alienate someone, because my designated racial identity itself exposes the very concept of racial classification as the offensive and irrational instrument of racism that it is. We see this in the history of classifying terms variously used to designate those brought as slaves to this country and their offspring: first "blacks," then "clarkies," then "Negroes," then "colored people," then "blacks" again, then "Afro-Americans," then "people of color," now "African-Americans. » Why is it that we can't seem to get it right,

once and for all? The reason, I think, is that it doesn't really matter what term we use to designate those who have inferior and disadvantaged status, because whatever term is used will eventually turn into a term of derision and disparagement in virtue of its reference to those who are derided and disparaged, and so will need to be discarded for an unsullied one.

1992, "Passing for White, Passing for Black,"  
" in *Out of Order, Out of Sight*, vol. 1, 275-76, 96

## **Performance Art**

Piper's pieces are performance art, a grab-bag category of works that do not fit neatly into theatre, dance, music, or visual art (see **Brentano box**). Much performance art puts into practice theories of performativity. This is especially true of performance art that deals with the construction of identity and in so doing enacts the slogan, "the personal is the political," a program that originated with feminist performance artists in the 1970s (see **Roth box**).

## **Robyn Brentano**

### ***Performance Art***

The term "performance art" first appeared around 1970 to describe the ephemeral, time-based, and process-oriented work of conceptual ("body") and feminist artists that was emerging at the time. It was also applied retrospectively to Happenings, Fluxus events, and other intermedia performances from the 1960s. Over the past thirty-five years, many styles and modes of performance have evolved, from private, introspective investigations to ordinary routines of everyday life, cathartic rituals and trials of endurance, site-specific environmental transformations, technically sophisticated multimedia productions, autobiographical ly-based cabaret-style performance, and large-scale, community-based projects designed to serve as a source of social and political empowerment. (...) What has come to be called performance art (...) has taken myriad forms, a result of its interdisciplinary nature (drawing from painting, sculpture, dance, theater, music, poetry, cinema, and video) and disparate influences, including (...) the Futurists, Dadaists, Constructivists, Surrealists, Abstract Expressionism, performance and art traditions of Native American and non-European cultures, feminism, new communications technologies, and popular forms such as cabaret, the music hall, vaudeville, the circus, athletic events, puppetry, parades, and public spectacles.

Moira Roth

*The Personal is the Political*

Performance art began in the late 1960s at the same time as the women's movement. In the general context of a highly charged and theatrical decade, radical feminists employed theatre in such events as the 1969 disruption of the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City and the nationwide WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) demonstrations at the same time. In feminist art circles, theatrical means -raw eggs and sanitary napkins littering pristine museum spaces -were used to protest the low percentage of women in the 1970 Whitney Museum's Biennial in New York. (...)

At the same time as women plunged into public battles, they also took on, within themselves, private ones. Through consciousness-raising groups, harsh feminist manifestos, poetic evocations in literature and scholarly studies, women - including many early performers - individually explored and collectively validated the substance of their lives. They reexamined and redefined the models on which they had based their self-images. As early feminists recognized that what had previously been designated (and, accordingly, often dismissed) as merely individual experience was, in actuality, an experience shared by many others, they developed the concept that "the personal is the political." It was this fresh and passionate investigation of self and of identification with other women that created the fervent supportive alliance between the first women performers and their audiences. And it was this bonding with the often all-women audiences, as much as the new personal content in the art, that accounted for the power of the early work.

1983, *The Amazing Decade*, 16-17

This formulation is only possible in light of the theoretical proposition of performativity as developed by the post structuralists. Only by recognizing that identity is constructed, not given, contested, not settled, historically and politically evolving, not fixed in "nature," can the practice of personal art, be regarded as political. There are many examples of "the

personal is the political" art but none more striking than **Carolee Schneemann's** (1939- )1975 performance, *Interior Scroll* (see **figure 5.9**).

**Carolee Schneemann (1939-):** American visual and performance artist. Works include *Meat Joy* (1964), *Interior Scroll* (1975), *Catscan and Vulva's School* (1995). She is the author of *More Than Meat Joy* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1995)

[Insérer fig. 5.9](#)

Fig. 5.9. Carolee Schneemann performing *Interior Scroll*, 1975. Photograph courtesy of Carolee Schneeman

Naked, Schneemann reaches into her vulva and pulls out a long scroll from which she reads her text:

(...). there are certain films  
we cannot look at  
the personal clutter  
the persistence of feelings  
the hand-touch sensibility  
the diaristic indulgence  
the painterly mess.  
the dense gestalt  
the primitive techniques

These were words Schneemann attributed to a "structuralist filmmaker" who refused even to look at Schneemann's films. Ironic, angry, and - given the taboos of that time - shocking, Schneemann's piece was personal, political, and avant-garde. She did not reject the filmmaker's estimation that her work was personal, full of touch, indulgent, messy, primitive. She rejected his rejection, arguing on the contrary that the very qualities the male filmmaker felt disqualified Schneemann's work. from even being looked at were what made her work important and new. History proved her right.

In the early days of performance art, much of the audience consisted of fellow artists who freely borrowed from each other. What took place was an extremely fertile convergence of ideas, techniques, and audiences. Some artists sought out specific audiences of women or gays or political activists of a given kind. No longer was art seen as converging on the grand places and occasions of official culture, Lincoln Center or Broadway. Performance art took place in venues not previously used for performance - roofs, beaches, swimming pools, galleries, street corners, storefronts (and many more). Performance art evolved to some degree from painting (see **Kaprow box 1**). Therefore, unlike theatre, dance, and music much performance art was and is the work of individual artists using their own selves - bodies, psyches, notebooks, experiences - as material. The work was not shaped for large general audiences, but kept particularity and edge. It was a fine equivalent to the quirky, difficult, and stimulating thought of people like Derrida.

*Allan Kaprow*

### *Happenings*

With the breakdown of the classical harmonies following the introduction of "irrational" or nonharmonic juxtapositions, the Cubists tacitly opened up a path to infinity. Once foreign matter was introduced into the picture in the form of paper [collage], it was only a matter of time before everything else foreign to paint and canvas would be allowed to get into the creative act, including real space. Simplifying the history of the ensuing evolution into a flashback, this is what happened: the pieces of paper curled up off the canvas, were removed from the surface to exist on their own, became more solid as they grew into other materials and, reaching out further into the room, finally filled it entirely. E ... I Inasmuch as people visiting such Environments are moving, colored shapes too, and were counted "in," mechanically moving parts could be added, and parts of the created surroundings could then be rearranged like furniture at the artist's and visitors' discretion. And/ logically since the visitor could and did speak, sound and speech, mechanical and recorded, were also soon to be in order. Odors followed.

1966, *Assemblage, Environments, and Happenings*, 165-66

Performance art is part of a line of the avant-garde reaching back to the turn of the twentieth century - symbolism, futurism, dada, surrealism, and so on. The immediate source of performance art was a convergence of Happenings, postmodern dance, and pop art (see figures 5.10 and 11).

[Insérer fig. 5.10 et 5.11](#)

Allan Kaprow coined the word "Happenings" to describe art events that simply, happened without picture frames, plots, or any marks of orthodox visual arts, theatre, dance, or music. In 1966, Kaprow outlined the seven qualities of Happenings (see **Kaprow box 2**).

### **Allan Kaprow**

#### **The Seven Qualities of Happenings**

1. The line between art and life is fluid, even indistinct.
2. The themes, materials, and actions of happenings are taken from anywhere but the arts.
3. Happenings should be performed in several widely spaced locales.
4. Time, which follows closely on spatial considerations should be variable and discontinuous.
5. Happenings should be performed only once.
6. Audiences should be eliminated entirely – everyone at a Happening participates in it.
7. The composition/sequence of events is not rational or narrational, but based on

associations among various parts; or by chance.

1966, *Assemblage, Environments, and Happenings*, 88-98

In his own way, he was laying the basis for "the personal is the political." Kaprow, like **Marcel Duchamp** (1887-1968) and Andy Warhol, wanted to demystify art, debunk the establishment that controlled museums, and make arts that could be performed by anyone. Kaprow proclaimed what he called "lifelike art" -not naturalism or any other kind of mimesis, but art that conformed to the processes of ordinary life. During the same period, many postmodern dancers rejected the strict codifications of both ballet and modern dance. They favored pedestrian, "or everyday-, movement, let dancers speak about their own lives as they danced, and got involved in political actions (see **Banes box**).

Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) Extremely influential French dada artist. Among his many works are the painting *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912), the construction *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (also known as the *Large Glass*) (1915-23), a urinal. Duchamp lived for many years in New York, becoming an American in 1955.

**Mimesis:** Greek word meaning "imitation." In the *Poetics*, Aristotle argues that a tragedy is a "mimesis of a praxis" ( an action of great enough magnitude to have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Exactly what Aristotle meant by mimesis has been the subject of much debate over the centuries. Currently, most commentators agree that Aristotle did not mean mimesis literally but as a specific artistic process of representation.

Sally Banes

### *Postmodern Dance*

Originally reacting against the expressionism of modern dance, which anchored movement to a literary idea or musical form, the post-modernists propose (...) that the formal qualities of dance might be reason enough for choreography, and that the purpose of making dances

might be simply to make a framework within which we look at movement for its own sake. But there are other purposes post-modernism claims for dance. One is that a dance can formulate or illustrate a theory of dance (...). Another purpose, partly inspired by phenomenological philosophers and writers, is to embody different perspectives on space, time, or orientation to gravity (...). The breakdown of the distinction between art and life (...), the clarification of individual, discrete movements, the isolation of the essential characteristics of dance, have all become valid purposes for making a dance. So has the option of making a dance for the pleasure of the dancer, whether or not the spectator finds it pleasing, or even accessible. The very question of what it means to create a dance can generate choreography: is writing a score (...) an act of choreography? Is dance making an act of construction and craft or a process of decision making? In post-modern dance, the choreographer becomes a critic, educating spectators in ways to look at dance, challenging the expectations the audience brings to the performance, framing parts of the dance for closer inspection, commenting on the dance as it progresses.

1980, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 15-16

### **What the Gravedigger Knew about the Performative**

Discussing whether or not Ophelia's suicide bars her from heaven, the more theoretical of two Gravediggers asserts, "An act hath three branches - it is to do, to act, to perform" (Hamlet, S. 1: 11). The Gravedigger divides an action into its physical attributes ("do"), its social aspects ("act"), and its theatrical qualities ("perform"). But why does he use the word "act" twice - first as an overall category and then as a subset of itself?

Any action consciously performed refers to itself, is part of itself. Its "origin" is its repetition. Every consciously performed action is an instance of restored behavior. Restored behavior enacted not on a stage but in "real life" is what poststructuralists call a "performative. It is their contention that all social identities, gender, for example, are performatives. The Gravedigger is not so much repeating himself as he is proposing a situation where the smaller ("to act") contains the larger ("an act"). He is also connecting "an act" as something accomplished in everyday life with "to act," something played on the stage. The ultimate example of "to act" is "to perform" - to be reflexive about one's acting. Shakespeare did not have Austin, Derrida, or Butler in mind when he wrote *Hamlet*. But the

Gravedigger's brief disquisition shows that the notion of performativity has been around a long time.

## **Conclusion**

Theories of performativity insist that all social realities are constructed. The construction of gender, race, and identity are but three examples of an all-encompassing theory. Social life as behaved is performed in the sense that I outlined in chapter 2: every social activity can be understood as a showing of a doing. I write "as behaved" to underline the "liveness" of certain aspects of social life - and to circumscribe the particular region that is most important to performance studies. This broad definition of liveness includes film, television, recorded musics, telephony, and the internet. These cannot be regarded as mere reproductions; because of how they, are produced and received they participate in "liveness." Other parts of social life are not behaved, or at least not obviously so, such as laws, architecture, written literature, and the like. However, poststructuralist theories of performativity indicate that even these aspects of social life can be best understood "as performance." Austin's performative concerned utterances only. But those who built on Austin's ideas were soon discovering a wide range of "speech acts" and applying the theory of performativity to all areas of social life. Derrida's insistence that all human codes and cultural expressions are "writing" is a powerful example of this kind of thinking.

These theories of the performative inhabit performance art, especially works dealing with gender, race, and the assertion that the personal is the political. And just as theorists found the performative in all areas of personal and social life, so performance artists broke free from orthodox venues and styles of performance. Some performance art may take only a few seconds, while other events can take a year or more to complete. Some works occur on street corners or in store front windows; others are dispersed to locations all around the world. In other words, just as there are no theoretical limits to performativity, so there are no practical limits to performance art.

What are the relationships between performativity, the performative, and performance proper - between what goes on at the Metropolitan Opera and what the poststructuralists posit? By far, performativity is the larger category. Many performances are clearly marked and delimited, such as formal presentations in theatres or episodes of public ceremony. Other performances are less clearly marked. Even non-performance - sitting in a chair,

crossing the street, sleeping - can be made into a performance by framing these ordinary actions "as performance." If I look at what happens on the street, or at the rolling ocean, and see these "as performance," then in that circumstance they are such. This is what John Cage meant when he answered my question, "What is theatre?" with, "Just look and listen." Indeed, performances belong mostly to the eye and ear. Performatives also come in two types - the clearly marked and the more diffuse. A performative may be a specific speech act such as a promise, bet, or contract. Or it may be something difficult to pin down - a "concept" (as in conceptual art), the "idea of" performance suffusing an act or activity. In this sense, there is an "as if» of performativity analogous to the "as if" of theatre. In theatre, the "as if" consists of characters, places, actions, and narratives - all of which exist only as they are performed. In performativity the "as if» consists of constructed social realities - gender, race, what-have-you - all of which are provisional, are "made up." At another level, performativity is a pervasive mood or feeling - belonging not so much to the visual-aural realm (as performances do) but to the senses of smell, taste, and touch. I smell something funny going on," or "that's to my taste," or "I was touched by what happened" are ways of apprehending the performative.

### ***THINGS TO THINK ABOUT.***

1. the "performative" began as a theory about utterances. It has developed into something much broader than that. Do you think that this expansion of the term makes it "unusable" or "useless"? Or do you feel that indeed much of postmodern life is lived "as a performative"? Defend your position.
2. What are some of the political and social implications of conceiving race, gender; and other identity formations as performative"?

### ***Things To Do***

- I Cross dress, then go out for a "night on the town." Note how people react to you, how you feel about yourself. Come home and write two pages on the subject "Gender is a social construction: true or false?"

2. Compose a piece of "performative writing" that draws on your own personal experiences in relation to some of the theoretical issues raised in this chapter.

### **SUGGESTED READINGS**

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