

Rethinking Ethnography Towards a Critical Cultural Politics

Critical theory is not a unitary concept. It resembles a loose coalition of interests more than a united front. But whatever it is or is not, one thing seems clear: Critical theory is committed to unveiling the political stakes that anchor cultural practices—research and scholarly practices no less than the everyday. On this point the participants in this forum agree. Yes, critical theory politicizes science and knowledge. Our disagreements arise from how we view (and value) the tension between science/knowledge and politics. Logical empiricists are dedicated to the *eviction* of politics from science. Critical theorists, on the other hand, are committed to the *excavation* of the political underpinnings of all modes of representation, including the scientific.

Ethnography, with its ambivalent meanings as both a method of social science research and a genre of social science text (see Clifford and Marcus 1986; Van Maanen 1988), has been the most amenable of the social sciences to post-structuralist critique. It presents a particularly sensitive site for registering the aftershocks of critical theory. No group of scholars is struggling more acutely and productively with the political tensions of research than ethnographers. For ethnography, the undermining of objectivist science came roughly at the same time as the collapse of colonialism. Since then, post-colonial critics have set about unmasking the imperialist underpinnings of anthropology (Mad 1973; Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989; Miller 1990), the discipline with which ethnography has been closely but not exclusively associated. Clifford Geertz explains:

The end of colonialism altered radically the nature of the social relationship between those who ask and look and those who are asked and looked at. The decline of faith in brute fact, set procedures, and unsituated knowledge in the human sciences, and

indeed in scholarship generally, altered no less radically the askers' and lookers' conception of what it was they were trying to do. Imperialism in its classical form, metropolises and possessions, and Scientism in its impulsions and billiard balls, fell at more or less the same time. (Geertz 1988, 131–132)

The double fall of scientism and imperialism has been, for progressive ethnographers, a *felix culpa*, a fortunate fall. The ensuing “crisis of representation” (Marcus and Fischer 1986, 7) has induced deep epistemological, methodological, and ethical self-questioning.

Though some assume defensive or nostalgic postures, most ethnographers would agree with Renato Rosaldo's current assessment of the field (Rosaldo 1989, 37): “The once dominant ideal of a detached observer using neutral language to explain ‘raw’ data has been displaced by an alternative project that attempts to understand human conduct as it unfolds through time and in relation to its meanings for the actors.” Moreover, a vanguard of critical and socially committed ethnographers argues that there is no way out short of a radical rethinking of the research enterprise. I will chart four intersecting themes in the critical rethinking of ethnography: (1) The Return of the Body, (2) Boundaries and Borderlands, (3) The Rise of Performance, and (4) Rhetorical Reflexivity.

Return of the Body

Ethnography's distinctive research method, participant-observation fieldwork, privileges the body as a site of knowing. In contrast, most academic disciplines, following Augustine and the Church Fathers, have constructed a Mind/Body hierarchy of knowledge corresponding to the Spirit/Flesh opposition so that mental abstractions and rational thought are taken as both epistemologically and morally superior to sensual experience, bodily sensations, and the passions. Indeed, the body and the flesh are linked with the irrational, unruly, and dangerous—certainly an inferior realm of experience to be controlled by the higher powers of reason and logic. Further, patriarchal constructions that align women with the body, and men with mental faculties, help keep the mind-body, reason-emotion, objective-subjective, as well as masculine-feminine hierarchies stable.

Nevertheless, the obligatory rite-of-passage for all ethnographers—doing fieldwork—requires getting one's body immersed in the field for a period of time sufficient to enable one to participate inside that culture.

Ethnography is an *embodied practice*; it is an intensely sensuous way of knowing. The embodied researcher is the instrument. James Clifford acknowledges (Clifford 1988, 24): “Participant-observation obliges its practitioners to experience, at a bodily as well as an intellectual level, the vicissitudes of translation.” In a posthumously published essay, “On Fieldwork,” the late Erving Goffman emphasized the corporeal nature of fieldwork:

It’s one of getting data, it seems to me, by subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, . . . so that you are close to them while they are responding to what life does to them. (Goffman 1989, 125)

This active, participatory nature of fieldwork is celebrated by ethnographers when they contrast their “open air” research with the “arm chair” research of more sedentary and cerebral methods.

Ethnographic rigor, disciplinary authority, and professional reputation are established by the length of time, depth of commitment, and risks (bodily, physical, emotional) taken in order to acquire cultural understanding. Letters of recommendation often refer approvingly to bodily hardships suffered by the dedicated ethnographer—malarial fevers, scarcity of food, long periods of isolation, material discomforts, and so forth, endured in the field.

Bronislaw Malinowski, credited with establishing modern standards of ethnographic fieldwork—whose own practice remains unsurpassed—recommended bodily participation, in addition to observation, as a mode of intensifying cultural understanding:

[I]t is good for the Ethnographer sometimes to put aside camera, note book and pencil, and to join in himself in what is going on. He can take part in the natives’ games, he can follow them on their visits and walks, sit down and listen and share in their conversations. (Malinowski 1961, 21–22)

Fifty years later, Geertz still affirms the corporeal nature and necessity of fieldwork:

It is with the kind of material produced by long-term, mainly (though not exclusively) qualitative, highly participative, and almost obsessively fine-comb field study in confined contexts that

the mega-concepts with which contemporary social science is afflicted . . . can be given the sort of sensible actuality that makes it possible to think not only realistically and concretely *about* them, but, what is more important, creatively and imaginatively *with* them. (Geertz 1973, 23)

Although ethnographic fieldwork privileges the body, published ethnographies typically have repressed bodily experience in favor of abstracted theory and analysis. In the shift from ethnographic method (fieldwork) to ethnographic rhetoric (published monograph), named individuals with distinct personalities and complex life histories are inscribed as “the Bororo” or “the Tikopia.” Finely detailed speech and nuanced gesture are summarized flatly: “All the voices of the field have been smoothed into the expository prose of more-or-less interchangeable ‘informants’” (Clifford 1988, 49). The interpersonal contingencies and experiential give-and-take of fieldwork process congeal on the page into authoritative statement, table, and graph. According to post-colonial feminist critic Trinh T. Minh-ha (Trinh 1989, 56): “It is as if, unvaryingly, every single look, gesture, or utterance has been stained with anthropological discourse . . .”

Recognition of the bodily nature of fieldwork privileges the processes of communication that constitute the “doing” of ethnography: speaking, listening, and acting together. According to Stephen Tyler the post-modern recovery of the body in fieldwork means the return of speaking, communicating bodies, a “return to the commonsense, plurivocal world of the speaking subject” (Tyler 1987, 172). He pushes this point: “Post-modern anthropology is the study of [wo]man—‘talking.’ Discourse is its object and means” (Tyler 1987, 171). Trinh reminds us that interpersonal communication is grounded in sensual experience: “[S]peaking and listening refer to realities that do not involve just the imagination. The speech is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched” (Trinh 1989, 121). When modernist ethnographers systematically record their *observations*, they forget that “seeing is mediated by saying” (Tyler 1987, 171).

Michael Jackson wants to recuperate the body in ethnographic discourse to reestablish “the intimate connection between our bodily experience in the everyday world and our conceptual life” (Jackson 1989, 18). He argues, “If we are to find common ground with them [the people we study], we have to open ourselves to modes of sensory and bodily life which, while meaningful to us in our personal lives, tend to get suppressed in our academic discourse” (Jackson 1989, 11). Jackson wants to

restore the epistemological and methodological, as well as etymological, connection between experience and empiricism. He names his project “radical empiricism” and positions it within and against “traditional empiricism.” What traditional empiricism attempts to control, suspend, or bracket out—“the empirical reality of our personal engagement with and attitude to those others” (Jackson 1989, 34)—radical empiricism privileges as “the intersubjective grounds on which our understanding is constituted” (Jackson 1989, 34):

The importance of this view for anthropology is that it stresses the ethnographer’s *interactions* with those he or she lives with and studies, while urging us to clarify the ways in which our knowledge is grounded in our practical, personal, and participatory experience in the field as much as our detached observations. Unlike traditional empiricism, which draws a definite boundary between observer and observed, between method and object, radical empiricism denies the validity of such cuts and makes the *interplay* between these domains the focus of its interest. (Jackson 1989, 3)

The project of radical empiricism changes ethnography’s traditional approach from Other-as-theme to Other-as-interlocutor (Theunissen 1984), and represents a shift from monologue to dialogue, from information to communication.

Jackson provocatively argues that traditional ethnographic “pretenses” about detached observation and scientific method reveal anxiety about the uncontrollable messiness of any truly interesting fieldwork situation:

Indeed, given the arduous conditions of fieldwork, the ambiguity of conversations in a foreign tongue, differences of temperament, age, and gender between ourselves and our informants, and the changing theoretical models we are heir to, it is likely that ‘objectivity’ serves more as a magical token, bolstering our sense of self in disorienting situations, than as a scientific method for describing those situations as they really are. (Jackson 1989, 3)

The radical empiricist’s response to the vulnerabilities and vicissitudes of fieldwork is honesty, humility, self-reflexivity, and an acknowledgement of the interdependence and reciprocal role-playing between knower and known:

In this process we put ourselves on the line; we run the risk of having our sense of ourselves as different and distanced from the people we study dissolve, and with it all our pretensions to a supraempirical position, a knowledge that gets us above and beyond the temporality of human existence. (Jackson 1989, 4)

Johannes Fabian focuses on temporality as a strategy for bringing back the body-in-time in ethnographic discourse, and with it the body politic. In a trenchant rhetorical critique of ethnographic texts he identifies the “denial of coevalness” as a strategy for “keeping Anthropology’s Other in another time” and thereby keeping “others” in their marginal place (Fabian 1983, 148). Coevalness is the experience of cotemporality, the recognition of actively sharing the same time, the acknowledgment of others as contemporaries. Fabian argues forcefully that ethnography manifests “schizochronic tendencies” (Fabian 1983, 37). On the one hand, the discipline insists on the coeval experience of fieldwork as the source of ethnographic knowledge, and on the other hand, this coevalness is denied in professional discourse that temporally distances others through labels such as “tribal,” “traditional,” “ancient,” “animistic,” “primitive,” “preliterate,” “neolithic,” “underdeveloped,” or the slightly more polite “developing,” and so forth. Clifford calls this tactic a “temporal setup” (Clifford 1988, 16). In a deeply contradictory way, ethnographers go to great lengths to become cotemporal with others during fieldwork but then deny in writing that these others with whom they lived are their contemporaries. Fabian warns, “These disjunctions between experience and science, research and writing, will continue to be a festering epistemological sore” (Fabian 1983, 33).

More problematically, he reveals how the expansionist campaigns of colonialist-imperialist policies “required Time to accommodate the schemes of a one-way history: progress, development, modernity (and their negative mirror images: stagnation, underdevelopment, tradition). In short, *geopolitics* has its ideological foundations in *chronopolitics*” (Fabian 1983, 144). Anthropology is complicit with imperialism and the ideology of progress when it rhetorically distances the Other in Time.

For Fabian, the way to prevent temporal reifications of other cultures is for ethnographers to rethink themselves as communicators, not scientists. He states this fundamental point in strong terms, “Only as communicative praxis does ethnography carry the promise of yielding new knowledge about another culture” (Fabian 1983, 71). Ethnographers must recognize “that fieldwork is a form of communicative interaction with an Other, one that must be carried out coevally, on the basis of

shared intersubjective Time and intersocietal contemporaneity” (Fabian 1983, 148). He privileges communication because “for human communication to occur, coevalness has to be *created*. Communication is, ultimately, about creating shared Time” (Fabian 1983, 30–31). Whereas Paul Ricoeur (1971) wanted to fix the temporal flow and leakage of speaking, to rescue “the said” from “the saying,” contemporary ethnographers struggle to recuperate “the saying from the said,” to shift their enterprise from nouns to verbs, from mimesis to kinesis, from textualized space to co-experienced time.

This rethinking of ethnography as primarily about speaking and listening, instead of observing, has challenged the visualist bias of positivism with talk about voices, utterances, intonations, multivocality. Sight and observation go with space, and the spatial practices of division, separation, compartmentalization, and surveillance. According to Rosaldo “the eye of ethnography” is connected to “the I of imperialism” (Rosaldo 1989, 41). Sight and surveillance depend on detachment and distance. Getting perspective on something entails withdrawal from intimacy. Everyday parlance equates objectivity with aloofness. Being “too close” is akin to losing perspective and lacking judgment.

Metaphors of sound, on the other hand, privilege temporal process, proximity, and incorporation. Listening is an interiorizing experience, a gathering together, a drawing in, whereas observation sizes up exteriors. The communicative praxis of speaking and listening, conversation, demands copresence even as it decenters the categories of knower and known. Vulnerability and self-disclosure are enabled through conversations. Closure, on the other hand, is constituted by the gaze. The return of the body as a recognized method for attaining “vividly felt insight into the life of other people” (Trinh 1989, 123) shifts the emphasis from space to time, from sight and vision to sound and voice, from text to performance, from authority to vulnerability.

Boundaries and Borderlands

Geertz’s well-known “Blurred Genres” essay charts ethnography’s ambivalent participation in the postmodern redistribution of analytical foci from center to periphery, delimitation to dispersal, whole to fragment, metropole to margin (Geertz 1983, 19–35). To be sure, ethnographers for a long time have been situated more characteristically in the peripheral village than in the metropolitan center. They have been predisposed professionally to seek out the frontier and hinterlands, the colony rather

than the capital. But this preoccupation with marginal cultures that obliged them figuratively and literally to live on the boundary did not prevent them from still seeing identity and culture, self and other, as discrete, singular, integral, and stable concepts. Once they crossed the border and pitched their tent on the edge of the encampment, they confidently set about describing “the Trobrianders,” or “the Nuer,” or “the ghetto,” interpreting these cultures as distinct, coherent, whole ways of life. In so doing, they centralized the peripheral instead of de-centering the “metropolitan typifications” that they carried inside their heads (Rosaldo 1989, 207).

All that confidence in continuous traditions and innocent encounters with pristine cultures has been shattered in our post-colonial epoch. Borders bleed, as much as they contain. Instead of dividing lines to be patrolled or transgressed, boundaries are now understood as crisscrossing sites inside the postmodern subject. Difference is resituated within, instead of beyond, the self. Inside and outside distinctions, like genres, blur and wobble. Nothing seems truer now than Trinh’s pithy insight “Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak” (Trinh 1989, 94).

Rosaldo believes that contemporary geo-politics, including decolonization and multinational corporations, requires thinking about boundaries not simply as barriers but as bridges and membranes, “All of us inhabit an interdependent late-twentieth-century world marked by borrowing and lending across porous national and cultural boundaries that are saturated with inequality, power, and domination” (Rosaldo 1989, 217). Further, the border-crossings emblematic of our postmodern world challenge ethnography to rethink its project: “If ethnography once imagined it could describe discrete cultures, it now contends with boundaries that crisscross over a field at once fluid and saturated with power. In a world where ‘open borders’ appear more salient than ‘closed communities,’ one wonders how to define a project for cultural studies” (Rosaldo 1989, 45). Rosaldo argues that the research agenda needs to move from centers to “borderlands,” “zones of difference,” and “busy intersections” where many identities and interests articulate with multiple others (Rosaldo 1989, 17, 28).

The major epistemological consequence of displacing the idea of solid centers and unified wholes with borderlands and zones of contest is a rethinking of identity and culture as constructed and relational, instead of ontologically given and essential. This rethinking privileges metonym, “reasoning part-to-part” over synecdoche, “reasoning part-to-whole” (Tyler 1987, 151); it features syntax over semantics. Meaning

is contested and struggled for in the interstices, *in between* structures. Identity is invented and contingent, not autonomous: “I is, therefore, not a unified subject, a fixed identity, or that solid mass covered with layers of superficialities one has gradually to peel off before one can see its true face. ‘I is, itself, *infinite layers*” (Trinh 1989, 94).

Clifford argues that much of non-western historical experience has been “hemmed in by concepts of continuous tradition and the unified self” (Clifford 1988, 10). The presuppositions of pattern, continuity, coherence, and unity characteristic of classic ethnography may have had more to do with the West’s ideological commitment to individualism than with on-the-ground cultural practices. “I argue,” says Clifford, “that identity, ethnographically considered, must always be mixed, relational, and inventive” (Clifford 1988, 10). The idea of the person shifts from that of a fixed, autonomous self to a polysemic site of articulation for multiple identities and voices.

From the boundary perspective, identity is more like a performance in process than a postulate, premise, or originary principle. From his historical study of the “colonial assault” on Melanesia, and his 1977 fieldwork study of a courtroom trial in Massachusetts where land ownership by Mashpee Native Americans was contingent upon “proof” of tribal identity, Clifford came to understand identity as provisional, “not as an archaic survival but as an ongoing process, politically contested and historically unfinished” (Clifford 1988, 9). In our postmodern world the refugee, exile, has become an increasingly visible sign of geopolitical turbulence as well as the emblematic figure for a more general feeling of displacement, dispersal, what Clifford describes as “a pervasive condition of off-centeredness . . .” (Clifford 1988, 9).

Betwixt and between worlds, suspended between a shattered past and insecure future, refugees and other displaced people must create an “inventive poetics of reality” for recollecting, recontextualizing, and refashioning their identities (Clifford 1988, 6). The refugee condition epitomizes a postmodern existence of border-crossings and life on the margins. With displacement, upheaval, unmooring, come the terror and potentiality of flux, improvisation, and creative recombinations. Refugees, exiles, homeless people, and other nomads enact the post-structuralist idea of “putting culture into motion” through experiences that are both violent and regenerative (Rosaldo 1989, 91). Taking the Caribbean as an illuminating example, Clifford notes that its history is one of “degradation, mimicry, violence, and blocked possibilities,” but it is also “rebellious, syncretic, and creative” (Clifford 1988, 15).

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau celebrates the in-

terventions of marginal people whose creativity, “the art of making do,” gets finely honed from living on the edge, a borderlands life:

Thus a North African living in Paris or Boubaix (France) insinuates *into* the system imposed on him by the construction of a low-income housing development or of the French language the ways of ‘dwelling’ (in a house or a language) peculiar to his native Kabylia. He superimposes them and, by that combination, creates for himself a space in which he can find *ways of using* the constraining order of the place or of the language. Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of *plurality* and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation. (de Certeau 1984, 30)

My own fieldwork with refugees and migrants in Thailand, the Gaza Strip, and inner-city Chicago resonates deeply with Clifford’s observations. “Many traditions, languages, cosmologies, and values are lost, some literally murdered; but much has simultaneously been invented and revived in complex, oppositional contexts. If the victims of progress and empire are weak, they are seldom passive” (Clifford 1988, 16).

There are implications for rhetoric and communication studies from ethnography’s current interest in boundary phenomena and border negotiations. Communication becomes even more urgent and necessary in situations of displacement, exile, and erasure. Trinh, a Vietnamese-American woman, speaking as an exile to other exiles, articulates the difficulty and urgency of expression for all refugees and displaced people:

You who understand the dehumanization of forced removal-relocation-reeducation-redefinition, the humiliation of having to falsify your own reality, your voice—you know. And often cannot *say* it. You try and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don’t, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said (Trinh 1989, 80).

The *discourse of displacement* is a project that beckons rhetorical and communication scholars.

And if the increasingly pervasive feeling of discontinuity and finding oneself “off center among scattered traditions” (Clifford 1988, 3) incites us to speak, then we must draw on *topoi* from among multiple discursive styles and traditions. Jackson notes the intertextual and heteroglossic nature of discourse. “Reviewing the historical mutability of discourse,

I am also mindful that no one episteme ever completely supercedes another. The historical matrix in which our present discourse is embedded contains other discursive styles and strategies, and makes use of them” (Clifford 1989, 176). Never has the rhetorical canon of *inventio* taken on more emphatic meaning than in the current rethinking of culture and ethos (see Wagner 1980).

Cities throughout the United States have become sites of extraordinary diversity as refugees and immigrants, increasingly from the hemispheres of the South and the East, pour into inner-city neighborhoods. Rosaldo makes the point that one does not have to go to the “Third World” to encounter culture in the borderlands. “Cities throughout the world today increasingly include minorities defined by race, ethnicity, language, class, religion, and sexual orientation. Encounters with ‘difference’ now pervade modern everyday life in urban settings” (Rosaldo 1989, 28). For more than three years I have been conducting ethnographic research in one of these polyglot immigrant neighborhoods in inner-city Chicago. More than 50 languages and dialects are spoken by students at the local high school. The “Bilingual Student Roster” displays an exotic array of languages that in addition to Spanish, Korean, and Arabic, includes Assyrian, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Khmer, Hmong, Malayalam, Gujarati, Lao, Urdu, Cantonese, Greek, Pashto, Thai, Punjabi, Italian, Armenian, Dutch, Turkish, Ibo, Amharic, Slovenian, Farsi, and others. For the first 20 months of fieldwork I lived in an apartment alongside refugee and immigrant neighbors from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Iraq, Laos, Cambodia, Poland, Lebanon, as well as African-American, Appalachian White, and elderly Jew all living cheek-by-jowl in the same crowded, dilapidated tenement building. The local street gang with which I work reflects the same polyglot texture of the neighborhood. It is called the Latin Kings, originally a Puerto Rican gang, but the current members include Assyrian, African-American, Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, Salvadoran, Vietnamese, Lao, Korean, Palestinian, Filipino, Mexican, White, and others (Conquergood, Friesma, Hunter and Mansbridge, 1990).

Few phrases have more resonance in contemporary ethnography—and with my own fieldwork—than Bakhtin’s powerful affirmation that “the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries. . . .” (Bakhtin 1986, 2).

The Rise of Performance

With renewed appreciation for boundaries, border-crossings, process, improvisation, contingency, multiplex identities, and the embod-

ied nature of fieldwork practice, many ethnographers have turned to a performance-inflected vocabulary. "In the social sciences," Geertz observes, "the analogies are coming more and more from the contrivances of cultural performance than from those of physical manipulation" (Geertz 1983, 22). No one has done more than Victor Turner to open up space in ethnography for performance, to move the field away from preoccupations with universal system, structure, form, and towards particular practices, people, and performances. A dedicated ethnographer, Turner wanted the professional discourse of cultural studies to capture the struggle, passion, and praxis of village life that he so relished in the field. The language of drama and performance gave him a way of thinking and talking about people as actors who creatively play, improvise, interpret, and re-present roles and scripts. In a rhetorical masterstroke, Turner subversively redefined the fundamental terms of discussion in ethnography by defining humankind as *homo performans*, humanity as performer, a culture-inventing, social-performing, self-making and self-transforming creature (Turner 1986, 81). Turner was drawn to the conceptual lens of performance because it focused on humankind alive, the creative, playful, provisional, imaginative, articulate expressions of ordinary people grounded in the challenge of making a life in this village, that valley, and inspired by the struggle for meaning.

Distinguishing characteristics of performance-sensitive research emerge from Turner's detailed and elaborated work on social drama and cultural performance. The performance paradigm privileges particular, participatory, dynamic, intimate, precarious, embodied experience grounded in historical process, contingency, and ideology. Another way of saying it is that performance-centered research takes as both its subject matter and method the experiencing body situated in time, place, and history. The performance paradigm insists on face-to-face encounters instead of abstractions and reductions. It situates ethnographers within the delicately negotiated and fragile "face-work" that is part of the intricate and nuanced dramaturgy of everyday life (see Goffman, 1967).

Turner appreciated the heuristics of embodied experience because he understood how social dramas must be acted out and rituals performed in order to be meaningful, *and* he realized how the ethnographer must be a co-performer in order to understand those embodied meanings. In one of his earlier works he enunciated the role of the performing body as a hermeneutical agency both for the researcher as well as the researched:

The religious ideas and processes I have just mentioned belong to the domain of performance, their power derived from the par-

icipation of the living people who use them. My counsel, therefore, to investigators of ritual processes would be to learn them in the first place “on their pulses,” in coactivity with their enactors, having beforehand shared for a considerable time much of the people’s daily life and gotten to know them not only as players of social roles, but as unique individuals, each with a style and a soul of his or her own. Only by these means will the investigator become aware. . . . (Turner 1975, 28–29)

The bodily image of learning something “on their pulses” captures the distinctive method of performance-sensitive ethnography. The power dynamic of the research situation changes when the ethnographer moves from the gaze of the distanced and detached observer to the intimate involvement and engagement of “coactivity” or co-performance with historically situated, named, “unique individuals.”

The performance paradigm can help ethnographers recognize “the limitations of literacy” and critique the textualist bias of western civilization (Jackson, 1989). Geertz enunciates the textual paradigm in his famous phrase: “The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong” (Geertz 1973, 452). In other words, the ethnographer is construed as a displaced, somewhat awkward reader of texts. Jackson vigorously critiques this ethnographic textualism:

By fetishizing texts, it divides—as the advent of literacy itself did—readers from authors, and separates both from the world. The idea that “there is nothing outside the text” may be congenial to someone whose life is confined to academe, but it sounds absurd in the village worlds where anthropologists carry out their work, where people negotiate meaning in face-to-face interactions, not as individual minds but as embodied social beings. In other words, textualism tends to ignore the flux of human relationships, the ways meanings are created intersubjectively as well as “intertextually,” embodied in gestures as well as in words, and connected to political, moral, and aesthetic interests. (Jackson 1989, 184)

Though possessed of a long historical commitment to the spoken word, rhetoric and communication suffer from this same valorizing of inscribed texts. A recent essay in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* provides a stunning example of the field’s extreme textualism: “Such a [disciplinary] grounding can only come about in the moment of methodological

commitment *when someone sits down with a transcript of discourse* and attempts to explain it to students or colleagues—in *that moment we become scholars of communication*” (Brummett 1990, 71; emphasis mine). In the quest for intellectual respectability through disciplinary rigor, some communication and rhetorical scholars have narrowed their focus to language, particularly those aspects of language that can be spatialized on the page, or measured and counted, to the exclusion of embodied meanings that are accessible through ethnographic methods of “radical empiricism” (Jackson 1989).

The linguistic and textualist bias of speech communication has blinded many scholars to the preeminently rhetorical nature of cultural performance—ritual, ceremony, celebration, festival, parade, pageant, feast, and so forth. It is not just in non-western cultures, but in many so-called “modern” communities that cultural performance functions as a special form of public address, rhetorical agency:

[C]ultural performances are not simple reflectors or expressions of culture or even of changing culture but may themselves be active agencies of change, representing the eye by which culture sees itself and the drawing board on which creative actors sketch out what they believe to be more apt or interesting “designs for living.” . . . Performative reflexivity is a condition in which a sociocultural group, or its most perceptive members acting representatively, turn, bend or reflect back upon themselves, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other sociocultural components which make up their public “selves.” (Turner 1986, 24)

Through cultural performances many people both construct and participate in “public” life. Particularly for poor and marginalized people denied access to middle-class “public” forums, cultural performance becomes the venue for “public discussion” of vital issues central to their communities, as well as an arena for gaining visibility and staging their identity. Nancy Fraser’s concept of “subaltern counterpublics” is very useful: “. . . arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser 1990, 67).

What every ethnographer understands, however, is that the mode of “discussion,” the discourse, is not always and exclusively verbal: Issues and attitudes are expressed and contested in dance, music, gesture, food,

ritual artifact, symbolic action, as well as words. Cultural performances are not simply epideictic spectacles: Investigated historically within their political contexts, they are profoundly deliberative occasions (see Fernandez 1986).

Although cultural performances often frame a great deal of speech-making—formal oratory, stylized recitation and chant, as well as backstage talk and informal conversation—it would be a great mistake for a communication researcher simply “to sit down with a transcript of discourse” and privilege words over other channels of meaning. Turner emphatically resists valorizing language or studying any of the multiple codes of performed meaning extricated from their complex interactions: “This is an important point—rituals, dramas, and other performative genres are often orchestrations of media, not expressions in a single medium” (Turner 1986, 23). There is a complex interplay, for example, between song, gesture, facial expressions, and the burning of incense, and even incense has different meanings when it is burned at different times, and there are different kinds of incense. “The master-of-ceremonies, priest, producer, director creates art from the ensemble of media and codes, just as a conductor in the single genre of classical music blends and opposes the sounds of the different instruments to produce an often unrepeatable effect” (Turner 1986, 23).

Turner encourages ethnographers to study the interplay of performance codes, focussing on their syntactic relationships rather than their semantics:

It is worth pointing out, too, that it is not, as some structuralists have argued, a matter of emitting the *same* message in different media and codes, the better to underline it by redundancy. The “same” message in different media is really a set of subtly variant messages, each medium contributing its own generic message to the message conveyed through it. The result is something like a hall of mirrors—magic mirrors, each interpreting as well as reflecting the images beamed to it, and flashed from one to the others. (Turner 1986, 23–24)

The polysemic nature of cultural performances “makes of these genres flexible and nuanced instruments capable of carrying and communicating many messages at once, even of subverting on one level what it appears to be ‘saying’ on another” (Turner 1986, 24). The performance paradigm is an alternative to the atemporal, decontextualized, flattening approach of text-positivism.

Rethinking the “world as text” to the “world as performance” opens up new questions that can be clustered around five intersecting planes of analyses:

1. *Performance and Cultural Process.* What are the conceptual consequences of thinking about culture as a *verb* instead of a *noun*, process instead of product? Culture as unfolding performative invention instead of reified system, structure, or variable? What happens to our thinking about performance when we move it outside of Aesthetics and situate it at the center of lived experience?
2. *Performance and Ethnographic Praxis.* What are the methodological implications of thinking about fieldwork as the collaborative performance of an enabling fiction between observer and observed, knower and known? How does thinking about fieldwork as performance differ from thinking about fieldwork as the collection of data? Reading of texts? How does the performance model shape the conduct of fieldwork? Relationship with the people? Choices made in the field? Positionality of the researcher?
3. *Performance and Hermeneutics.* What kinds of knowledge are privileged or displaced when performed experience becomes a way of knowing, a method of critical inquiry, a mode of understanding? What are the epistemological and ethical entailments of performing ethnographic texts and fieldnotes? What are the range and varieties of performance modes and styles that can enable interpretation and understanding?
4. *Performance and Scholarly Representation.* What are the rhetorical problematics of performance as a complementary or alternative form of “publishing” research? What are the differences between reading an analysis of fieldwork data, and hearing the voices from the field interpretively filtered through the voice of the researcher? For the listening audience of peers? For the performing ethnographer? For the people whose lived experience is the subject matter of the ethnography? What about enabling the people themselves to perform their own experience? What are the epistemological underpinnings and institutional practices that would legitimate performance as a complementary form of research publication?
5. *The Politics of Performance.* What is the relationship between

performance and power? How does performance reproduce, enable, sustain, challenge, subvert, critique, and naturalize ideology? How do performances simultaneously reproduce and resist hegemony? How does performance accommodate and contest domination?

The most work has been done in Numbers One, Two, and Five, particularly One. Although we still need to think more deeply and radically about the performative nature of culture, Erving Goffman, Kenneth Burke, Dell Hymes, and a host of other social theorists have already set the stage. The expansive reach of conceptualizing performance as the agency for constituting and reconstituting culture, leads from performance as Agency to performance as ultimate Scene: "All the world's a stage." The popularity of Shakespeare's adage notwithstanding, we scarcely have begun to unpack and understand the radical potential of that idea.

Numbers Three and especially Four are the most deeply subversive and threatening to the text-bound structure of the academy. It is one thing to talk about performance as a model for cultural process, as a heuristic for understanding social life, as long as that performance-sensitive talk eventually gets "written up." The intensely performative and bodily experience of fieldwork is redeemed through writing. The hegemony of inscribed texts is never challenged by fieldwork because, after all is said and done, the final word is on paper. Print publication is the telos of fieldwork. It is interesting to note that even the most radical deconstructions still take place on the page. "Performance as a Form of Scholarly Representation" challenges the domination of textualism.

Turner advocated, practiced, and wrote about performance as a critical method for interpreting and intensifying fieldwork data (Turner 1986, 139–155). It is quite another thing, politically, to move performance from hermeneutics to a form of scholarly representation. That move strikes at the heart of academic politics and issues of scholarly authority. Talal Asad points in this direction:

If Benjamin was right in proposing that translation may require not a mechanical reproduction of the original but a harmonization with *its intentio*, it follows that there is no reason why this should be done only in the same mode. indeed, it could be argued that "translating" an alien form of life, another culture, is not always done best through the representational discourse of ethnog-

raphy, that under certain conditions a dramatic performance, the execution of a dance, or the playing of a piece of music might be more apt. (Asad 1986, 159)

If post-structuralist thought and the postmodern moment continue to open up received categories and established canons, more of this experimentation with scholarly form might happen. If the Performance Paradigm simply is pitted against the Textual Paradigm, then its radical force will be coopted by yet another either/or binary construction that ultimately reproduces modernist thinking. The Performance Paradigm will be most useful if it decenters, without discarding, texts. I do not imagine life in a university without books, nor do I have any wish to stop writing myself. But I do want to keep thinking about what gets lost and muted in texts. And I want to think about performance as a complement, alternative, supplement, and critique of inscribed texts. Following Turner and others, I want to keep opening up space for nondiscursive forms, and encouraging research and writing practices that are performance-sensitive.

Rhetorical Reflexivity

Far from displacing texts, contemporary ethnography is extremely interested in and self-conscious about its own text-making practices. There is widespread recognition of “the fact that ethnography is, from beginning to end, enmeshed in writing” (Clifford 1988, 25). These writings are not innocent descriptions through which the other is transparently revealed. “It is more than ever crucial for different peoples to form complex concrete images of one another,” Clifford affirms, “as well as of the relationships of knowledge and power that connect them; but no sovereign scientific method or ethical stance can guarantee the truth of such images. They are constituted—the critique of colonial modes of representation has shown at least this much—in specific historical relations of dominance and dialogue” (Clifford 1988, 23). Geertz argues that even “the pretense of looking at the world directly, as though through a one-way screen, seeing others as they really are when only God is looking . . . is itself a rhetorical strategy, a mode of persuasion” (Geertz 1988, 141).

Ethnography is being rethought in fundamentally rhetorical terms. Many of the most influential books recently published in ethnography are meta-rhetorical critiques. It seems that everyone in ethnography nowadays is a rhetorical critic. Many ethnographers now believe that disciplinary authority is a matter of rhetorical strategy not scientific

method. Geertz is perhaps most blunt about the essentially rhetorical nature of ethnography:

The capacity to persuade readers . . . that what they are reading is an authentic account by someone personally acquainted with how life proceeds in some place, at some time, among some group, is the basis upon which anything else ethnography seeks to do . . . finally rests. The textual connection of the Being Here and the Being There sides of anthropology, the imaginative construction of a common ground between the Written At and the Written About . . . is the *fons et origo* of whatever power anthropology has to convince anyone of anything—not theory, not method, not even the aura of the professorial chair, consequential as these last may be. (Geertz 1988, 143–144)

Much of the current rethinking of ethnography has been sobered and empowered by vigorous rhetorical critique of anthropological discourse.

Geertz is foremost among ethnography's practicing rhetorical critics. His rhetorical criticism of E.E. Evans-Pritchard's (E-P) ethnographic texts is exemplary (Geertz 1988). He identifies E-P's stylistic token as "drastic clarity" (Geertz 1988, 68) that translates onto the page as "a string of clean, well-lighted judgments, unconditional statements so perspicuously presented that only the invincibly uninformed will think to resist them," a sort of "first-strike assertiveness" (Geertz 1988, 63). The rhetorical questions Geertz puts to E-P's texts are: "How (why? in what way? of what?) does all this resolute informing inform?" (Geertz 1988, 64) His "deep reading" of E-P yields these insights:

How he does it: The outstanding characteristic of E-P's approach to ethnographic exposition and the main source of his persuasive power is his enormous capacity to construct visualizable representations of cultural phenomena—anthropological transparencies. *What he does:* The main effect, and the main intent, of this magic lantern ethnography is to demonstrate that the established frames of social perception, those upon which we ourselves instinctively rely, are fully adequate to whatever oddities the transparencies may turn out to picture. (Geertz 1988, 64)

According to Geertz E-P produces a "see-er's rhetoric" (Geertz 1988, 66). With E-P's texts, like all rhetorical practice, "the way of saying is the what of saying" (Geertz 1988, 68).

At a deep level, Geertz insightfully notes E-P's discussion of the Nuer and the Azande underwrite his own cultural ethos as much as they illuminate the other:

. . . it validates the ethnographer's form of life at the same time as it justifies those of his subjects—and that it does the one by doing the other. The adequacy of the cultural categories of, in this case, university England, to provide a frame of intelligible reasonings, creditable values, and familiar motivations for such oddities as poison oracles, ghost marriages, blood feuds, and cucumber sacrifices recommends those categories as of somehow more than parochial importance. Whatever personal reasons E-P may have had for being so extraordinarily anxious to picture Africa as a logical and prudential place—orderly, straightforward and level-headed, firmly modeled and open to view—in doing so he constructed a forceful argument for the general authority of a certain conception of life. If it could undarken Africa, it could undarken anything. (Geertz 1988, 70)

By bringing “Africans into a world conceived in deeply English terms” he thereby confirmed “the dominion of those terms” (Geertz 1988, 70).

Geertz as rhetorical critic moves beyond formalist analysis and situates ethnographic texts within their distinctive institutional constraints and engendering professional practices:

However far from the groves of academe anthropologists seek out their subjects—a shelved beach in Polynesia, a charred plateau in Amazonia; Akobo, Meknes, Panther Burn—they write their accounts with the world of lecterns, libraries, blackboards, and seminars all about them. This is the world that produces anthropologists, that licenses them to do the kind of work they do, and within which the kind of work they do must find a place if it is to count as worth attention. In itself, Being There is a postcard experience (“I've been to Katmandu—have you?”). It is Being Here, a scholar among scholars, that gets your anthropology read, published, reviewed, cited, taught. (Geertz 1988, 129–130)

Geertz weights the Being Here writing it down side of the axis. To be sure, ethnography on the page constrains and shapes performance in the field. But it is also true, I believe, that experiential performance sometimes resists, exceeds, and overwhelms the constraints and strictures of

writing. It is the task of rhetorical critics to seek out these sites of tension, displacement, and contradiction between the Being There of performed experience and the Being Here of written texts.

This rhetorical self-reflexivity has helped politicize ethnography: “The gap between engaging others where they are and representing them where they aren’t, always immense but not much noticed, has suddenly become extremely visible. What once seemed only technically difficult, getting ‘their’ lives into ‘our’ works, has turned morally, politically, even epistemologically, delicate” (Geertz 1988, 130). Ethnographic authority is the empowering alignment between rhetorical strategy and political ideology. Once shielded by the mask of science, ethnographers now have become acutely aware of the sources of their persuasive power:

What it hasn’t been, and, propelled by the moral and intellectual self-confidence of Western Civilization, hasn’t so much had to be, is aware of the sources of its power. If it is now to prosper, with that confidence shaken, it must become aware. Attention to how it gets its effects and what those are, to anthropology on the page, is no longer a side issue, dwarfed by problems of method and issues of theory. It . . . is rather close to the heart of the matter. (Geertz 1988, 148–149)

Trinh enacts this struggle towards self-reflexive awareness of textual power in her book subtitled “Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism”: “. . . what is exposed in this text is the inscription and de-scription of a non-unitary female subject of color through her engagement, therefore also disengagement, with master discourses” (Trinh 1989, 43).

It is ironic that the discipline of communication has been relatively unreflexive about the rhetorical construction of its own disciplinary authority. It would be illuminating to critique the rhetorical expectations and constraints on articles published in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, or *Communication Monographs*. What kinds of knowledge, and their attendant discursive styles, get privileged, legitimated, or displaced? How does knowledge about communication get constructed? What counts as an interesting question about human communication? What are the tacitly observed boundaries—the range of appropriateness—regarding the substance, methods, and discursive styles of communication scholarship? And, most importantly for critical theorists, what configuration of socio-political interests does communication scholarship serve? How does professionally authorized knowledge about communication articulate with relations of power? About the connection between a field of

knowledge and relations of power, Michel Foucault offers this sobering insight: “. . . power produces knowledge . . . ; power and knowledge directly imply one another; . . . there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (Foucault 1979, 27).

NOTES

I borrow the term “critical cultural politics” from James Clifford (1988, 147).

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Chapter 7: Performance Ethnography

[p. 149 ↓]

The good news is that in recent decades there has been a remarkable constellation of thinking around performance. The “anti-theatrical prejudice” notwithstanding, performance is now a powerful locus for research in the human sciences, a rallying point for scholars who want to privilege action, agency, and transformation.

—Dwight Conquergood, “Beyond the Text: Toward a Performative Cultural Politics” (1998)

Performance has indeed, in the words of Dwight Conquergood (1998), brought about a “remarkable constellation of thinking” relating to the meanings and effects of human behavior, consciousness, and culture. These days, it seems one can hardly address any subject in the arts, humanities, and social sciences without encountering the concept of performance.

Performance has become a popular signifier expanding the definitions and assumptions of a range of social phenomenon. The power of performance is captured in the idea that human beings are naturally a performing species. Rather than *homo sapiens*, we more accurately resemble “*homo performans*.” The oft-quoted passage by anthropologist Victor Turner (1985) has become a classic refrain in describing the significance of performance:

If man is a sapient animal, a tool making animal, a self-making animal, a symbolizing animal, he is no less, a performing animal, *Homo performans*, not in [p. 150 ↓] the sense, perhaps that a circus animal may be a performing animal, but in the sense that man is a self-making animal—his performances are, in a way, reflexive; in performance he reveals himself to himself. (p. 187)

If we accept the notion of human beings as *homo performans* and therefore as a performing species, performance becomes necessary for our survival. This is due to the belief that we come to simultaneously recognize, substantiate, and (re)create ourselves as well as Others through performance. Furthermore—in this process of recognition, substantiation, creation, and invention—culture and performance become inextricably connected and mutually formative. Performance becomes a ubiquitous force in our social and discursive universe. In accepting the deeper significance of performance, we must then try to set forth examples and bring some kind of order and clarification to its far-reaching uses and meanings. We must describe and decipher its multiple operations in order to comprehend it and recognize it, not simply for its own sake, but for what performance will teach us about our culture and ourselves.

In this chapter, we will order and decipher “the remarkable constellation of thinking” in the relationship between performance and ethnography through the following topics: (a) foundational concepts in performance and social theory, (b) the performance interventions of Dwight Conquergood, and (c) staging ethnography and the performance of possibilities.

Foundational Concepts in Performance and Social Theory

In this section, we will discuss selected foundational paradigms that connect ethnography and performance. These paradigms form core ideas out of which more detailed and complex examinations of performance are developed. This section serves as an introduction to theories of performance that is specifically directed to ethnographic projects and field research.

Performance as Experience

For me, the anthropology of performance is an essential part of the anthropology of experience. In a sense, every type of cultural performance, including ritual, ceremony, carnival, theatre, and poetry, is explanation and explication of life itself, as Dilthey often argued. Through the performance process itself, what is normally sealed up, inaccessible to everyday forth—Dilthey uses [p. 151 ↓] the term Ausdruck, “an expression,” from ausdrucken, literally, “to press or squeeze out.” “Meaning” is squeezed out of an event, which has either been directly experienced by the dramatist or poet or cries out for penetrative, imaginative understanding (Verstehen). An experience is itself a process, which “presses out” to an “expression” which completes it.

—Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982a)

One important theoretical view of performance addresses the notion of *experience*. This view asserts that experience begins from our uneventful, everyday existence. Moving inconsequentially through the daily, colorless activities of our lives, we flow through moments of ordinariness, nonreflection, and the mundane. We brush our teeth, ride the bus, wait in supermarket lines, and generally talk about the weather without excitement or happenstance. But then something happens, and we move to moments of experience. At this point, life's flow of uneventfulness is interrupted by a peak moment that breaks through the ordinariness, and we think and consider what has just happened to us. We give feeling, reason, and language to what has been lifted from the inconsequential day-to-day. We bring experience to it.

The experience is received in consciousness and reflected upon: while brushing our teeth this particular morning, we notice a gray hair growing at the top of our head; while riding the bus, we meet an extraordinary person; while in the supermarket line, the cake box jogs a childhood memory; and while talking about the weather, we discover disturbing news. The mundane becomes heightened when gray hair conjures thoughts of aging; when an extraordinary person brings new insight; when the egg carton reminds us of licking mother's cake pan; and when the rainy weather bring news of tragedy and loss. Edward M. Bruner (1986) states,

By experience we mean not just sense data, cognition, or in Dilthey's phrase, ‘the diluted juice of reason,’ but also feelings and expectations. ... Lived experience, then, as thought and desire, as word and image, is the primary reality. (pp. 4–5)

“Feeling and expectation” that constitute experience now becomes the potential for something more. It is from experience that expression may now come forth. Turner (1982a) wrote that

expressions are “the crystallized secretions of once living human *experience*” (p. 17). Once an experience presses forward from the field of the mundane, it moves to expression; it is no longer a personal reality, but a shared one. What we experience is most often whatever needed to be expressed, whether through story, [p. 152 ↓] gossip, or humor on the one end, or poetry, novels, or film on the other. The experience now made into expression is presented in the world; it occupies time, space, and public reality. Experience made into expression brings forth reader, observer, listener, village, community, and audience. In arriving at this third evolutionary stage of expression, we have arrived at the threshold of performance evolving from experience. Experience becomes the very seed of performance.

In understanding this view that emphasizes the performance of experience, we may then ask several questions: If performance begins with the rupture of the ordinary in our everyday, then can performance only be self-reflective, heightened, and therefore preceded by experience? Can performance ever be “just behavior,” or do we always need that revelatory moment of experience? Can there be performance without bringing the ordinary into the extraordinary?

The movement just outlined, from quotidian ordinariness to reflective experience and ultimately to creative expression, is just one trajectory toward performance. It is true these moments that burst forth from everyday life into experience—then to expression and eventually into a full-blown performance—constitute the making of performance; however, there are other frameworks by which we may identify performance. Not all performance is necessarily based on individual experience or expression. Performance does not necessarily begin with experience; indeed, some argue that experience begins with performance. Conquergood (1986a) argues for this “reverse,” saying that it is the “performance that realizes the experience” (pp. 36–37). Bakhtin (1981) affirms the precedence of performance:

After all, there is no such thing as experience outside of embodiment in signs. It is not experience that organizes expression, but the other way around—expression organizes experience. Expression is what first gives experience its form and specificity of direction.” (qtd. in Conquergood, 1986a, p. 85)

We will further explore the relationship between experience and expression, but now we turn to performance as an analytical framework for social patterns of behavior.

Performance as Social Behavior

Cultures, I hold, are better compared through their rituals, theatres, tales, ballads, epics, and operas than through their habits. For the former are the ways in which they try to articulate their meanings.

—Edward Bruner, *The Anthropology of Experience* (1986)

[p. 153 ↓] In performance as behavior, social life is constructed through an organizing metaphor of dramatic action, or what the social critic Kenneth Burke (1945) describes as *situated modes of action*. Burke (1966) invites us to ponder an important question: What does

it mean and what does it entail when we interpret what people are doing and why they are doing it?

This is a question that can be applied to an infinite range of human actions. It is a question that demands consideration, contexts, and engagement. In asking the question, Burke (1945) opens the “dramas of living” while radically humanizing and historicizing it in his approach to an answer. Burke provides a dramatic paradigm comprising five key concepts in his attempt to answer the question—a pentad that is particularly relevant for critical ethnographers. His five key terms are *act* (which names what took place in thought or deed), *scene* (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred), *agent* (the person or kind of person performing the act), *agency* (the means or instruments that were used in the act), and *purpose* (the aim or objective). Burke (1945) states,

Men may violently disagree about the purposes behind a given act, or about the character of the person who did it, or how he did it, or in what kind of situation he acted; or they may even insist upon totally different words to name the act itself. But be that as it may, many complete statements about motives will offer *some kind* of answers to those five questions: what was done (act), when and where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how (agency), and why he did it (purpose). (p. xvii)

Just as Burke employed elements of performance to analyze social patterns and behavior, the anthropologist Victor Turner (1982a, 1982b, 1985) is credited with making path-breaking contributions in ethnographic research for illuminating key performance dynamics that permeate social and cultural life.

Victor Turner left a rich and comprehensive body of work that is timeless and invaluable to those field researchers who are interested in the relationship between performance, culture, and ethnography (see Turner, 1982a, 1982b, 1985). Due to space and the focus of this text, I have not attempted to represent the immensity and complexity of Victor Turner's thinking. However, it is very important to introduce to the student of critical ethnography key concepts that constitute the foundation of his thinking.

Cultural Performance

The anthropologist Milton Singer (1984) first introduced the term *cultural performance*, stating that these kind of performances all possess a “limited [p. 154 ↓] time span, a beginning and an end, an organized program of activity, a set of performers, an audience, and a place and occasion” (xii). Cultural performances are therefore understood as more conventional forms of performance because they are framed by cultural conventions. They are consciously heightened, reflexive, framed, and contained. Cultural performances range from plays and operas to circus acts, carnivals, parades, religious services, poetry readings, weddings, funerals, graduations, concerts, toasts, jokes, and story telling. In all these examples, self-conscious and symbolic acts are presented and communicated within a circumscribed space. Meaning and affect are generated by embodied action that produces a heightened moment of communication.

Cultural performance inheres in what the ethnologist Richard Bauman (1977) calls “markings.” It is framed by its content both within and outside the flow of life as lived, as well as by its distinct markings of beginnings and endings (Bauman, 1977). You cannot stumble into a cultural performance and be oblivious to it. You will pick up a book, witness a film, observe a wedding, or overhear an oral history and be unaware of stepping into a time and space in which thought and action are heightened, stylized, and set apart by symbolic or conventional indicators of a start and finish. These indicators—from “once upon a time” to curtain call, The National Anthem, film credits, or “The End”—are a few of the markers that are familiar to us.

One of the most immensely important characteristics of cultural performance articulated by Turner (1982a, 1982b, 1985) is how they reflect who we are and human behavior. It is said that cultural performances *show ourselves to ourselves* in ways that help us recognize our behavior, for better or worse, as well as our unconscious needs and desires. When we perform and witness cultural performances, we often come to realize truths about ourselves and our world that we cannot realize in our day-to-day existence:

It might be possible to regard the ensemble of performative and narrative genres, active and acting modalities of expressive culture as a hall of mirrors, or better magic mirrors. ... In this hall of mirrors the reflections are multiple, some magnifying, some diminishing, some distorting the faces peering into them, but in such a way as to provoke not merely thought, but also powerful feelings and the will to modify everyday matters in the minds of the gazers, for not one likes to see himself as ugly, ungainly, or dwarfish. *Mirror distortions of reflection provoke reflexivity* [italics added]. (1982a, p. 105)

Cultural performances are not only a reflection of what we are, they also shape and direct who we are and what we can become. Turner (1982a) states, “When we act in everyday life we do not merely re-act to indicative [p. 155 ↓] stimuli, we act in frames we have wrested from the genres of cultural performance” (p. 122).

Social Performance

In social performance, action, reflection, and intent are not marked as they are in cultural performances. Social performances are the ordinary, day-by-day interactions of individuals and the consequences of these interactions as we move through social life (Turner, 1982a, pp. 32–33). All these social performances are based upon a cultural script. Typically, the participants in social performances are not self-consciously aware their enactments are culturally scripted. Social performances become examples of a culture's or sub-culture's particular symbolic practices. These performances are most striking when they are contrasted against different cultural norms (e.g., greetings, dining, dressing, dating, walking, and looking). Turner (1982a) ascribes social performances to any action that is formed, understood, and reiterated through cultural scripting. Eating a meal, shaking someone's hand, dressing for the beach, asking for a date, walking with a friend, speaking to a parent, or looking in the eyes of the person speaking to you are all very ordinary and “natural” to the flow of daily life. However, different cultures and subcultures may practice each of these actions in strikingly different ways. In some cultures, it is a common occurrence for men who are platonic friends to walk down public streets holding hands without there being any thought of a romantic or sexual involvement. There are cultures in

which it is rude to look into the face of the person speaking to you. There are subcultures in the United States where a handshake and greeting in one community is a very different social performance from what one would do in another community.

Social performance is also elaborated on in the influential work of the sociologist Ervin Goffman. Goffman examined the characteristics of role-playing in social situations in his best-known work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Goffman emphasizes the various tasks and functions individuals assume as “roles” that carry with them scripted characteristics or “fronts” (e.g., settings, costumes, gestures, voice, appearances, and demeanor). These roles in everyday life are based upon the relationships between the performers and an audience. Such roles are public roles in what he calls “front-stage drama”—for example, a waiter and a customer, a teacher and students, a father and a child, as well as situations like the first date or the job interview. We perform the tasks or function of our roles before or “in front of” a particular audience. Goffman states that for every front-stage drama there is a backstage drama—the performance of the waiter, the school teacher, and the father out of the view of the customer, [p. 156 ↓] the students, the son and daughter, or “behind the scenes” of the date and the interview. For Goffman, performance can be defined as “all activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers” (p. 22).

Social Drama

In social harmony, the working arrangements within a particular social unit are synchronized. When a social drama occurs, there is a schism or break in the synchronization. The social unit is disturbed and the parties involved are in disagreement. Turner (1982a) states, “Social life, then, even its apparently quietest moments is characteristically ‘pregnant’ with social dramas. It is as though each of us has a ‘peace’ face and a ‘war’ face, that we are programmed for cooperation, but prepared for conflict” (p. 11).

Turner (1982a) defines social drama using a four-phase structure: *breach*, *crisis*, *redressive action*, and *resolution*. In breach, there is an overt nonconformity and breaking away by an individual or group of individuals from a shared system of social relations, be it an African village, a political party, a family, or nation. In breach, the agreed-upon norm is violated (p. 38).

It is in the second stage of crisis that conflict becomes most apparent. The opposing forces are openly at odds; the masks are stripped away or magnified and the conflict escalates. In crisis, the breach has enlarged; it is made public. In the third stage, redressive action, a mechanism is brought forth to squelch the crisis from further disruption of the social system. This may be in the form of a mediator, of a judicial system, or of the opposing forces coming together themselves in an effort to resolve the crises. In the redressive phase, norms are suspended to make amends.

The final phase is resolution. It is here, according to Turner (1982a), where the “disturbed parties are reconciled and reintegrated back into their shared social system” (p. 198). The parties may reunite but with changes; or the other result is the recognition of a “legitimate and

irreparable schism between the parties” which will separate them from the social system, and/or the parties may establish another social system (pp. 8–19). In reintegration, there is usually some kind of ritual act to mark the separation or a celebration of the union:

The social drama concludes—if ever it may be said to have a “last act”—either in the reconciliation of the contending parties or their agreement to differ—which may involve a dissident minority in seceding from the original community and seeking a new habitat. ... (Turner, 1982a, p. 10)

[p. 157 ↓]

Structure and Antistructure

For Turner (1982a), performance rises out of the ever-shifting processes of culture (pp. 9–13). Turner's (1985) processual view describes culture as a never-ending phenomenon of “becoming” as opposed to “being” (pp. 178–181). Culture is never a finished product, but is a growing, changing organism; therefore culture is in constant creation, definition, and reflection of itself (Turner, 1985, p. 203). In the processes of cultural becoming, culture moves through phases of *structure* and *antistructure*. Turner (1982a) asserts that humankind “grows through anti-structure, and conserves through structure” (p. 114). Structure is order within systems (Turner, 1982a, p. 36). As a positive function, structure regulates and preserves culture, making its members feel safe, secure, and protected. Structure as a less positive function is “all that holds people apart, defines their differences, and constrains their action” (Turner, 1982a, p. 47). Turner (1982a) links structure with obligation, juralty, law, restraint:

In people's social structure relationships they are by various abstract processes generalized and segmentalized into roles, statuses, classes, cultural sexes, conventional age-divisions, ethnic affiliations, etc. In different types of social situations they have been conditioned to play specific social roles. It does not matter how well or how badly as long as they “make like” they are obedient to the norm sets that control different compartments of the complex model known as the “social structure.” (p. 46)

Antistructure, according to Turner (1982a) is the “dissolution of normative social structure, with its role-sets, statuses, jural rights and duties” (p. 28). The anthropologist Brian Sutton-Smith, in his conception of normative structure and antistructure, inspired Turner. Sutton-Smith states (1972),

The normative structure represents the working equilibrium; the “anti-structure” represents the latent system of potential alternatives from which novelty will arise when contingencies in the normative system require it. We might more correctly call this second system the *protocultural* system because it is the precursor of innovative normative forms. It is the source of new culture. (pp. 18–19)

The “potential alternative” that antistructure nurtures is explored in Turner's (1982a, 1982b) discussion of the *liminal* and *liminoid*. Remarking on Sutton-Smith's assertion that antistructure

generates creativity, Turner notes that what interests him in this formulation is that “liminal and [p. 158 ↓] liminoid situations” are “settings in which new models, symbols, paradigms, etc. arise—as seedbeds of cultural creativity ...” (Turner, 1982a, p. 28). Turner has been criticized for his distinction between liminal and liminoid as he compares them to so-called tribal and advanced cultures. To examine the distinction between the concepts and the full range of their meanings requires a more detailed analysis than I offer here; however, as an overview for the student of critical ethnography, it is useful to apply the notion of the liminal and liminoid in your work.

Liminoid

In Turner's (1982a, 1982b, 1985) work, *liminoid* is a provocative term used to describe an individualized expression of creative and alternative expressions in industrialized societies, where varied leisure time activities and choices are more accessible than in agrarian or preindustrialized societies. The solitary artist *creates* the liminoid phenomena; the collectivity *experiences* collective liminal symbols. For Turner (1982a), this does not mean that the maker of

liminoid symbols, ideas, images, etc., does so *ex nihilo*; it only means that he is privileged to make free with his social heritage in a way impossible to members of cultures in which the liminal is to a large extent sacrosanct. (p. 52)

Liminality

Turner (1982a, 1982b, 1985) contends that liminality is the state of being betwixt and between structures or situations. Members of liminoid societies are also generally referred to as being in states of liminality; however, Turner employed the term *liminoid* to industrialized societies to mark a distinction between them and nonindustrialized societies. However, societies that are considered liminal are not referred to as being *liminoid* in Turner's lexicon. Therefore, *liminoid* denotes a specific characteristic of materiality, whereas *liminality* is more generally used to describe the state of being neither here nor there—neither completely inside nor outside a given situation, structure, or mindset.

Relatively free of norms, guidelines, and requirements, liminality, for Turner, is the space of greatest invention, discovery, creativity, and reflection. It is in this state of liminality where we are at the threshold of systems, not stepping into the system to the right, nor the system to the left, but reflectively, creatively, or ceremoniously assessing both. It is also important to add that, while Turner (1982a) underscores the creativity invoked within liminal spaces, he also comments upon its destructive nature:

[p. 159 ↓] Liminality is, of course, an ambiguous state, for social structure, while it inhabits full social satisfaction, gives a measure of finiteness and security; liminality may be for many the acme of insecurity, the breakthrough of chaos into cosmos, of disorder into order, rather than the milieu of creative interhuman or transhuman satisfaction and achievements. Liminality may be the scene of disease, despair, death, suicide, the

breakdown without compensatory replacement of normative, well-defined social ties and bonds. (p. 46)¹

Liminoid/liminality as the state of creation and destruction—of the betwixt and between—and of being both and neither inside and/nor outside was captured earlier in Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) idea of *carnival*: laws, prohibitions, and restriction that determine the structure and order of ordinary. That is, noncarnival life is suspended, and where it is suspended a space to defy the norms, invert the expected, embrace the playful, and form new and different human connections opens up. The carnival is “the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a *new form of interrelationships between individuals* [italics added], counter posed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life” (Carlson, 1996, p. 28).

Communitas

Spontaneous *communitas* might be compared to a moment of utopian unity, in which human differences and hierarchies seem to fade into perfect cohesion. Communitas is the bond between individuals that is an intrinsic union beyond formal social bonds. Individual identities come together in a direct and immediate manner. Communitas is experienced as a communion of individuals as equals, where all racial, class, gender, or structural divisions are dissolved in the spontaneous and immediate feelings of communion (Turner, 1982a).

This inclusiveness, the antistructure of communitas, is not permanent; structure returns. Roles, status, and order can never be eliminated. It should also be understood that communitas encompasses three distinct and “necessarily sequential forms” (Turner, 1982a, p. 47): *spontaneous communitas*, *ideological communitas*, and *normative communitas*. Spontaneous communitas is a deep, direct, immediate, and total personal interaction that “has something magical about it” (p. 47). Ideological communitas is “a set of theoretical concepts which attempt to describe the interactions of spontaneous communitas” (p. 47). It is the search, “the centering of attention” on articulating and re-creating the nature of the magic. Normative communitas is “a subculture or group which attempts to foster and maintain relationships of spontaneous communitas on a more or less permanent basis” (p. 47). [p. 160 ↓] Members of normative communitas are those persons having a substantive link, as in the sense of “comrades,” and may include members of religious revivals, political rallies, disenfranchised groups, and so forth.

For Turner (1982a, 1982b, 1985), performance—whether cultural performance, social performance, or social drama—takes place under the rubric of structure or antistructure. Structure is all that which constitutes order, system, preservation, law hierarchy, and authority. Antistructure is all that which constitutes human action beyond systems, hierarchies, and constraints.

The Influences of Richard Schechner

In a discussion of Victor Turner, it is important to add the influence of performance theorist

Richard Schechner (1973, 1985, 1998) on Turner's ideas, as well as to discuss Schechner's general contribution to performance ethnography. In a workshop lead by Turner and Schechner exploring the intersections between social and aesthetic drama, Turner commented that Schechner “persuaded [him] that co-operation between anthropology and theatrical people was not only possible but also could become a major teaching tool for both sets of partners” (qtd. in Carlson, 1996, p. 22). Carlson (1996) cites the 1973 special issue of *The Drama Review*, guest edited by Richard Schechner, which lists seven arenas in which performance theory and the social sciences overlap:

1. Performance in everyday life, including gatherings of every kind
2. The structure of sports, ritual, play, and public political behaviors
3. Analysis of various modes of communication (other than the written word); semiotics
4. The connection between human and animal behavior patterns, with an emphasis on plays and ritualized behavior
5. Aspects of psychotherapy that emphasize person-to-person interaction, acting out, and body awareness
6. Ethnography and prehistory—both of exotic and of familiar cultures
7. Constitution of unified theories of performance, which are, in fact, theories of behavior

In summary, the social critics discussed provide performance-oriented lenses for examining social action and patterns of human behavior that are especially helpful to the critical ethnographer. They contribute performance paradigms that identify and order the ambiguities, crises, and deeply felt problems that arise from human conflict ranging from the inner lives of individuals to the public lives of nations.

[p. 161 ↓]

Performance as Language and Identity

What we will now add to the above discussion is a more detailed focus on the performative dimensions of language and the performative repetition of symbolic acts in the construction of identity. Just as we must attend to situated modes of action to unveil deep structures of intention and meaning, we must also attend to situated modes of language and the action generated from the words spoken. We begin here with the British philosopher J. L. Austin (1975) and his idea of speech-act theory. In 1955, Austin presented “How to Do Things With Words” for the William James Lecture Series at Harvard University. Austin's speech-act theory, set forth in 1955 and published later as a book, made an indelible impact on how we grasp the implications of language and its influence on human action. Briefly defined, a *speech-act* is the action that is performed when a word is uttered. For Austin, a performative utterance is not simply a statement that is true or false. To understand language as merely statements that describe, refer, or indicate based on accuracy and truth is much too narrow. Austin describes this view of language as mere statement as *constative*, and argues that language has a function beyond the constative. He states that language does more than describe; it also *does something* that makes a material, physical, and situational difference. For example, the words, “I promise to give him the message,” “I pronounce you husband and wife,” and “You are

forgiven” all *do something in the world*. They create a particular reality. Language can bestow forgiveness, a blessing, freedom, citizenship, marriage, or a promise. Language *performs* a reality; therefore, for Austin (1975), language is not merely constative, but *performative*.

Austin's student John R. Searle (1969) expands upon Austin's theory of performative utterance to assert not only that language is performative at certain heightened moments or ceremonial events that separate the performative from the constative, but also that *all* language is a form of doing. Searle believes that whenever there is *intention* in speaking, there is also the performative. While Austin designates particular moments when words produce a speech-act—that is, when words are performed—Searle argues that whenever words are spoken with intention (and they almost always are), words are performative.

Jacque Derrida (1973, 1978, 1982), however, takes issue with Austin's and Searle's suggestion that a performative utterance creates a “doing” or a particular reality. Derrida's concern is that Austin did not recognize that language is always spoken within particular contexts and through certain identities, and therefore language is constantly producing the very reality to which it refers. Derrida argued against the notion that a performative utterance was aligned with a “presence” that was *original* and *unique* to a [p. 162 ↓] particular moment, and was therefore something done in that moment for the *first time*. For Derrida, the idea that a speech-act makes something happen within a particular present moment is to deny the fact of history and culture. Speech is citational; that is, what is spoken has been spoken many, many times before, and its effects are a result of its repetition and citation, not a result of a unique or present moment when words are uttered. Derrida's (1973) critique of speech-act theory is captured in the idea of a metaphysics of presence. For Derrida, all that we know and say is based upon what has gone before and what we have inherited from past actions. If something is done with words, it is because it has happened before and we know out of convention and custom to continue to do it.

The disagreement between speech-act theory and Derrida's metaphysics of presence tends to overlook what is useful about both arguments and what can be gained when we accept elements of both positions and see them as supplementary to one another rather than in opposition. What is important for critical ethnographers employing the analyses of Austin and Searle is that words are indeed performative and *do* have material effects. Obviously, they *do something in the world*; and that something is to reiterate (in terms of Derrida) speech, meaning, intent, and customs that have been repeated through time and that are communicative and comprehensible because they are recognizable in their repetition.

Note: Derrida and Deconstruction

- Deconstruction is a theory that posits that signifiers and signified are continually breaking apart and reattaching in new combinations; indeed, there is no fixed distinction between signifiers and signified.
- The deconstruction process is not only infinite, but also somehow circular: signified keeps transforming into signifier, and vice versa, and you never arrive at a final signified that is not a signifier itself.

- For Derrida (1973, 1978), the structure of the sign is determined by *trace*: One sign leads to another and so forth, indefinitely.
- Derrida (1973, 1978) labels “metaphysical” any thought system that depends on an unassailable foundation—an absolute or immutable truth claim.
- Derrida (1973, 1978) stresses the point that it is not enough simply to neutralize the binary opposition of metaphysics: Deconstruction invokes reversal and displacement. Deconstruction is not simply a strategic reversal of categories. Derrida's method consists of showing how the privileged term is held in place by the force of a dominant metaphor and not, as it might seem, by any conclusive logic.

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- In deconstructionism, there is an abandonment of all references to a center, to a fixed subject, to a privileged reference, to an origin, to an absolute founding and controlling just principle.
- The deconstructionist method often consists of deliberately inverting traditional oppositions and marking the invisible concepts that reside unnamed in the gap between opposing terms.
- Deconstruction is an attempt to dismantle the logic by which a particular system of thought is grounded, as well as how a whole system of political structure and social control maintains its force.
- If there is a summarizing idea for deconstruction, it is the theme of the *absent center*. The postmodern experience is widely held to stem from a profound sense of ontological uncertainty.

Performativity

The feminist critic Judith Butler (1988, 1990, 1994), in her descriptions of performativity, further extends the examination of the performative. For Butler, performativity is understood as a “stylized repetition of acts” that are—like Derridian citation—“always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms,” which means that 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” (Diamond, 1996, pp. 4–6). Butler employs performativity to mark gender identity in particular. Gender is recognized and embodied through very specific stylized acts that are repeated through generations to substantiate what it means to be male on the one hand and what it means to be female on the other. In other words, men are conditioned to act in certain ways, thereby making or constructing maleness, just as women have been conditioned to act in other ways, thereby constructing femaleness. Performativity in this sense becomes all at once a cultural convention, value, and signifier that is inscribed on the body—performed through the body—to mark identities.

Gestures, posture, clothes, habits, and certain distinctions, from the way one holds a cigarette to the manner in which one crosses one's legs, to the way one wears a hat—they all are performed differently depending on the gender, race, class status, and sexual orientation of the

performer. How the body moves about in the world, and its various mannerisms, styles, and distinctions are inherited from one generation through space and time to another and demarcated within specific identity categories. Therefore, these performativities become the manifestation of gender, race, sexuality, and class. You have heard the saying, "Act like a man," or the stereotypes, "She acts like a boy," "He doesn't act black," "He acts like he's gay," or "She [p. 164 ↓] acts like she has no class." These expressions are common in the vernacular, because identity is performed, and to perform outside these inherited constructions is to break through these taken-for-granted and commonsense notions of what a specific identity is or should be. These performativities are engrained in the way we understand and order social behavior to the point that we often think it is not only natural, but *proper* and *as it should be*.

But what happens when performativity is disrupted? What happens when a boy acts like a girl? When a woman acts like a man? When a black person does not act black? When an old person does not act old? Performativity is up for examination and reflection in cultural performance. What is taken for granted and goes unrealized within the everyday operations of the world is mirrored back in cultural performance, where "the urgent problems of our reality" (Turner, 1982a, p. 122) are witnessed, reinterpreted, and possibly undone.

Elin Diamond (1996) speaks to the politics of performance in the capacity for cultural performances to open up critical questions that penetrate the reiterations of performativity:

When being is de-essentialized, when gender and even race are understood as fictional ontologies, modes of expression without true substance, the idea of performance comes to the fore. But performance both *affirms and denies this evacuation of substance*. In the sense that the "I" has no interior secure ego or core identity, "I" must always enunciate itself: there is not only performance of self, [but] an external representation of an interior truth. But in the sense that I do my performance in public, for spectators who are interpreting and/or performing with me, there are real effects, and meanings solicited or imposed that produce relations in the real. Can performance make a difference? A performance, whether it inspires love or loathing, often consolidates cultural or subcultural affiliations, and these affiliations might be as regressive as they are progressive. The point is, as soon as performativity comes to rest on a performance, questions of embodiment, of social relations, of ideological interpellations, of emotional and political effects, all become discussable. (p. 5)

Examinations of *performative*, *performativity*, and *metaphysics of presence* are helpful and relevant to critical ethnographers because they offer definitions for human action that shape and guide the roles, institutions, and values constituting our life worlds. The emphasis on performativity as citationality is helpful in understanding how identity categories are not naturally inherent or biologically determined, but rather how they are socially constructed within the meanings and values of politics and culture. This is a significant realization, because it beckons the call to change inequities. It places the responsibility to break through unfair practices upon our shoulders and [p. 165 ↓] forces us to reckon with the fact that these categories—and therefore the responses and practices based on these categories—are not a fact of life, but are based upon human behavior that we can change.

The description of performativity as citationality is a critical move, but, for many performance scholars, it is only *one* way of articulating performativity. Conquergood (1998) asks us to consider the deeper political implications when performativity is consistently reworked as citationality. We may understand performativity as citationality, but we may also understand performativity as having the capability of resistance. Just as performativity is an internalized repetition of hegemonic stylized acts inherited from the *status quo*, it can also be an internalized repetition of subversive stylized acts inherited by contested identities. Subversive performativity can disrupt the very citations that hegemonic performativity enacts. The postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha (1994) employs the performative as action that disturbs, disrupts, and disavows hegemonic formations (pp. 146–149).

Up to this point, we have discussed performance through the inquiries of Kenneth Burke (dramatic pentad), Victor Turner (performance anthropology), J. L. Austin (speech-act-theory), Jacques Derrida (metaphysics of presence), Mikhail Bakhtin (carnavalesque), and Judith Butler (performativity). Now we will turn to the work of Dwight Conquergood.

The Performance Interventions of Dwight Conquergood

No one has contributed more to the intersections between performance and ethnography than Dwight Conquergood (1982a, 1982b, 1983, 1984, 1986a, 1986b, 1988, 1989, 1991, 1992, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2000a). So many who are engaged in the work of performance and who are committed to the politics and ethics of ethnography find their source of inspiration in the intellectual insights and far-reaching activism of Dwight Conquergood. We will enter the corpus of Conquergood's work from four vantage points: (1) process and performance, (2) the body and scriptocentrism, (3) dialogical performance, and (4) cultural politics.

Process and Performance

Conquergood's early work (1982a, 1982b, 1983, 1984) is a critique of hard edge, positivist assertions of culture as a quantifiable, static, and absolute entity. Traditionally, researchers prided themselves on how accurately human behavior could be measured, managed, and manipulated [p. 166 ↓] (Conquergood, 2002b). Conquergood places the emphasis on the “processes of becoming” in the changing and evolving dynamic of human relationships and creations. He asks us to move the focus of study from structures, patterns, and products that were so revered by positivist thinking to the yearnings, struggles, stories, tensions, symbols, and performances that produce and are produced by these structures, patterns, and products. Conquergood (1986a) reminds us that “meaning is in-between structures” and that “identity is conjectural and processual” (p. 36). It is these in-between meanings and conjunctural processes that generate, sustain, deconstruct, and reconstruct the very structures and patterns that positivist thinking attempts to quantify. Conquergood asks that we pay attention to the doing of identity and culture, as it is always made and remade within the matrices of varying histories, economies, and desires. Conquergood (1986) states,

The ground-of-being of the autonomous Self is displaced by the *experience-of-becoming* a performing self that enacts its identities within a community of others. ... Humanity as performer, rather than author, or her own identity, is always historically situated,

culturally mediated, and intersubjectively constituted. (p. 6)

In this emphasis on becoming, we turn from “spatialized products to temporal processes,” understanding as we do that human beings are products and producers of culture in an ongoing and ever-changing process of creating the world around us and beyond us (Conquergood, 1986, p. 6).

The Body and Scriptocentrism

In the Western tradition, written expression has held a privileged place over bodily expression. Writing is valued within the higher realms of knowledge, cosmopolitanism, and civility. Conquergood (2002a, 2002b) dignifies the body by recognizing embodied practices as constituting knowledge, emotion, and creation. The body is more than appearances and a sensing organ that holds the mind and soul. An exclusive focus on writing negates the everyday expressions of orality and symbolic embodiment that pervade in cultural spaces often hidden and cast out from the center of writing. To attend to the performances of symbolic bodily practices is a radically democratic endeavor, because the body expresses itself writ large everywhere. Conquergood's (2002b) explication of the body informs critical ethnography in the following ways:

- Radical empiricism is an embodied mode of being together with Others on intersubjective ground. The aliveness of interactive engagement [p. 167 ↓] requires the touch, smell, sights, and sounds of physical, bodily contact free from the mediations of distance and detachment.
- *Coevalness* is the temporality of a shared experience in which bodies are present together in time. Bodies are bonded by the experience of a common time, and to negate the commonality of shared time is to negate the reality that particular bodies shared a particular space.
- Myths are composed of the stories we live by, whether they take the form of master narratives, sacred stories, or local resistance. Conquergood (1983) recalls, “Myths and narrative arts live in performance, not on the page” (p. 2). Myths circulate in and through the everyday through embodied practices and performances (as opposed to written stories) that we consciously and unconsciously reenact.
- Experience is known through embodied performance. Instead of the idea of experience pressing out to expression, we must remember that we know experience through the body. It is the embodied expression that organizes experience (Conquergood, 1982, p. 85).

Conquergood (2002b) argues that we can no longer privilege the written text over the expressive body, because to do so is to obscure the multiple sites, practices, and interventions that are variously in the margins, on the borders, and beyond the center of writing. He underscores that scriptocentrism resonates through the past and present forces of imperialism (2000, 2002a, 2002b).

Dialogic Performance

For Conquergood (1982), dialogical performance is an ethical imperative. It is through dialogue that we resist the arrogant perception that perpetuates monologic encounters, interpretations, and judgments. From the ethics discussion in [Chapter 4](#), we will remember that dialogical performance embraces and complicates diversity, difference, and pluralism. Conquergood (1982) states,

A commitment to dialogue insists on keeping alive the inter-animating tension between Self and Other. It resists closure and totalizing domination of a single viewpoint, unitary system of thought. The dialogical project counters the normative with the performative, the canonical with the carnivalesque, Apollonian rationality with Dionysian disorder. Instead of silencing positivism, the performance paradigm would strive to engage it in an enlivening conversation. Dialogicalism strives to bring as many different voices as possible into [p. 168 ↓] the human conversation, without any one of them suppressing or silencing the other. (p. 11)

For Conquergood (1982a, 1983, 1988, 1989), the experience of becoming also means that, as a researcher, we must displace the primacy of seeing for a meaningful connection with listening. The traditional focus on seeing in the absence of profound listening is to *gaze out* at the Other as spectator, thereby risking a more dialogical meeting of *receiving in*. He calls on the critical ethnographer to move beyond the appearances that the exclusivity of sight holds to the deeper engagement with sound. Listening invites dialogue. As Conquergood (1982b) states, “The power dynamic of the research situation changes when the ethnographer moves from the gaze to the distance and detached observer to the intimate involvement and engagement of ‘coactivity’ or co-performance” (pp. 12–13). Dialogical performance means one is a cop performer rather than a participant-observer. It is to live in the embodied engagement of radical empiricism, to honor the aural/oral sounds that *incorporate* rather than *gaze over*.

Coperformance as dialogical performance means you not only do what subjects do, but you are intellectually and relationally invested in their symbol-making practices as you experience with them a range of yearnings and desires. Coperformance, for Conquergood (1982a, 1997, 2002b), is a “doing with” that is a deep commitment.

Cultural Politics

Conquergood's (1998, 2002a) explication of the politics of performance is of great importance to critical ethnography. I must mention that all of the concepts presented up to this point fall under the category of cultural politics. The corpus of Conquergood's work is never devoid of politics. I have included principles and paradigms under this topic that organize and address the distribution of power and modes of resistance. Conquergood's ideas on politics are presented in the following points with key excerpts from his writings.

Symbols and Images

Conquergood (1998) reminds us that “images and symbolic representations drive public policy” (p. 11). He goes on to state,

Symbols instill beliefs and shape attitudes that underpin social structures. The binding force of culture, by and large, is a web of symbols that enables people [p. 169 ↓] to control and make sense out of experience in patterned ways.... Images and symbolic representations drive public policy. (p. 11)

Transnational Narratives

The notion of territory in this era of globalization has taken on new and more expansive meanings. Moreover, the manner in which the local is affected by transnational communication and affiliations has problematized our understanding of the concepts of *community*, *nation*, and *identity*. Conquergood (2002b) states,

According to Michel de Certeau, “what the map cuts up, the story cuts across” (1984:12). This pithy phrase evokes a postcolonial world crisscrossed by transnational narratives, Diaspora affiliations, and especially, the movement and multiple migrations of people, sometimes voluntary, but often economically propelled and politically coerced. In order to keep pace with such a world, we [can] not think of “place” as a heavily trafficked intersection, a port of call and exchange, instead of circumscribed territory. A boundary is more like a membrane than a wall. ... Our understanding of local context expands to encompass the historical, dynamic, often traumatic, movements of people, ideas, images, commodities, and capital. It is not easy to sort out the local from the global: transnational circulations of images get reworked on the ground and redeployed for local tactical struggles. (p. 145)

Mimesis, Poiesis, Kinesis

The triad of *mimesis*, *poiesis*, and *kinesis* is one of Conquergood's (1998) most popular conceptualizations. He traces a three-tiered evolution of performance as political intervention, stating,

The contours of this new analytic emphasis on process over product can be seen in the shifting meanings of the key word *performance* as it has emerged with increasing prominence in cultural studies. This semantic genealogy can be summarized as the movement from performance as *mimesis* to *poiesis* to *kinesis*, performance as imitation, construction, dynamism. (Conquergood, 1998, p. 31)

Mimesis is the mode where performance acts as a mirror or imitation of experience. Performance becomes a reflection of life, a simulation framed through dramatic convention or cultural convention. Citing social scientist Erving Goffman (1959) as an early proponent of the mimetic view of performance, Conquergood (1998) states that Goffman “studied the parts of social life that staged, clearly demarcated frontstage and backstage boundaries, and gave currency to notions of frames, role-playing, impression [p. 170 ↓] management, and benign fabrications” (p. 31). Although useful under very limited circumstances, this view of performance as primarily mimetic is incomplete. It focuses on surface and reinscribes the “Platonic dichotomy between reality and appearances, and thus reinforces the antiperformance

prejudice” (Conquergood, 1998, p. 31).

Mimesis then moves to deeper levels of meaning and more consequential effects of human action in the form of poiesis. It is at the level of poiesis that the mirroring of mimesis is understood as the marking of meaning and effect. Poiesis reminds us that performance is a doing that actually denotes and connotes something beyond its appearance. We learn something from performance; it has an impression upon us. Conquergood (1982a) credits Victor Turner for opening the classic meaning of performance as mimesis to performance as poiesis in Turner's description of performance as “making not faking” (p. 93). Turner's (1985) notion of *homo performans*, in addition to the speech-act theory of J. L. Austin (1975), moves performance from simply being mimetic toward the higher realm of the poetic. When Austin distinguished the performative as the category of utterance that makes something happen—the idea that the utterance actually does something in the world—he contributed to the understanding of performance being more than simply theatrical.

Just as performance is more than simply mimetic, so it is also more than the poetic. From mimesis to poiesis, we now come to the culminating stage of kinesis. Kinesis is the point at which reflection and meaning now evoke intervention and change. The trajectory of performance, from the mirroring of mimesis to the enlightenment of poiesis, and finally to the intervention of kinesis, is a testament to the view of performance as a phenomenon that does not simply describe the world, but offers great possibility for changing it.

Conquergood (1998) cites the works of Michael Taussig (1993) on mimesis in terms of bringing the mimesis-poiesis-kinesis triad full circle. Taussig extends the possibilities of mimesis by offering alternative practices that use mimicry to subvert authority. Disenfranchised identities in differing locations and forms will mime the habits, gestures, and life customs of power-holders as a subversive act for various purposes. Mimicry in this instance become imitation for the purpose of intervention, acting in various capacities to bless the weak, mock the strong, protect the threatened, gain access to the inaccessible, and so forth.

Conquergood's emphasis on performance as kinesis is a kind of disruption that plays on the centrifugal force of decentering. Homi Bhabha (1994) uses the term *performative* to describe “action that incessantly insinuates, interrupts, interrogates, and antagonizes powerful master discourses” (p. 32). The trajectory from performance as mimesis to poiesis and finally to kinesis is particularly useful to qualitative researchers and ethnographers [p. 171 ↓] because it provides a means by which we may identify how human beings imitate each other in multiple and complicated ways while they are simultaneously generating meaning and resisting domestication. Moreover, it reveals how these performative actions are ripe with contestation, breakthroughs, and change. Conquergood (1998) states,

Instead of construing performance as *transcendence*, a higher plane that one breaks into, I prefer to think of it as *transgression*, that force which crashes and breaks through sediment meanings and normative traditions and plunges us back into the vortices of political struggle—in the language of bell hooks as “movement beyond boundaries.” (p. 32)

Performance as kinesis is the point of subversion that breaks through boundaries of domestication and hegemony. As critical ethnographers, this movement from mimesis, poesis, and kinesis is another path in our endeavor to resist regimes of oppressive power structures.

Triads of Analysis and Activity

The overarching domain of performance is generally ordered through the triad of *theory, method, and event*: performance theory provides abstract analysis; performance method provides concrete application, and performance event provides an aesthetic or noteworthy happening. Although theory, method, and event are useful in ordering the unwieldy possibilities of performance, Conquergood (2002b) provides a more meaningful and productive set of triads, particularly for ethnography, in his triad of triads: (1) The I's, *imagination, inquiry, and intervention*; (2) the A's, *artistry, analysis, and activism*; and (3) the C's, *creativity, critique, and citizenship*. Conquergood (2002b) states,

Performance studies is uniquely suited for the challenge of braiding together disparate and stratified ways of knowing. We can think through performance along three crisscrossing lines of activity and analysis. We can think of performance (1) as a work of *imagination*, as an object of study; (2) as a pragmatics of *inquiry* (both as model and method), as an optic and operation of research; (3) as a tactics of *intervention*, an alterative space of struggle. Speaking from my home department at Northwestern, we often refer to the three A's of performance studies: artistry, analysis, activism. Or to change the alliteration, a commitment to the three C's of performance studies: creativity, critique, citizenship (civic struggles for social justice). (2002b, p. 152)

Dwight Conquergood's body of work is essential for critical ethnographers who take on (a) culture as process; (b) expression and experience; (c) myth and orality; (d) radical empiricism, coperformance, and embodied practice; [p. 172 ↓] (e) dialogical performance and questions of Otherness; and (f) cultural politics and performance interventions. Conquergood has conducted field-work with Hmong refugees in Ban Vinai, Thailand; Palestinian refugees in the Middle East, Gaza Strip; inner-city gang members on the south side of Chicago; and with organizations and communities across the United States to end the death penalty. Conquergood's activist scholarship provides us with a model for critical performance ethnography grounded in Lugones's (1994) world traveling and loving perception.

In the next section, we will turn to theoretical questions in staging fieldwork.

Staging Ethnography and the Performance of Possibilities²

In this section, we will examine the political and social implication of what it means to stage our fieldwork data. Translating from the field to the stage presents several theoretical and ethical questions. In this section, we will discuss staged, cultural performances—what I shall call *a performance of possibilities*—based on ethnographic data from the specific spheres of (a) the subjects, whose lives and words are being performed; (b) the audience, who witnesses the performance; and (c) the performers, who embody and enact the data.

In a performance of possibilities, the possible suggests a movement culminating in creation and change. It is the active, creative work that weaves the life of the mind with being mindful of life, of merging the text with the world, of critically traversing the margin and the center, and of opening more and different paths for enlivening relations and spaces. A performance of possibilities raises several questions for the ethnographer: By what definable and material means will the subjects themselves benefit from the performance? How can the performance contribute to a more enlightened and involved citizenship that will disturb systems and processes that limit freedoms and possibilities? In what ways will the performers probe questions of identity, representation, and fairness to enrich their own subjectivity, cultural politics, and art?

We will turn now to these questions as each relates to subjects, audience, and performer.

The Subjects

The means by which the subjects themselves benefit from the performance are explored by examining the arenas of voice, subjectivity, and interrogative field. By voice, I do not simply mean the representation of an utterance, [p. 173 ↓] but the presentation of a historical self, a full presence that is in and of a particular world. The performance of possibilities does not accept “being heard and included” as its focus, but only as its starting point; instead, voice is an embodied, historical self that constructs and is constructed by a matrix of social and political processes. The aim is to present and represent subjects as made by and makers of meaning, symbol, and history in their full sensory and social dimensions. Therefore, the performance of possibilities is also a performance of voice wedded to experience and history.

Moreover, whether one likes the performance or not, one cannot completely undo or (un)know the image and imprint of that voice (inside history) upon their own consciousness once they have been exposed to it through performance. Performing subversive and subaltern voices proclaims existence, within particular locales and discourses, that are being witnessed—entered into one's *sown* experience—and this witnessing cannot be denied. The subjects themselves benefit from this proclamation through the creation of space that gives evidence not only that “I am here in the world among you,” but more importantly that “I am in the world under particular conditions that are constructed and thereby open to greater possibility.”

How, then, does all this benefit the subjects? Human desire implores that we be listened to, apprehended, engaged, and free to imagine in and with worlds of Others. This idea of existence and self is further illustrated in Nisa, a !Kung woman speaking to the anthropologists Margorie Shostake (1983) as she expresses the fear of the disappearances of her stories: “I'll break open the story and tell you what is there, this like the others that have fallen out onto the sand, I will finish with it, and the wind will take it away” (p. 233). That we are all social beings who live in a world where others necessarily constitute the self reflects Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) words, “Nothing is more frightening than the absence of an answer” (p. 111). The nature of Bakhtin's answer is a profound giving back that affirms we are real to others (and to ourselves) and that we are not alone.

This is not to argue that we do not have a self (or a soul) that generates its own will, action,

and meaning (“I think therefore I am”), but that the self is reciprocally joined to other selves (or souls) for its own being and creations (“I am because we are, and we are because I am”). This acknowledgement of subjects within experience, relative to the social world, is just the beginning; a deeper connection is necessary that now takes us a step further into the realm of subjectivity.

Subjectivity

Subjectivity requires that we delve more deeply into the desires resonating within the locations of the Other. It is the move beyond the *acknowledgment* [p. 174 ↓] of voice within experience to that of *actual engagement*. Audience and performer must now engage the material and discursive world of the Other. Because subjectivity is formed through a range of discursive practices—economic, social, aesthetic, and political—and meanings are sites of creation and struggle, subjectivity linked to performance becomes a poetic and polemic admixture of personal experience, cultural politics, social power, and resistance. We witness subjects as they work for and against competing discourses and social processes in the quest for security and honor in their locations. The acknowledged Others become subjects when the audience and performers actually identify with the substance of who they are, where they are, and what they do. We have entered, albeit symbolically and temporarily, into their locations of voice within experience. Through performance, we are placed, subject to subject, in that contested space while, as the feminist critic bell hooks (1990) describes, oppressed “people resist by identifying themselves as subjects by defining their reality, shaping new identity, naming their history, telling their story” (p. 43).

The performance strives to communicate a sense of subjects’ worlds in their own words; it hopes to amplify their meanings and intentions to a larger group of listeners and observers. These listeners and observers are then affected by what they see and hear in ways that motivate them to act and think in ways that now beneficially affect (directly and indirectly) either the subjects themselves or what they advocate. At this point, the audience moves from the performance space to the social world or the interrogative field.

Interrogative Field

The interrogative field is the point at which the performance of possibilities aims to create or contribute to a discursive space where unjust systems and processes are identified and interrogated. It is where what has been expressed through the illumination of voice and the encounter with subjectivity motivates individuals to some level of informed and strategic action. The greatest benefit to subjects is for those who bear witness to their stories to interrogate actively and purposefully those processes that limit their health and freedom. I do not mean to imply that one performance can rain down a revolution, but one performance can be revolutionary in enlightening citizens to the possibilities that grate against injustice.

The Audience

How the performance will contribute to a more enlightened and involved citizenship is another question from the performance of possibilities. [p. 175 ↓] Creating performances in which the

intent is largely to invoke interrogation of specific political and social processes means that in our art we are consciously working toward a cultural politics of change that resonates in a progressive and involved citizenship. To regard the audience as citizens with the potential for collective and involved action and change is part of the foundation upon which a performance of possibilities is based. Toni Morrison (1994) underscores the symbiosis between art and politics:

I am not interested in indulging myself in some private, closed exercise of my imagination that fulfills only the obligation of my personal dreams—which is to say yes, the work must be political. It must have that as its thrust. That's a pejorative term in critical circles now: if a work of art has any political influence in it, somehow it's tainted. *My feeling is just the opposite: If it has none, it is tainted.* The problem comes when you find harangue passing off as art. It seems to me that the best art is political and you ought to be able to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time. (p. 497)

Where the intent is both “the political and irrevocably beautiful,” art assumes responsibility for political effectiveness and communicates the principle that we are all part of a larger whole and are therefore radically responsible to each other for all of our individual selves. Linda Alcoff (1991) describes a web in which our social practices are made possible or impossible by agents and events that are spatially far from our own body and that, in turn, can affect distant strangers: “We are collectively caught in an intricate, delicate web in which each action I take, discursive or otherwise, pulls on, breaks off, or maintains the tension in many strands of a web in which others find themselves moving also” (p. 20). A performance of possibility strives to reinforce to audience members the web of citizenship and the possibility of their individual selves as agents and change makers.

Intersubjectivity

Striving toward an enlightened and involved citizenship also means that, although formerly the focus was on subjectivity relative to the subjects, the focus must now move to *intersubjectivity* relative to the audience. Because performance asks the audience to travel empathically to the world of the subjects and to feel and know some of what they feel and know, two life-worlds meet and the domain of outsider and insider are simultaneously demarcated and fused. I have an identity separate from the subject, and the performance clearly illuminates our differences. In the [p. 176 ↓] space of the performance, I am outsider; in the space of the world, these positions are more likely switched: I am insider and the subject is the outsider. While I see that I am an outsider to the subject's experience, the performance ironically pulls me inside.

I am now in the midst of a profound meeting. Do I remain here at the margins of the meeting, or is the performance beautiful enough and political enough to compel me to travel more deeply inside the mind, heart, and world of the subject? In this ability to travel across worlds, two identities meet, engage, and become something more. Maria Lugones (1994) describes this process of intersubjectivity: “The reason why I think that traveling to someone's ‘world’ is a way of identifying with them is because by traveling to their ‘world’ we can understand *what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes* [italics added]. Only when we have traveled to each other's ‘worlds’ are we fully subjects to each other” (p. 637). Performance

becomes the vehicle by which we travel to the worlds of subjects and enter domains of intersubjectivity that problematize how we categorize who is *us* and who is *them*, and how we see *ourselves* with other and different eyes.

As I argue that action beyond the performance space is of essential benefit to the subjects, so it is to audience members as well. Ideally, as an audience member consciously reenters the web of human connectedness and then travels into the life-world of the subject, where rigid categories of insider and outsider transfigure into an intersubjective experience, a path for action is set. Action, particularly new action, requires new energy and new insight. In the performance of possibilities, when the audience member begins to witness degrees of tension and incongruity between the subject's life-world and those processes and systems that challenge and undermine the world, something more and new is learned about how power works. The question is to what extent these life-worlds are threatened and, in turn, resist being captured in the space and time of performance. The audience, however, as involved citizens who are both disturbed and inspired, may seek the answer long after the final curtain. This is a *pursuit of possibility*, a gift of indignation and inspiration, passed on from the subject to the audience member. The performance of possibilities expects the audience member to continue, reaffirmed, or at least to begin honing his or her skills toward world traveling. In the performance of possibilities, both the performers and audience can be transformed: They can be themselves and more as they travel between worlds.

The performance ambitiously hopes to guide members of the audience and to equip them for the journey with empathy and intellect, passion and critique. There are creative tensions at the borders between self and Other, yet [p. 177 ↓] the performance hopes to challenge them to become witness, interlocutor, subversor, and creator.

The Performers

One of the initial challenges for a performer is the identity of the subjects. In this meeting with identity, the performer is confronted with questions: How is identity formed and what constitutes it? How can performance defer to the ways in which identity changes, transforms itself, and multiplies? Since the performer is transported slowly, deliberately, and incrementally at each rehearsal and at each encounter toward the knowledge and life-world of the subject, the performer is creatively and intellectually *taking it all in*, internalizing and receiving partial maps of meaning that reflect the subject's consciousness and context. This receptiveness, however, is never completely without the generative filter of the performer's own knowledge and location. The process of being transported, of receiving meanings and generating meanings, is a more intimate and potentially a more traumatic engagement for the performers than for the audience members, because the transportation is mentally and viscerally more intense than traveling to the world of Others. It is making those worlds your home place. The performer is not only *engaged*, but also strives *to become*. For the performer, this is an endeavor not only to live in an individual consciousness shaped by a *social world*, but also to live in that social world as well. Of course, by "living in that social world," I do not mean literally changing your address. I do, however, mean that the performer must first seriously research all the crucial elements that encompass a cognitive map of the social, economic, cultural, and political practices that constitute that world. Moreover, the performer must be committed—doing what must be done

or going where one must go—to experience the felt-sensing dynamic of that world: its tone-color—the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, textures, rhythms—the visceral ethos of that world.

In personal narrative performances, particularly of contested identities, performers are not only performing the words of subjects, they are performing the subjects' political landscapes. Cultural studies scholar Lawrence Grossberg (1994) calls this “spatial territorialisation”; he writes, “Places and spaces, of people, practices, and commodities, describes this political landscape. It is in this sense that discourse is always placed, because people are always anchored or invested in specific sites. Hence, it matters how and where practices and people are placed, since the place determines from and to where one can speak (or act)” (p. 20). Identity is then constituted by [p. 178 ↓] identification with certain cultural practices and connected to creation, empowerment, and belonging. At the same time, identity is contingent upon how these practices and locales change over time. Identity is definable yet multiple, contested yet affirmed, contextual yet personal, a matter of difference and a matter of identification.

As the performer is being transported into domains both of spatial territorialization and of the subject's consciousness, we understand this process is always partial, contingent, and relative. While some performers more than others struggle through the complicated tensions between trauma and transformation, any move toward transgression is dangerous without taking on the serious questions of identity conjoined with representation. Performance becomes the vehicle by which a representation is manifest and through which identity is presented; therefore, representation of the Other is a value-laden construction of signification within a specific context. Representation and identity are largely mediated through the performer's body—what it does and says in performance space. Therefore, in the performance of possibilities, we understand representation as first and foremost a responsibility. We are responsible for the creation of what and who is being represented; we are representing the represented, and our representing most often carries with it political ramifications far beyond the reach of the performance. Again, because “how a people are represented is how they are treated” (Hall, 1998, p. 27), the act of representation is also an act of material consequences. The body politic responds to individuals and communities by the way they understand them, which is itself based upon a complex configuration of discourses and experiences, none of which is more profound than how these lives enter their consciousness through representations in cultural performances.

In a performance of possibilities, moral responsibility and artistic excellence culminate in an active intervention to break through unfair closures, remake the possibility for new openings, and bring the margins to a shared center. The performance of possibility does not arrogantly assume that we exclusively are giving voice to the silenced, for we understand that they speak and have been speaking in spaces and places often foreign to us. Nor are we assuming that we possess the unequivocal knowledge and skills to enable people to intervene in injustice—or that they have not been intervening through various other forms all the time.

We understand that in performing the contested identities of subjects that there must be caution and politics. We are involved in an ethics guided by caution and a strategy informed by cultural politics. We are not recklessly speaking to and against one location, but to our very endeavor

and ourselves. We are involved with the “opening the self” work of breaking, with the grandest dialogic possibility of remaking.

[p. 179 ↓]

Warm-Ups

1. Discuss the social dramas that have an impact on your life both personally and on a broader (inter)national scale. How do they both adhere to and diverge from Turner's (1982a, 1982b, 1985) paradigm?
2. What is the value of understanding ethnography through a performance paradigm?
3. What are the most memorable cultural performances you have experienced and how did they affect you?
4. How would you use performance in your research?

Notes

1. From *Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, by Victor Turner. Copyright © 1982 Victor Turner and PAJ Publications. Reprinted by permission of PAJ Publications.

2. This section, “Staging Ethnography and the Performance of Possibilities,” is used with permission from the National Communication Association. Reprinted from Madison, D. Soyini. “Performance, Personal Narratives, and the Politics of Possibility.” 1988. In Dailey, Sheron J. (Ed.), *The Future of Performance Studies: Visions and Revisions*. Washington, DC: National Communication Association. 276–286.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to Critical Ethnography: Theory and Method

[p. 1 ↓]

Critical ethnography is conventional ethnography with a political purpose.

—Jim Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography* (1993)

We should not choose between critical theory and ethnography. Instead, we see that researchers are cutting new paths to rein-scribing critique in ethnography.

—George Noblit, Susana Y. Flores, & Enrique G. Murillo, Jr., *Post Critical Ethnography: An Introduction* (2004)

Last summer, while attending an annual, local documentary film festival in a small movie theatre with about 80 or more other interested people, I waited with great anticipation for one of the award-winning documentaries to begin. It had been highly recommended by a friend and the festival description was intriguing. From what I could gather, the subject of the film related to women's human rights in Ghana, West Africa. I was very excited about seeing it. I was hoping the film was inspired by the work of indigenous [p. 2 ↓] human rights activists in the developing world, particularly in Ghana, since it is a country for which I have deep affection. I lived there for almost three years conducting field research with local activists on human rights violations against women and girls.

As I waited anxiously for the documentary to start, I began to reflect back on my fieldwork and my days in Ghana working with and learning from Ghanaian human rights activists. I thought of the many sacrifices these people make in working for the victims of human rights abuses in their own country: by providing shelter and protection for them, by enlightening their countrymen and-women on the importance of human rights, and by their own political acumen in helping establish human rights policies. They are truly committed, openly condemning abusive cultural practices while simultaneously advocating for economic and social justice in the developing world. I witnessed so many of them being denigrated and condemned by members of their own communities; however, they forged ahead because of their belief in human dignity and self-determination.

The more I was exposed to the struggles of African men and women working in their own countries for peace, justice, and human rights, the more I realized how their work goes unrecognized by many of us in the West or global North. For many of us, the primary representations we see of developing countries, particularly Africa, are of tribal warfare, corruption, human rights abuses, and those desperately seeking asylum in the West. These representations do not tell the whole truth. The battle these local activists are fighting is one of immense proportions within their own communities that is made more difficult by the forces of global inequities. I remain inspired by the profound importance of their work. I welcomed this documentary as further credit to them.

The film began. A story was unfolding—a story being told by a young Ghanaian woman. My excitement grew. The camera focused on the young woman and shifted intermittently to particular sites in Ghana. As she told her story, she recounted the fear, helplessness, and desperation she felt when confronted by her father's demand that she undergo female circumcision (or what is variously referred to as *female incision*, *female genital mutilation*, or *clitoridectomy*). The portrayal was of a frightened young woman alone in a country where there was no refuge, no one to assist her, and no space of protection and safety. I was beginning to feel uncomfortable; there was something wrong with this story. The documentary came to an end, adapting a tone of hope and opportunity, as the young woman looked into the camera and poignantly expressed that she was finally safe: She had fled the dangers of Ghana. She is now in safe asylum in the United States of America.

The film ended with bold white letters written across the screen revealing the large numbers of women threatened by female incision. It told a tragic, [p. 3 ↓] compelling, beautiful, and well-crafted story of a young woman fleeing a dangerous country where there was no protection from the wrath of her father and the mutilation of her body; moreover, the enormous pain and injustice threatening this woman was all averted in the only option available to her: asylum—the safe haven of the United States.

I began to tremble with rage. The documentary was seriously misleading. It competed with countless other documentaries and it won; therefore, it was given a public viewing before hundreds of people attending the film festival. My blood was boiling. It was a gross and dangerous misrepresentation of Ghana and her people.

During the question-and-answer session, I could not contain my anger over the suggestion that there was no intervention or protection in Ghana for human rights abuses, thereby erasing the work of human rights activists in that country as though they were nonexistent. The filmmaker responded to my comments by stating that female incision occurs in the rural areas of Ghana, far from the city and out of reach from the work of the activists I knew. I sat there in utter disbelief. I had traveled throughout Ghana and knew first-hand of the work of activists in the rural area represented in the film. I witnessed their struggles against female incision.

I know the story of Mahmudu Issah, who with his organization of rights activists work in the same area where the woman in the documentary says she found no refuge. Muhamudu and his comrades are struggling with little resources to combat female incision and other human rights abuses at great risk to their lives and livelihoods. They provide safety and protection while making great strides to change the practice. Theirs is a far more compelling story that was absent in the film, leaving the viewer to assume they do not exist.

After it was all over and people were leaving the theatre, the filmmaker came up to me wishing to talk further about the film and the concerns I expressed. She spoke briefly of the region she visited and the woman who told the story. After listening to her speak and sensing her genuine concern around the issue of representation, it was clear to me that she was sincere in her efforts to create a documentary that depicted the experience of this woman and to make a statement about the cruelty of this traditional practice. I believe her intent was sincerely to help

this particular woman and to bring attention to a cultural practice that imperils the freedom and well being of women. She was, for all intents and purposes, trying to “do the right thing.”

So, why does my discontent with the representation of this woman's story still weigh so heavily that it occupies the opening pages in a book on ethics, performance, and critical ethnography? It is because with all the good intentions, excellent craftsmanship, and even with the reliability and eloquence of a particular story, representing Others is always going to be a complicated [p. 4 ↓] and contentious undertaking. I believe the documentarian to be ethical; yet the documentary, as with all products of representation, still raises ethical questions. These questions of ethics and representation are obviously not exclusive to this documentary. They arise again and again as I encounter ethnographic and qualitative projects and as I meet artists, researchers, students, and activists engaging the worlds and meanings of Others.

As I continue to think about the documentary, I must also be self-reflexive about my own discontent. After all, the medium was documentary; it was not a book or an article. The documentary does not purport to be ethnography, let alone critical ethnography. So why should I be disturbed? Why should the recounting of this experience occupy the opening pages of this book? The answer is that the film not only documented the lives and stories of real people the filmmaker came to know but also introduced those lives and stories to us. Representation has consequences: How people are represented is how they are treated (Hall, 1997). Whether *claiming* to be ethnography or not, the documentary was ethnographic in that the author or interpreter spent time in a location interacting with others within that prescribed space; furthermore, she interpreted and recorded what she found there and then, through her own interpretive standpoint, represented those findings to us. We meet the woman, learned of her experience and her culture through the idiosyncratic lens of the interpreter's interpretation. In this instance, as in most, interpretation held a great deal of power.

I recount the story of the documentary to illustrate what is at stake when you stand in as the transmitter of information and the skilled interpreter in both presenting and representing the lives and stories of others whom you have come to know and who have given you permission to reveal their stories. This illustration raises a multitude of questions; however, there are five central questions I invite the reader to consider:

1. How do we reflect upon and evaluate our own purpose, intentions, and frames of analysis as researchers?
2. How do we predict consequences or evaluate our own potential to do harm?
3. How do we create and maintain a dialogue of collaboration in our research projects between ourselves and Others?
4. How is the specificity of the local story relevant to the broader meanings and operations of the human condition?
5. How—in what location or through what intervention—will our work make the greatest contribution to equity, freedom, and justice?

These are questions we will engage throughout this book.

[p. 5 ↓] A few days after seeing the documentary, I expressed my concern to one of the judges of the festival who chose that particular documentary for viewing. She admonished me for believing that the film further entrenched the “backward view of Africa” and that it erased local human rights activists and their work. “After all,” she said, “the film was only fifteen minutes long: There wasn't time to depict human rights. Anyway it is a documentary, and she is a filmmaker, not an anthropologist!” Whether in the form of a film or a book, or whether the recorder is a filmmaker or an anthropologist, or whether an account must be condensed to a paragraph or fills a 300-page monograph, we must still be accountable for the consequences of our representations and the implications of our message—because they matter.

Positionality and Shades of Ethnography

Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain. By “ethical responsibility,” I mean a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on moral principles of human freedom and well-being, and hence a compassion for the suffering of living beings. The conditions for existence within a particular context are not as they *could* be for specific subjects; as a result, the researcher feels a moral obligation to make a contribution toward changing those conditions toward greater freedom and equity. The critical ethnographer also takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the *status quo*, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control. Therefore, the critical ethnographer resists domestication and moves from “what is” to “what could be” (Carspecken, 1996; Denzin, 2001; Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004; Thomas, 1993). Because the critical ethnographer is committed to the art and craft of fieldwork, empirical methodologies become the foundation for inquiry, and it is here “on the ground” of Others that the researcher encounters social conditions that become the point of departure for research (Thomas, 1993). We now begin to probe other possibilities that will challenge institutions, regimes of knowledge, and social practices that limit choices, constrain meaning, and denigrate identities and communities.

What does it mean for the critical ethnographer to “resist domestication”? It means that she will use the resources, skills, and privileges available to her to make accessible—to penetrate the borders and break through the confines in defense of—the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach. This means the critical ethnographer contributes to emancipatory knowledge and discourses of social justice. The [p. 6 ↓] often quoted phrase “Knowledge is power” reflects how narrow perception, limited modes of understanding, and uncritical thinking diminish the capacity to envision alternative life possibilities; domestication will prohibit new forms of addressing conflict, and it will dishonor the foreign and the different. Knowledge is power relative to social justice, because knowledge guides and equips us to identify, name, question, and act against the unjust; consequently, we unsettle another layer of complicity. But, I must now confess: there is something missing with my singular emphasis on politics and the resistance of domestication.

The documentary, reflecting the aims of a critical ethnography project, took a stand against “suffering” and “injustice”—but it was not enough. I found its critique problematic. Therefore, I will argue that critical ethnography must begin to extend its political aims and augment its notion

of “domestication” and “politics.” Politics alone are incomplete without self-reflection. Critical ethnography must further its goals from simply politics to the politics of positionality. The question becomes, How do we begin to discuss our positionality as ethnographers and as those who represent Others?

Michelle Fine (1994) outlines three positions in qualitative research (p. 17):

1. The *ventriloquist* stance that merely “transmits” information in an effort toward neutrality and is absent of a political or rhetorical stance. The position of the ethnographer aims to be invisible, that is, the “self” strives to be nonexistent in the text.
2. The positionality of *voices* is where the subjects themselves are the focus, and their voices carry forward indigenous meanings and experiences that are in opposition to dominant discourses and practices. The position of the ethnographer is vaguely present but not addressed.
3. The *activism* stance in which the ethnographer takes a clear position in intervening on hegemonic practices and serves as an advocate in exposing the material effects of marginalized locations while offering alternatives.

Fine's outline is similar to the three positions of social inquiry set forth by Jurgen Habermas (1971) when he discusses the (a) *natural science model* of empirical analysis, in which the social world can be measured, predicted, and tested as life phenomena in the natural sciences through the invisible reportage of the researcher; (b) *historical and interpretive model*, in which social phenomena is described and its meanings and functions further elaborated through the balanced commentary and philosophical descriptions of the researcher; and the (c) *critical theory model*, in which social life is represented and analyzed for the political purpose of overcoming social oppression, particularly forms that reflect advanced capitalism through the overt polemics of the researcher. (See also Davis, 1999, p. 61.)

[p. 7 ↓] In the examples above, various positions of social science and qualitative researchers are *described*; however, George W. Noblit, Susana Y. Flores, and Enrique G. Murillo, Jr. (2004) take positionality a step further in what they refer to as *postcritical ethnography*. They not only describe positionality, but also comprehensively critique it relative to traditional notions of critical ethnography. Noblit et al. state that much of critical ethnography has been criticized for its focus on social change but lack of focus on the researchers own *positionality*: “Critical ethnographers must explicitly consider how their own acts of studying and representing people and situations are acts of domination even as critical ethnographers reveal the same in what they study” (p. 3).

Positionality is vital because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subjects. A concern for positionality is sometimes understood as “reflexive ethnography”: it is a “turning back” on ourselves (Davis, 1999). When we turn back, we are accountable for own research paradigms, our own positions of authority, and our own moral responsibility relative to representation and interpretation. We begin to ask ourselves, What are we going to do with the research and who ultimately will benefit? Who gives us the authority to make claims about where we have been?

How will our work make a difference in people's lives? But we might also begin to ask another kind of question: What difference *does* it make when the ethnographer himself comes from a history of colonization and disenfranchisement? Enrique G Murillo, Jr., describes these identities in his revisioning of the term *mojado*:

Mojado ethnography is how I have chosen to describe one node along my journey. Mojado (wetback) refers to Mexicans and other Latinos who cross the nation-state territorial border into the United States, and are socially, politically, economically (as well as legally) constructed as “illegal entrants,” and “newcomers.” ... Mojado symbolizes the distrust and dislike experienced in *gringolandia*, as *la raza odiada*, “those damn Mexicans” *extranjeros*, which literally means “outsiders.” ... My experience as an educational ethnographer, to date, can sometimes be described as traveling those blurred boundaries when Other becomes researcher, narrated becomes narrator, translated becomes translator, native becomes anthropologist, and how one emergent and intermittent identity continuously informs the other. (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 166)

Murillo's positionality moves against the objective, neutral observer. Fieldwork research has a very long and early history of scientific empiricism and concern with systematic analysis that is testable, verifiable, and objective without the distraction or impairment of subjectivity, ideology, or emotion. What many early researchers, particularly during the colonial and modern period, did not recognize was that their stalwart “objectivity” was [p. 8 ↓] already subjective in the value-laden classification, meanings, and worldviews they employed and superimposed upon peoples who were different from them. The current emphasis on reflexive ethnography or postcritical ethnography and its critique of objectivity are in sharp contrast to the philosophy of a value-neutral fieldwork methodology that favors the analytic evaluation of the natural science model. But critical ethnography—or what some have called the “new ethnography” (Goodall, 2000)—must not only critique the notion of objectivity, but must also critique the notion of subjectivity as well. More and more ethnographers are heralding the unavoidable and complex factor of subjective inquiry as they simultaneously examine its position. Moreover, the current thinking is not that ethnographers can simply say or do anything they think or feel and pass it off as fact, but rather that they make sure we do not say “is” when we mean “ought”—or as Thomas (1993) writes, “We are simply forbidden to submit value judgments in place of facts or to leap to ‘ought’ conclusions without a demonstrable cogent theoretical and empirical linkage” (p. 22).

In various dimensions, this was done under the traditional banner of objectivity, when cultures and people were reinvented and redefined to fit inside the biased classifications and philosophical systems of the objective researcher. However, we are now more and more critical of the subjective researcher and how that subjectivity reflects upon its own power position, choices, and effects. This “new” or postcritical ethnography is the move to contextualize our own positionality, thereby making it accessible, transparent, and vulnerable to judgment and evaluation. In this way, we take ethical responsibility for our own subjectivity and political perspective, resisting the trap of gratuitous self-centeredness or of presenting an interpretation as though it has no “self,” as though it is not accountable for its consequences and effects. Doing fieldwork is a personal experience. Our intuition, senses, and emotions—or what Wallace Bacon (1979) collectively refers to as “felt-sensing”—are powerfully woven into and inseparable

from the process. We are inviting an ethics of accountability by taking the chance of being proven wrong (Thomas, 1993).

Dialogue and the other

As we recognize the vital importance of illuminating the researcher's positionality, we also understand that critical ethnography requires a deep and abiding dialogue with the Other as never before. This means that our attention to ethnographic positionality still must remain grounded in the empirical world of the Other. In fact, it is this concern for the Other that demands we attend seriously to our position as researchers. Ethnographic positionality [p. 9 ↓] is not identical to subjectivity. Subjectivity is certainly within the domain of positionality, but positionality requires that we direct our attention beyond our individual or *subjective* selves. Instead, we attend to how our subjectivity *in relation to the Other* informs and is informed by our engagement and representation of the Other. We are not simply subjects, but we are subjects in dialogue with the Other. We understand that our subjectivity is an inherent part of research, but in critical ethnography it is not my *exclusive* experience—that is autobiography, travel writing, or memoir (or what some people call *autoethnography*). I contend that *critical* ethnography is always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among the Other(s), one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in the Other's world.

A more detailed explication of the relationship and dialogue with the Other is further elaborated in the corpus of work by Dwight Conquergood (1982a, 1982b, 1983, 1984, 1986a, 1986b, 1988, 1989, 1991, 1992, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2000a, 2000b). Conquergood frames dialogue as performance and contends that the aim of “dialogical performance” is to bring self and Other together so they may question, debate, and challenge one another. Dialogue is framed as performance to emphasize the living communion of a felt-sensing, embodied interplay and engagement between human beings. For Conquergood, dialogue resists conclusions. It is intensely committed to keeping the meanings between and the conversations with the researcher and the Other open and ongoing. It is a reciprocal giving and receiving rather than a timeless resolve. The dialogical stance is situated in multiple expressions that transgress, collide, and embellish realms of meaning. Dialogue is both difference and unity, both agreement and disagreement, both a separation and a coming together. For Conquergood, ethnographic, performative dialogue is more like a hyphen than a period. Dialogue is therefore the quintessential encounter with the Other.

Moreover, it is through dialogue and meeting with the Other that I am most fully myself. The wonderful paradox in the ethnographic moment of dialogue and Otherness is that communion with an Other brings the self more fully into being and, in doing so, opens you to know the Other more fully. Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) writes,

I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a thou). Separation, dissociation, enclosure within the self is the main reason for the loss of one's self. The very being of man is the deepest communion. ... To be means to be

for another, through the other, for oneself. (p. 287)

[p. 10 ↓] It is the dialogic relationship with the Other, this ongoing liveliness and resistance to finality that resists the connotation of timelessness commonly described as “the ethnographic present,” that has adversely haunted traditional ethnography. The ethnographic present refers to the representation of a timeless account of the culture or people being studied. Charlotte Aull Davis (1999) states,

The ethnographer moves on. [But] temporally, spatially and developmentally, the people he or she studied are presented as if suspended in an unchanging and virtually timeless state, as if the ethnographer's description provides all that it is important, or possible, to know about their past and future. (p. 156)

The Other inscribed as a static, unchanging, and enduring imprint in the ethnographic present is dislodged by a dialogic, critical ethnography. Dialogue moves from ethnographic *present* to ethnographic *presence* by opening the passageways for readers and audiences to experience and grasp the partial presence of a temporal conversation constituted by the Other's voice, body, history, and yearnings. This conversation with the Other, brought forth through dialogue, reveals itself as a lively, changing being through time and no longer an artifact captured in the ethnographer's monologue, immobile and forever stagnant.

Note: Brief Historical Overview of Critical Ethnography

The field of ethnography in the United States is primarily influenced by two traditions: the British anthropologist from the 19th century and the Chicago School from the 1960s.

Anthropology and British Functionalism

Anthropology was established as an academic discipline during the middle of the 19th century. In the beginning, the questionnaire was the main method the missionaries, traders, sailors, explorers, and colonial administrators used to obtain data from the population that inhabited their local outposts or stations. The questionnaires were then sent back to the colonial metropolis for the “armchair” ethnologists to interpret (Davis, 1999, p. 60). The most noted work of this period is James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1900).

Toward the end of the century, more ethnologists financed their own expeditions to “far off lands” for the purpose of conducting surveys. These surveys were generally based upon predetermined questions for the interests and benefit of the colonial empire (Davis, 1999, p. 68). The limitations, distortions, [p. 11 ↓] and superficiality of these accounts created a growing unrest and demand for more detail. As a result, in the early years of the 20th century there was a turn toward longer engagements in these locations. This was the foundation for long-term participant observation fieldwork and is associated with the work of Bronislaw Malinowski (1926, 1945) in Britain and Franz Boas (1928, 1931) in America

and their students. As Davis (1999) writes about Malinowski and Boas,

Both had come to recognize the complexity of the so-called primitive and to link this with both an attack on cultural evolutionism and a deep and genuine (if sometime naïve and unreflexive) opposition to ethnocentrism. ... Both were concerned to recognize and include in their analysis the interconnectedness of each individual society's cultural forms and social structures; in British social anthropology, this came to be expressed theoretically by Radcliffe-Brown's structural functionalism; in American anthropology, its fullest expression took the form of an interest in culture complexes. (p. 69)

Structural Functionalism.

A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's (1958) development of structural functionalism is concerned with defining and determining social structures and the interconnectedness within their own system of structures. It excludes any consideration of external influences; the focus was on the mechanisms that sustain the structure, thereby deeming human behavior as a function of the structures that guide and determine their culture and conduct.

The Chicago School

The Chicago School of ethnography developed in the 1920s in the Department of Social Science and Anthropology at the University of Chicago. Key contributors to the school were Robert Park (1864–1944), who turned the focus of fieldwork to the urban landscape; G. H. Mead (1865–1931) and John Dewey (1859–1932), who emphasized pragmatism; and Herbert Bloomer (1900–1987), proponent of symbolic interactionism. The Chicago School is credited for laying the foundation for “a vibrant and increasingly methodologically sophisticated program of interpretive ethnography” (Thomas, 1993, p. 11).

Positivism

Positivism is based on the idea that empiricism must reach the goal of positive knowledge—that is, prediction, laws of succession and variability. **[p. 12 ↓]** Positivists believe genuine knowledge is founded by direct experience and that experience is composed of social facts to be determined while reducing any distortion of subjectivity (theology or metaphysics) by the presence of the ethnographer. Therefore, positivism is based on the following assumptions outlined by Norman K. Denzin (2001): (a) There is a reality that can be objectively interpreted; (b) the researcher as a subject must be separate from any representation of the object researched; (c) generalizations about the object of research are “free from situational and temporal constraints: that is, they are universally generalizable” (p. 44); (d) there is a cause and effect for all phenomena—there are “no causes without effects and no effects without causes” (p. 44); and (e) our analyses are objective and “value-free” (p. 44).

Post-Positivism

The post-positive turn—or what is variously referred to as the “performance turn,” the “postmodern turn,” the “new ethnography,” or the “seventh movement” (Denzin, 2001, 2003)—has denounced the tenets of positivism. Positivism's goal for objectivity, prediction, cause/effect, and generalization has been replaced by the recognition and contemplation of subjective human experience, contingencies of truth claims, value-laden inquiry, and local knowledge and vernacular expressions as substantive analytical frameworks.

The Method and Theory Nexus

This book serves as a resource for qualitative researchers who wish to emphasize critical analysis, ethical considerations, and theories and practices of performance. In order to proceed, I must first stress that criticism, ethics, and performance require a level of *theoretical understanding*. Theory becomes a necessity, because it guides the meanings and the vocabulary for each of these three domains. Theory is embedded in their definitions and functions: Critical analysis is grounded in social theory, ethics is grounded in moral philosophy, and performance is both a practice and a theory. In accepting the significance of theoretical knowledge, it is equally important for us to comprehend the way in which theory is at times the same as method, and at other times distinct from it.

How are theory and method the same and different? They are the same in that theory is used in ethnography as an *interpretive or analytical method*. We often rely on theory—whether it is Marxist theory, critical race theory, or phenomenology—to interpret or illuminate a social phenomenon. However, though theory may guide and inspire us in composing a lay [p. 13 ↓] summary, designing interview questions, or coding data, it is not theory but a methodological process that directs the completion of the task. The relationship between theory and method has a long and provocative history reflected in disciplinary boundaries and research traditions privileging one over the other, as well as defining them as exclusively separate spheres.

The researcher engaged in ethnography, ethics, and performance needs both theory and method.

This tension between theory and method can be addressed by emphasizing what is significant about each as separate spheres and as inseparable entities. According to Joe L. Kinchloe and Peter McLaren (2000), critical theory finds its method in critical ethnography. In this sense, ethnography becomes the “doing”—or, better, the performance—of critical theory. To think of ethnography as *critical theory in action* is an interesting and productive description. The following quotation from Jim Thomas (1993) underscores this point. He refers to critical theory as “intellectual rebellion.” The passage is useful because, as it describes the approach of critical theory, it is also describes the aim of critical ethnography:

The roots of critical thought spread from a long tradition of intellectual rebellion in which rigorous examination of ideas and discourse constituted political challenge. Social

critique, by definition, is radical. It implies an evaluative judgment of meaning and method in research, policy, and human activity. Critical thinking implies freedom by recognizing that social existence, including our knowledge of it, is not simply composed of givens imposed on us by powerful and mysterious forces. This recognition leads to the possibility of transcending existing forces. The act of critique implies that by thinking about and acting upon the world, we are able to change both our subjective interpretations and objective conditions. (p. 18)

Critical social theory evolves from a tradition of “intellectual rebellion” that includes radical ideas challenging regimes of power that changed the world. As ethnographers, we employ theory at several levels in our analysis: to articulate and identify hidden forces and ambiguities that operate beneath appearances; to guide judgments and evaluations emanating from our discontent; to direct our attention to the critical expressions within different interpretive communities relative to their unique symbol systems, customs, and codes; to demystify the ubiquity and magnitude of power; to provide insight and inspire acts of justice; and to name and analyze what is intuitively felt.

If, as Kinchloe and McLaren (2000) suggest, critical theory finds its most compelling method in critical ethnography, then we must not only comprehend the necessity of theory but also its *method*. Enrique G. Murillo, Jr. (2004), states,

[p. 14 ↓] Theory is linked to methods, and methods to the scenes studied, grounding one's work. The methods rely heavily on direct observation (participant observation), open-ended interviewing, and textual analysis of human products. However, the degree and extent of utilization of each of these methods depend on the researcher's purposes, the guiding questions, theoretical framework, and the scene itself. (p. 157)

Although theory may fund the guiding principles of our doing, there is a necessary and distinct attention that must be given to the guidelines, techniques, and processes of that doing itself—our method. Theory, when used as a mode of interpretation, *is* a method, yet it can be distinguished from method (and indeed take a back seat to method) when a set of *concrete actions* grounded by a specific scene are required to complete a task. Murillo eloquently reminds us that methods are not simply isolated or immutable activities, but are contingent on our purpose, our fundamental questions, the theories that inform our work, and the scene itself.

I began the chapter with a story about representation. I will end this chapter by coming back to the story and the central question it raised: How do we represent Others and their world for *just* purposes? We have begun to address the question in this chapter by introducing the themes of *positionality*, *dialogue*, *Otherness*, and the *theory/method nexus*.

Summary

- **Positionality.** Positionality is vital because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we denounce the power structures that surround our subjects. A concern for positionality is a reflexive ethnography; it is a turning back on ourselves. When we turn back on ourselves, we examine our intentions, our methods,

and our possible effects. We are accountable for our research paradigms, our authority, and our moral responsibility relative to representation and interpretation.

- **Dialogue/Otherness.** Dialogue emphasizes the living communion of a felt-sensing, embodied interplay and engagement between human beings. Dialogue keeps the meanings between and the conversations with the researcher and the Other open and ongoing. The conversation with the Other that is brought forth through dialogue reveals itself as a lively, changing being through time and no longer an artifact captured in the ethnographer's monologue or written transcript—fixed in time and forever stagnant.

[p. 15 ↓]

- **Theory/Method.** Critical ethnography becomes the “doing” or the “performance” of critical theory. It is critical theory in action. Theory, when used as a mode of interpretation, is a method, yet it can be distinguished from method (and indeed take a back seat to method) when a set of concrete actions grounded by a specific scene is required to complete a task. We rely on theory—whether it is Marxist theory, critical race theory, or phenomenology—to interpret or illuminate a social action. However, in composing a lay summary, designing interview questions, or coding data, theory may inspire and guide, but it is a methodological process that directs and completes the task.

In the following chapter, an examination of methods is explored in greater detail. After the methods chapter, a series of hypothetical case studies are presented to illustrate how theory is applied as an interpretive method. [Chapter 2](#) specifically discusses initial methods employed as the researcher enters the field, including such topics as “Starting Where You Are,” “Being Part of an Interpretive Community,” “The Research Design,” “The Lay Summary,” “Interviewing and Field Techniques,” and “Coding and Logging Data.” [Chapter 3](#) comprises three fictional case studies or ethnographic stories that use key concepts from particular theoretical frameworks. Case One includes key concepts from *postcolonial and Marxist criticism*; Case Two includes key concepts from *theories of phenomenology, subjectivity, symbolism, and sexuality*; and Case Three includes key concepts from *critical race and feminist theory*.

Warm-Ups

1. Take an image—it can be from a photograph, a painting, an advertisement—and speak from the points of view of the various objects or characters within the image. How are they each expressing differently what it means to be within the frame or parameters of the image? How are they expressing their relationship to the other figures or images around them? In your various voicings of what is within the image, are you giving more emphasis to one or more images over others? Why or why not?
2. View the film *Rashomon* or observe a similar story that is constructed from several viewpoints that each tell their side of one story. How does the writer, filmmaker, or teller construct the narrative to give voice to the various characters? What devices are used?

[p. 16 ↓]

3. Choose a current situation in world events in which two competing sides have been locked in enduring opposition and conflict. Speak from the position of each side with sincere, calm, and thoughtful persuasion and belief. Then, speak as the critical ethnographer in an effort to interpret the situation in order to make change.

Suggested Readings

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Chapter 2: Methods: “Do I Really Need a Method?” A Method ... or Deep Hanging-Out

[p. 17 ↓]

Human reality as such is an interpreted reality, a social construction given shape and meaning by the various cultural discourses/texts that circulate within it. Those texts that carry the weight of cultural authority as “reliable knowledge” or “objective information” (e.g., expert opinions or news reports) exerts powerful influences on how common perceptions are formed and common sense is made.

—Mary S. Strine, “Critical Theory and ‘Organic’ Intellectuals: Reframing the Work of Cultural Critique” (1991)

One day a student in my Performance Ethnography course raised her hand and said, “My advisor told me that *methods* are not necessary and that all you really need in the field is *deep hanging-out*.” I had been teaching this course for more than 10 years, and I had recently come back from my fieldwork in West Africa. I have been asked all sorts of questions over the years related to the theory/method divide. However, I noticed that this particular student was more emphatic in her dismissal of methods. Although the course is offered in the Department of Communication Studies, students enroll from across the campus—students in sociology, education, history, folklore, and anthropology. The young woman came from another [p. 18 ↓] department outside the field of communication studies; she later expressed that it is only anthropologists who do “real” fieldwork. She was told to believe that self-reflection and intuition, good theory and politics, and in-depth knowledge of context and culture were all that was needed for “real” fieldwork. Another student in the course from sociology was completely irritated by her dismissal of methodology and adamantly expressed her discontent by stating, “If you don't have a methodology, you don't have anything! What do you think you are doing in the field?”

Over the years, it has become clear to me that certain disciplines have their own philosophy about the nature and definition of methods and their value. These tensions surrounding the disciplinary boundaries within and across the humanities and social sciences in defining the term *method* and its use have often resulted in a peculiar turf war: one side regarding fieldwork as more a matter of theory, subjectivities, and culture, with another side regarding it as more a matter of precision, validation, and evidence.

As stated in [Chapter 1](#), method and theory are reciprocally linked yet necessarily distinguishable. At key moments in the ethnographic or qualitative process they are separable, and at other moments seamless. In my own work, there are moments when theory and method are at a discreet distance: for example, when it is time to design interview questions and log data. But it is theory that still informs the kinds of questions I will ask and the categories of data that take priority. Although I always have an overarching theory in my work that guides the purpose and direction of the study, when it is time to design questions, log data, and code

information, I also rely more on concrete procedural models. These models are flexible and context specific, but they follow a basic formula and rather systematic technique. For example, when coding the mass of data on human rights from activists, stakeholders, field notes, and archival research, I employ a technique to order and categorize the morass of data from the general to the specific using a systematic method that is divided by domains, clusters, and themes.

Sometimes, theory will get in the way by actually obstructing method, but there are still other moments when the method is the theory. For example, in the interpretation and analysis of certain data, theory and method become one and the same. In my work with the personal narratives of indigenous human rights activists, a particular interview I examined required a method of analysis that articulated the connection between poverty and human rights abuses. My method of analysis was based on concepts from phenomenology, as well as from postcolonial and Marxist theory. Hence, my theory was my method, and my method was my theory. In terms of the theory-versus-method debate, the dismissal or privileging of one over the other raises important questions and considerations and is sometimes counterproductive. It is as [p. 19 ↓] counterproductive as the disciplinary turf battles that erupt over which disciplinary tradition is more “authentic” or “rigorous” in conducting field-work or which field is more “deeply” ethnographic.

This chapter serves as a practical reference guide. It is geared toward those undergraduate and graduate students who want to know more about *practical methods*, understanding that methods are a *set of procedures or a process for achieving an end, a goal, or a purpose*. In this chapter, I hope to address the question, What is an ethnographic method?

Corrine Glesne (1999) claims that methodological procedures for all qualitative researchers are basically the same: (a) state a purpose, (b) pose a problem or state a question, (c) define a research population, (d) develop a time frame, (e) collect and analyze data, and (f) present outcome (p. 4). James Spradley (1979) lists a methodological sequence that is similar to Glesne's: (a) select a problem, (b) formulate a hypothesis, (c) collect data, (d) analyze data, and (e) write up the results (p. 15).

This chapter will expand upon the methodological sequences outlined by Glesne and Spradley by elaborating upon the particular challenges for critical ethnography.

“Who Am I?": Starting Where You Are

Start where you are. The experiences in your life, both past and present, and who you are as a unique individual will lead you to certain questions about the world and certain problems about why things are the way they are. It is important to honor your own personal history and the knowledge you have accumulated up to this point, as well as the intuition or instincts that draw you toward a particular direction, question, problem, or topic—understanding that you may not always know exactly why or how you are being drawn in that direction. Ask yourself questions that only you can answer: “What truly interests me?” “What do I really want to know more about?” “What is most disturbing to me about society?” You might probe even more deeply and ask yourself, as in the words of the writer Alice Walker (2003), “What is the work my soul must

have?" (p. 238), and go from there.

“Who Else Has Written about My Topic?”: Being a Part of an Interpretive

Community

When you have a general topic in mind, you are then ready to contemplate questions or problems that might relate to your topic. At this stage, in order [p. 20 ↓] to be most effective, it is important to read and examine other studies or models related to the topic. Be very careful that other studies do not become an uncritical or replicated model: be careful that you do not simply summarize or repeat what has already been researched and that you do not entirely reject the value of what has already been researched—avoid a blatant negation without careful consideration. It is important to be both critical of other studies and to be inspired by them. Find the balance between comparison and contrast. Extend and augment the studies you admire, don't simply repeat them. Consider what is useful from the studies you don't admire, even if their usefulness is by contrast. You may be surprised by what you will learn from your unfavorable models, as well as how such models will help you in sharpening your critical skills and refining your topical question or problem.

Other models, favorable and unfavorable, provide ideas about content, form, and method, and, most importantly, you will enrich your knowledge base. By considering other examples, you expand questions and contexts relative to your project and learn by comparing what you wish to adapt from studies you admire and what you wish to contrast and differentiate from those you do not. Moreover, you become part of an interpretive community writing on a subject, a community of other researchers with which you will be in dialogue. You will refer to their work, to enlighten and to critique, and your ideas and arguments will sometimes be in accord and at other times in discord with theirs. Keep in mind that it is also your responsibility as a critical researcher and as a member of a particular interpretive community to know what others are imparting about a subject and community that you have made a commitment to interact with and to learn with and from.

The Power of Purpose: Bracketing Your Subject

After you have identified a subject that you are drawn to and that is of unique interest to you, and after you have examined illustrations that will further guide you toward a more specific question or problem, you are now ready to begin to bracket your subject and contemplate your purpose. At this stage, you want to capture more fully and more specifically the phenomenon you wish to study. This requires that you bracket the population you wish to study (Denzin, 2001; Glesne, 1999; Lofland & Lofland, 1984).

As you identify or bracket in clear terms the population of your study, you are simultaneously developing your research question and your purpose. Take care that you are framing an *identifiable* question or problem, not simply a subject of interests that is general and amorphous. You must be more precise at this stage in identifying a question or problem as it guides you [p. 21 ↓] toward a path of inquiry and interest that is clear and directed. You will be more focused, self-assured, and motivated when you have a subject you feel strongly about and you can articulate for yourself and others. This does not mean that you are confined to this question and that there is no room for change, invention, or discovery along the way. In fact, in my experience, I have found that by clearly identifying a topic (while feeling free to alter and

change), researchers feel more knowledgeable and skilled in changing or taking on different questions or problems, if necessary, than what their original questions or problems demanded. Once you get in the field, your question or problem may be enriched and augmented by what you experience on the ground. It may change into another domain completely or it may remain consistently vital and inspiring. What is important is to identify your question from the onset because, without a research question, your purpose will have less focus and certainty. Moreover, you will have less direction in formulating your ideas if you do need to alter or change the original question or problem.

The following steps serve to help you in the process of developing a specific research problem or question:

- After reviewing the literature and familiarizing yourself with other research models on the topic (including indexes, titles of references from bibliographies, quotations, etc.), note what sparks your interests and jot down titles, phrases, names, and places.
- Combine this list with your own interest and intuitive attraction toward an item, and then brainstorm questions about your subject of interest. Write, write, and keep writing. Take a break, and then write more questions.
- When you have exhausted writing down all the questions that come to mind, then consider the overarching themes that arise. This will take a bit of time, but enjoy the exercise. You will discover and learn from this step as you make connections and build clusters of ideas and meanings that surface and repeat themselves.
- For each cluster that you complete, create a topic sentence or a subject heading in the form of a question that best reflects the composite of questions within each cluster.
- After you have developed the summary or topical question for each of your clusters, you are now closer to the point of narrowing down your array of notes into a solid research question. Review your topical questions and contemplate how your research question will evolve from them. This is a process of prioritizing certain questions over others, eliminating overlaps, and blending [p. 22 ↓] questions together. Throughout the process, and most especially in this last step, keep in mind what it is that you, as a critical ethnographer, want to contribute or change for the cause of social justice. The formulation of your research question serves as an articulation of what it is you want to do and why.

Preparing for the Field: The Research Design and Lay Summary

The Research Design

“Gaining access” is a major concern in qualitative research. There has been a great deal of attention paid to the challenges of what is understood as *entry*. As a qualitative researcher you must consider how you enter the terrain of your subjects in ways that are appropriate, ethical, and effective. As you begin your preparations to enter the field, it is often advisable first to complete *aresearch design*. This is a plan that outlines, step by step, what you hope to accomplish relative to your fieldwork process and methods. A research design comprises key points to be addressed. Please understand that you are not expected to address each of these

points in precise or full detail at the beginning of your study and before you actually enter the field—some points you may address more fully than others. Your research design is to help you organize and plan what you are about to encounter in the field in order to provide more focus, direction, confidence, and sense of purpose.

The following points comprise a research design:

- A restatement of your question or problem
- A description of your (a) data collection methods as coperformer in the field or participant observer; (b) type, style, and techniques of interview; (c) field journal and data logging techniques; (d) data coding process; and (e) theoretical frameworks for data analysis and interpretation
- A delineation of your ethical methods in placing the welfare of subjects first by protecting their rights, interests, privacy, sensibilities, and offering reports at key stages to participants, including the final report
- A description of your research population in terms of (a) geographic location, (b) description of subjects, (c) norms and rules, (d) significant historical and cultural contexts, and (e) expectations for key informants or coperformers within the population
- An outline of your time frame for (a) entering the field, (b) data collection and/or performance process, (c) departure and/or public performance, (d) coding and analysis, and (e) completion of written report and/or public performance at home site

[p. 23 ↓] Please remember that it is perfectly fine if you do not have the answers to all of the questions included in your research design. It may not even be necessary for you to have the answers to them all. The research design is intended to serve as a starting point, a map, or a guide in organizing and specifying your project. It helps lead the way.

The Lay Summary

Remember, the research design is of primary significance to you; however, the *lay summary* is more for the benefit of the subjects you will be meeting. It serves to assist them in understanding who you are, what you are doing, and what their role will be in the process. The lay summary will also address specific questions; however, unlike the research design, the information provided in the lay summary will be relatively more precise and predetermined. However, it is important to keep in mind that your lay summary *draws from the information in your research design*, and several points of information that you will be sharing with participants are already articulated in that design. Also, keep in mind that the purpose of the lay summary is to explain your project to the people who are central to it; therefore, they have the right to know, and you have the responsibility to explain your presence in their lives.¹

The lay summary should address the following questions:

- Who are you? What is your background and where do you come from? You will explain your institutional affiliation or sponsorship, and, if necessary, information that might be significant relative to your cultural, ethnic, or personal identity.
- What are you doing and why? Why are you in this particular place? What exactly do you plan to do here and for what purpose? You will explain to participants (a) what motivated or inspired you to enter into this particular space of their lives, (b) your research methods or how you will collect your data, and (c) your desired outcome and what you specifically hope to contribute toward social change. (Note: You may refer to your research design in communicating these points to participants.)
- What will you do with the results of your study? What happens to the information you gathered here after you leave? You will describe the end product of your fieldwork; that is, you will explain what form the information you gathered is going to take (a book, a performance, a policy report, a classroom assignment, etc.). You will also explain how, where, and to whom this information will be given or distributed.

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- How were participants selected? What mechanisms did you use to gain access to the people in the field with whom you chose to speak and interact? You will explain your method and how you came to locate and meet them: for example, through an introduction from a key participant or community liaison, with assistance from relevant institutions and networks, through word-of-mouth, via the “snowball effect” or the “grapevine,” as well as by “hanging out” at local sites such as churches, social gatherings, rallies, and so forth.
- What are the possible benefits or risks to participants? What will participants gain and/or lose by your presence in their lives? You will explain what you hope your project will do to serve and contribute to the lives or population of your study. This means you will express what difference your presence will make upon a situation or experience that relates to or affects them. You will also express with honesty and humility the possible consequences that your project may have upon the situation and/or their lives. As you describe all the possible negative consequences, you must also speak in clear terms regarding what measures you will take to try to prevent such consequences from occurring. (This point is elaborated with more detail and examples in the section on ethics.)
- How will you assure confidentiality and anonymity, when necessary, for participants as well as the site? You will explain your ethical stance and your methods by outlining step by step how your research data—specifically, names, places, encounters, and identities—will be changed, altered, and safeguarded from the general public, other participants, and your institutional colleagues. (This point is also elaborated with examples and detail in the ethics section.)
- How often and how long would you like to meet for interviews and observations? You will inform participants of why you may need to meet with them on more than one occasion and the possible duration of each meeting. You will also inquire about significant times to meet that will enhance the data and address more fully your research question. You will also keep in mind that how often you meet is contingent upon what is convenient and appropriate for participants.
- How and in what manner will you ask participants’ permission to record their actions,

experiences, and words? After you have described the project, particularly after you have informed participants of possible benefits and consequences, of what will be done with the data, and of the purpose of the project, the *means* by which the data will be recorded will more than likely be less invasive, foreign, or even suspicious. The means by which [p. 25 ↓] you record your data are through notes, tape recordings, photographs, and videotaping. You will obviously ask permission to record, especially for photographs and audio or video recordings. It is often good practice, particularly with video recordings, and for participants who are reluctant to meet a day or two before the more formal interview. If time allows, have a conversation about more general subjects that are innocuous or that are of interests to them in order to develop more familiarity and ease with the videotape. It is also effective when using video to make arrangements for these individuals to be part of a group interview and discussion before you videotape them individually. Being part of a group for the initial taping buffers the focus and concentration on them as individuals. It gives them an opportunity to interact with and respond to others who are also being taped and to witness by comparison or contrast how others respond.

The lay summary, like the research design, serves only as a guide or a map. Remember that every situation is different and context specific. It is important to feel free to adapt and adjust the need of the lay summary to your particular project and situation.

Interviewing and Field Techniques

Unlike survey interviews, in which those giving information are relatively passive and are not allowed the opportunity to elaborate, interviewees in qualitative interviews share in the work of the interview, sometimes guiding it in channels of their own choosing. They are treated as partners rather than as objects of research.

—Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*(1995)

Interviewing is a hallmark experience of fieldwork research (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The ethnographic interview opens realms of meaning that permeate beyond rote information or finding the “truth of the matter.” The interviewee is not an object, but a subject with agency, history, and his or her own idiosyncratic command of a story. Interviewer and interviewee are in partnership and dialogue as they construct memory, meaning, and experience together. The primary aim of much social science research is to locate valid and reliable information, with the interviewer directing the questions and the interviewee answering them as truthfully as possible. This is not to suggest that validity and substantiation are irrelevant in critical ethnography, because they are indeed significant at many levels of inquiry. However, [p. 26 ↓] critical ethnography reflects deeper truths than the need for verifiable facts and information. The beauty of this method of interviewing is in the complex realms of individual subjectivity, memory, yearnings, polemics, and hope that are unveiled and inseparable from shared and inherited expressions of communal strivings, social history, and political possibility. The interview is a window to individual subjectivity and collective belonging: *I am because we are and we are because I am.*

The ethnographic interview may encompass three forms: (1) *oral history*, which is a recounting of a social historical moment reflected in the life or lives of individuals who remember them and/or experienced them; (2) *personal narrative*, which is an individual perspective and expression of an event, experience, or point of view; and (3) *topical interview*, the point of view given to a particular subject, such as a program, an issue, or a process. It is important to note that these forms are not isolated from one another. They are separated here for definitional purposes, because they each have special albeit discrete characteristics from the others. But please keep in mind that each type will often and necessarily overlap with the others.

Formulating Questions

What is seen, heard, and experienced in the field, these are “the nuggets around which you construct your questions.”

—Corrine Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* (1999)

One of the most interesting and important challenges of the interview process is during the initial stages, when you are thinking about what questions to ask. There are those who have a natural talent for asking questions, while others are not so sure what to ask or how to ask it and need more guidance. Questions will naturally evolve the more time you spend in the field and the more experience you have with participants and with the context and culture in which they live or work. It is generally advised that researchers should have a basic level of understanding of the field—the general history, meanings, practices, institutions, and beliefs that constitute it—before they plunge full force into the actual face-to-face interviewing. Spending time closely listening, observing, and interacting in the field while compiling extensive field notes will provide a foundation of knowledge and experience upon which you may begin to craft your questions.

Greater knowledge and familiarity before you begin your interviews will inspire your questions. Your field notes will be an invaluable source and frame [p. 27 ↓] of reference as you contemplate your questions; however, it also helps to have a few tried-and-true models and guidelines. Below are two models I have found to be particularly helpful in developing questions. They are drawn from Michael Patton (1990) and James P. Spradley (1979). Following these models is a list of “tried and true” methods that I have found most useful over the years.

The Patton Model

We will examine the Patton model using the example of a qualitative researcher conducting interviews with black students about so-called black isolation on the campus of a major state university.

1. Behavior or Experience Questions. Behavior or experience questions address concrete human action, conduct, or ways of “doing.” It is helpful to think about behavior as comportment or as action in some form, and to think of experience as being more mindful or reflexive of the meanings of the action or behavior. *“I notice that most black students stick together and claim their own spaces and groupings on campus. They eat*

together in the dining hall; they congregate among themselves outside Wicker Hall on the quad; they sit together in classes and so forth. This is behavior that is obvious and that most people can observe. Could you describe other ways or behaviors that are not so obvious where black students come together?" Keep in mind that this question is not asking *why* these students come together, nor is it trying to decipher meaning. It is asking the interviewer for more information on *action* or *behavior*.

2. Opinion or Value Questions. Opinion or value questions address a conviction, judgment, belief, or particular persuasion towards a phenomenon. Although opinions and values are very closely related and often interchangeable, an opinion question is usually considered more individually idiosyncratic, while a value question leans more toward guiding principles and ideals emanating from formal or informal social arrangements. "*In your opinion, why do you think black students behave in this way? And a somewhat different question is, What do you believe is the value of this behavior? Does it even have a value?*"

3. Feeling Questions. Feeling questions address emotions, sentiments, and passions. The interviewer is concerned not with the truth or validity of a phenomenon, but with how a person feels about it or is emotionally affected by it. "*How do you personally feel about this behavior? And to add another twist to that question, How do you feel about the need to come together as black students in these ways?*"

[p. 28 ↓]

4. Knowledge Questions. Knowledge questions address the range of information and learning a participant holds about a phenomenon, as well as where this knowledge comes from and how it is attained. "*What are the historical roots of this kind of behavior? How does the larger society influence the desire for these students to behave in this way?*"

5. Sensory Questions. Sensory questions address the senses and human sensation. How does the body hear, taste, touch, smell, and see a phenomenon at the purely visceral level in its contact with the phenomenon? "*How does your body, your senses, react in these moments of contact and allegiance with other black students? Do you see, hear, taste, smell, or touch in ways that are different at these times than other times?*"

6. Background/Demographic Questions. Background and demographic questions address concrete and practical information concerning the distribution, location, and size of populations including births, deaths, and other significant information related to population statistics. "*What is the population of black students on campus and what part of the country do most of them come from? Are there more men than women? What is the ethnic breakdown of black students on campus in terms of percentages of African Americans, Caribbeans, Africans, Europeans, and so forth?*"

The Spradley Model

We outline the Spradley (1979) model using the example of a qualitative researcher conducting interviews with food service workers on campus and after a recent strike.

1. Descriptive Questions. Descriptive questions ask for a recounting or a depiction of a

concrete phenomenon. The focus here is away from ideas, abstraction, and emotion. Although we often employ descriptive questions to move toward abstraction and emotion, we are concerned here with delineating or rendering a picture or image of a real or actual circumstance or object. For Spradley, descriptive questions can be subdivided into “tour,” example, experience, and native-language questions.

- Tour Question: Spradley (1979) writes, “Whether the ethnographer uses space, time, events, people, activities, or objects, the end result is the same: a verbal description of significant features of the cultural scene” (p. 87). Like a tour, a cultural scene unfolds in its many and varied elements. Spradley makes a distinction between grand tour questions and mini-tour questions. *“Can you describe an average working day in the cafeteria? Can you describe the space of the cafeteria itself, that is, the various rooms, cooking areas, and lounges providing a grand tour of the cafeteria building?”*

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- Example Question: Example questions ask the participants to provide an example of a response that may need more specificity or clarity. Spradley (1979) states that example questions “most often lead to the most interesting stories of actual happenings which an ethnographer will discover” (p. 88). *“Can you recount an example of a particular working day that you will never forget?”*
- Experience Questions: Spradley (1979) suggests that experience questions “are best used after asking numerous grand tour and mini-tour questions” (p. 89). You are, in essence, asking the participants how they experienced the scene or subject just described. *“How would you describe the experience that day when you and the other cafeteria workers decided to go on strike? What did you do exactly and how did you feel about it?”*
- Native-Language Questions: According to Spradley (1979), “The more familiar the informant and ethnographer are with each other's cultures, the more important native-language questions become” (p. 90). With these questions, you are addressing the larger meanings, implications, and symbolic value embedded in the respondent's everyday language. *“How do you and the other cafeteria workers come up with the various terms like, ‘snub nose,’ ‘hungry giant,’ ‘green pill,’ and ‘mean spot’ to describe students and their different attitudes? How do you use these terms among yourselves?”*

2. Structural or Explanation Questions: Structural or explanation questions are not to be confused with inquires of actual societal or cultural structures, as in institutions or systems of power. By structural questions, Spradley (1979) is really referring to questions that require *explanation*. So, structural questions are really explanation questions that complement and should be asked concurrently with descriptive questions. Structural questions “explore the organization of an informant's cultural knowledge” (p. 131), and they most often require contextual information, because such information “aids greatly in recall and will avoid the problem of making an informant feel he is being tested with a series of short questions” (p. 125). *“Can you help me understand how the workers came up with the idea of a strike in getting the administration to pay attention to your demands? Can you explain how making up your own words for students is important? What is your role at the university?”*

3. **Contrast Questions:** Contrast questions evoke unlike comparisons. They often require contextual clarification from the interviewer in asking the questions and further explanation or elaboration from the interviewee after answering it. Spradley (1979) outlines three principles that give rise to contrast questions: (1) the *use principle*, in which “the meaning of a symbol can be discovered by asking how it is uniquely and distinctly used rather than asking what it means” (p. 156); (2) the *similarity principle*, in which “the [p. 30 ↓] meaning of a symbol can be discovered by finding out how it is similar to other symbols” (p. 157); and (3) the *contrast principle*, in which “the meaning of a symbol can be discovered by finding out how it is different from other symbols” (p. 157). Contrast questions may take on a range of forms, from implicit or suggested contrasts to obvious and culturally understood contrasts. Questions may also constitute a contrast of two phenomena to several others, perhaps even referring to a listing of phenomena. “*How useful was the strike in getting people on campus to pay attention to the conditions and circumstances of laborers on campus? How did your campus strike compare to the strikes of other laborers, like the city garbage collectors two years ago? How was it different from the garbage strike?*”

Extra Tips for Formulating Questions

More Models

Other models for questions in addition to the series outlined above include the following:

1. **Advice Questions.** In searching for a point of view, personal philosophy, or disposition, you may ask advice questions as another choice for a model, using a formula such as, “What advice would you give to ...” or “What would you say to others who. ...” Advice questions are helpful in addressing some of the suggestions set forth by Patton (1990), such as behavior, feelings, knowledge, and opinion. “*What advice would you give to other campus laborers who are underpaid, overworked, and feeling disrespected by the campus community?*”

2. **Quotation Questions.** Repeating direct quotations from others and asking for a response is another effective model in addressing abstract issues, such as feelings and opinion. “*Someone once said, ‘Rudeness is the weak man’s imitation of strength.’ What do you think?*”

3. **Once-Upon-a-Time Descriptive Questions.** Some descriptive questions aim for a narrated experience reflecting the drama of a story. These questions are most effective when the interviewer is relatively confident that the interviewee is capable of telling such a story, based on prior questions that reveal experiences, opinions, knowledge, and so forth. The interviewer referring to a context or situation already being discussed in the interview may then ask, “*Can you describe the time when ...*” or “*Would you tell the story about the time when you. ...*” “*Can you tell me about the time when [p. 31 ↓] you felt the most disrespected by a student and decided to let the person know how you felt?*”

Initial Brainstorming

When you first begin trying to formulate your questions, a useful exercise is to reread your research question or problem over several times and then ask yourself, “If this is what I am to understand, then what is it that I need to know about it to answer the questions or address the problem?” You will then list everything of interests that comes to mind.

The Puzzlement

Lofland and Lofland (1984) suggest another helpful exercise to inspire questions: Ask yourself, “What is it about this thing that is a puzzle to me? What is it that I see before me?” List your questions about the puzzle: As you jot them down, you are “teasing” out the puzzlements (p. 53). Lofland and Lofland state that by sorting and ordering the puzzlements, “they take on general clusters and topics that have a global or comprehensive design” (pp. 54–55).

Attributes of the Interviewer and Building Rapport

Above and beyond techniques for designing interview questions and charting out the field study, one of the most important considerations is the ethnographer's own demeanor and attitude in the field. Much has been discussed regarding the importance of the ethnographic personality and what it means to look inward to refine and develop our own personal attributes as interviewers (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 1990; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Below is a list of considerations relating to the interviewer that will help in building a harmonious or productive relationship with subjects in the field, or what is commonly referred to as rapport.

Mindful Rapport

It is important to keep in mind in the beginning that rapport is the feeling of comfort, accord, and trust between the interviewer and interviewee. Being mindful of rapport throughout the interview is essential in helping to create for the participant the feeling of being respected and of being genuinely heard. Keep in mind that being a good listener is an art and a virtue.

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Anticipation

It is common to have feelings of anticipation that may range from joyful excitement to nervous apprehension. It is important to turn the energy of anticipation into positive planning—reviewing field notes, developing and brainstorming questions, and understanding that a level of excitement and anxiety are normal.

Positive Naïveness

The idea of the *knower and the known* is provocative in its implications of identifying who knows and who is striving to know. As ethnographers, our knowing is always leveraged by a level of unknowing that we struggle to fill by asking the knowers (Spradley, 1979). In the field, we will invariably come across to participants as unsophisticated, innocent, and easy targets for deception. Positive naïveness is acknowledging that you do not know and that you must rely

with humility on others and trust upon the knowledge of knowers. Keep in mind that we are capable of grasping what we do not know with integrity, intelligence, and conviction.

Active Thinking and Sympathetic Listening

Although it is conventionally understood that the ethnographer is the interviewer and the participant is the interviewee, in critical ethnography the rigid back-and-forth replay of question-answer-question is replaced by a more fluid and reciprocal dynamic, in which the interviewee and interviewer become what Rubin and Rubin (1995) describe as “conversational partners.” The conversational quality that evolves from the interview is substantively meaningful and a key factor of rapport that is generated by active thinking and sympathetic listening. You are listening with an open heart and kind reception to what is being said and expressed to you; you are not motivated by judgment, but by understanding. As you fully engage the art of listening sympathetically, you are actively thinking about what is being expressed; you are not just present in body, but deeply engaged in mind. The meanings and implications of what is being expressed are significant, and your mind is alert, active, and thinking. Again, we are engaged in the performative dynamic of dialogue.

Status Difference

It is important to be aware of power differences and status. If you are oblivious to or refuse to accept the power and privilege you carry with you as a researcher, you will be blind to the ways your privilege can be a [p. 33 ↓] disadvantage to others. If you cannot see or refuse to see the rewards of your status, you will also be blind to the complex inequities and veiled injustices of those whose status is unjustly subordinated. If this example of status difference does not apply to your project, and you are interviewing powerful people whose material and social status is greater than yours, you must still be aware of your status difference as a researcher. You have the power to tell their story and to have the last word on how they will be represented.

Patiently Probing

During the interview session, topics and questions will arise that will invariably lead you to feel that you need to gain a deeper or clearer understanding of what has been expressed. Perhaps an account seems contradictory and you feel you need to get at the veritable quality of the story. You need more information or a more lucid accounting, so you must probe further. Probing requires patience and understanding. No one likes to feel as though they are being tested or interrogated. Obviously, you are not a journalist or a judge; therefore, your probing must be done gently, with respect, and, when necessary, with assistance. Contextualize your probes with follow-up questions that aid memory and enhance dialogue.

The Gorden Model

In the awareness of our own attributes, we must also be circumspect about the attributes and elements that influence those we interview. Raymond L. Gorden (2003) makes an important contribution in his framing of “threats” that significantly affect those we interview. He sets forth a

series of sociopsychological dimensions where participants generally feel threatened. Awareness of these dimensions and how they affect the interview are helpful to the researcher in understanding the subjective and idiosyncratic elements that shape responses. Each one will variously influence *what* is being said and *how* it is being said:

- *Degree of Ego Threat.* Gorden (2003) writes, “The respondent tends to withhold any information which he fears may threaten his self-esteem” (p. 159). Here is a situation in which the threat was not intended, but the response to the question brings feelings of embarrassment, shame, or belittlement. The participant may therefore avoid answering the question or respond in a manner that distorts reality in an effort to protect his or her self-esteem. When a threat to ego is recognized, the ethnographer may decide not to pursue the question or to buffer the threat with indirect words of comfort.

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- *Degree of Forgetting.* It is important to keep in mind that memory is a factor in every interview, regardless of the topic or the identity of the participant. It is also important to understand that the purpose of the interview is often not simply to help the interviewee remember, but see *how* memory is expressed. In other words, it is not always the goal to get participants to remember facts and events correctly or as they “really” were. As critical ethnographers, we are not concerned with forgetting, but with memory itself and how individuals remember as they do. We honor the fact that each individual memory will be remembered in different forms and to different degrees.
- *Degree of Generalization.* As human beings, we capture experiences by generalizing them, as well as by specifying them. As researchers, we must be aware when generalizations take the form of “truths” that are really specific to a limited experience or are the result of a particular worldview. Just as generalizations are problematic in the truth claims they purport, specificity can be problematic in its oblivion to broader implications.
- *Degree of Subjective Experience.* As critical performance ethnographers, we are concerned with the construction and influences of subjectivity. We understand that the meaning of an event or circumstance cannot be devoid of the speaker's subjectivity, of the narration that brings the event or circumstance into being. What is significant for us is how experiences are expressed and enacted through the speaking subject. An experience or event that we wish to grasp as researchers will always be grasped through the degree of subjectivity encased in the expression of the telling (the participant's subjectivity), as well as the degree of our own subjectivity that is encased in our listening (the researcher's subjectivity). Subjectivity becomes all at once a vessel, lens, and filter of every telling.
- *Conscious Versus Unconscious Experience.* The unconscious is a powerful force in constituting what it means to be human. Consciousness comprises that which we are aware of and forms only an infinitesimal part of our psyche; the unconscious forms the greater part of our being. Freud (1927) compared the conscious and the unconscious to an iceberg, where consciousness represented the tip, preconsciousness was the medium between consciousness and unconsciousness, and the unconscious was the mass of the iceberg forming almost 90 percent of what is unseen beneath the water. It is helpful to be aware of the significance of the unconscious as we speak with participants. We are often witness to unconscious meanings, implications, and intentions as we

actively and sympathetically listen. The power of the unconscious will be more forcefully recognized as you later begin to interpret and analyze the data. While it is important to keep the [p. 35 ↓] influence of the unconscious in mind, we must also keep in mind that our interpretations and questions are not meant to psychoanalyze the participant or to focus on deciphering consciousness from unconsciousness.

- *Degree of Trauma.* Deep fear, dread, and sorrow that leaves one traumatized by a past occurrence can manifest during the interview in the need immediately to shut down the questions or to respond to them in great length, detail, and emotion. Degree of trauma is further reason for the researcher to be prepared before scheduling the interview. Although degree of trauma cannot always be avoided, it is less difficult for both conversational partners to deal with trauma if the researcher is sensitive to and aware of the difficulties. This is an area that requires rapport; that is, dealing with trauma requires listening with sympathy, following the narrator's pace, demonstrating appreciation through eye contact and gestures of concern, explaining the reason for your question, and, if necessary, guiding the responses with gentle empathy.
- *Degree of Etiquette.* "Communication is given its form by taboos, secrets, avoidances, 'white lies' ... and certain symbols and attitudes circulate only in restricted channels or between people in certain social relationships," says Gorden (2003, p. 163). When preparing for the interview process and in interacting in the field before you begin interviewing individuals, degrees of etiquette should be an important part of gathering information. There are elements participants will not express because of impropriety, and the reasons may be due to gender, race, age, or nationality, or to cultural civilities, habits, and taboos. It is important to understand when responses are affected or governed by norms of etiquette. What you think you are hearing as true to experience may actually be based upon how your gender or race is perceived in that culture or situation.

Interviewing is a dynamic process fundamental to ethnography. It is part technique, part ethics, part theory, part method, part intuition, part collaboration, and part openness to deep vulnerability. Della Pollock (1999) describes her positionality as interviewer and researcher on "birth stories" in her poignant book *Telling Bodies Performing Birth*:

I made myself ... vulnerable to being moved. Listening and writing. I saw myself as the register of someone else's power. Against the grain of current obsessions with the power of the researcher to shape, tame, appropriate, and control the worlds he or she investigates, in the course of talking with and writing about the many people who contributed to this project, I more often than not felt unnerved and overwhelmed, "othered," interrogated, propelled into landscapes of knowing and not knowing I would not otherwise have dared enter. (p. 23)

[p. 36 ↓] Interviewing does not *absolutely* require a set of predesigned questions and entering the field with an effective and detailed plan. It certainly helps a great deal (especially for the new ethnographer) if you do have them, but your project will not necessarily fail if you do not. What *is* required is genuine curiosity, sincere interest, and the courage to be "vulnerable" to another at the risk of being "the register of someone else's power."

You have walked down many paths and listened to many stories as an interviewer, and your most pressing questions are evolving into thickly described stories that are beginning to require some attention and deciphering. It's time to stop. What happens after the interviews have all been conducted? You now have an abundance of information and it all feels a bit unwieldy. You remember someone said something to you once upon a time about “coding and logging.”

Coding and Logging Data

You are nearing the end of your fieldwork. You have conducted interviews, you have been listening and involved in the day-to-day processes that inform your research question, and you have a collection of data comprising field notes, interview tapes, and other relevant documents and artifacts collected and discovered during your stay. Now it is time to see what you have by bringing all the data together in some form or fashion of order. Coding or logging “allows you to recall the extra-ordinary complex range of stimuli with which you have been bombarded” (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, p. 46). What do you do with this mass of information? Keep in mind that every project and every researcher is unique, so it is expected that you will pick and choose, select and sort, and blend and combine what is useful for you. Coding and logging data is the process of *grouping together themes and categories that you have accumulated in the field*.

Glesne (1999) suggests that, when you select and sort, you build what she describes as “code clumps ... [by] putting like-minded pieces together into data clumps, you create an organizational framework” (p. 135). The following model draws from a combination of various coding procedures to outline a step-by-step method that can be revised as needed to serve your particular project:

- It is generally understood that you order the mass of data by beginning with generic categories: interview tapes, places, and people, as well as prevalent topics or key issues. You may also think of coding as *high-level coding*, [p. 37 ↓] concerned with more abstract ideas, or *low-level coding*, concerned with more concrete data (Carspecken, 1996). However, you must also ask yourself before you begin, “What is the best way to group or cluster all this material so that it will help me focus more clearly on my analysis or how I wish to present this material?”
- The process of grouping is not only about putting similar categories together; the very selections and act of grouping is creating a point of view or statement: “Code with analysis in mind. ... Themes emerge from your coding, these themes guide your analysis” (Carspecken, 1996, pp. 146–153). If you perform or adapt the data for the stage, you may also code with scenes for your performance in mind, and you may also think about coding with your audience or readers in mind. The point is that coding is not *exclusively* about grouping similarities—although this is the *priority*. You must consider factors of analysis, presentation, readership, and audience that may alter and guide your “clumps.”
- The precision and detail of interviewing will guide your coding (Carspecken, 1996; Lofland & Lofland, 1984). Keeping this precision is very important: The more specific and thematic your interview, the less complicated it will be to group and order your data.
- As your clumps or clusters begin to form, you will then begin a process of further

ordering:

- a. You will examine each specific topic within that cluster.
 - b. You will then compare and contrast that particular topic within that cluster.
 - c. You will continue to examine and note the topics within each cluster.
 - d. You will discover overlapping topics, marked distinctions, and topics that should be moved from one cluster to a different cluster. You will also discover that some topics should be eliminated from the study completely.
 - e. After the topics within each cluster have been examined, you will then make adjustments for comparisons and contrasts across clusters, thereby creating linkages and themes.
 - f. The evolution of your themes has now become more apparent.
- When you have completed logging or coding your data—or if you feel you need more direction and clarity during the process—it is often helpful to create a graphic or picture of your organizational framework. You may want to create a tree, cluster, box, or table of what you have developed. These graphics can be invaluable, displaying the connections, hierarchies, and distinctions with more clarity.

[p. 38 ↓]

Note: About Computers

The Internet has become an invaluable resource and methodological tool for many ethnographers. The Internet can be used to “conduct searches about a topic, analyze census data, conduct interviews by ‘chatting’ or videoconferencing, share notes and pictures about a research site, debate issues with colleagues on listservs and in online journals, and download useful data collection and analysis software” (Fetterman, 1998, pp. 72–73). For many researchers, the Internet is far more efficient in terms of time, detail, precision, volume of information, and speed than the traditional methods I just outlined above. Although the Internet is, in many ways, an invaluable and productive resource, we must remember that ultimately the information and data collected is determined by the eyes and ears, and the heart and mind, of the ethnographer who determines “what to collect and how to record it as well as how to interpret the data from a cultural perspective” (Fetterman, p. 84). The best approach I have found is to combine the hands-on methods of the researcher with the Internet's capabilities relative to the nature and context of the project

There are three major categories available through the Internet that can be of help to the ethnographer:

1. **Search Engines.** Search engines tell you where you can find information on a topic. They list sites and resources available on the World Wide Web related to your question or topic. The researcher may use a search engine for most all their informational needs. Search engines provide a wealth of information, such as, maps, demographic information, historical dates, current events, cultural attributes,

and so forth. Search engines may include Google, Yahoo, MSN, and Altavista, to name a few. Some search engines may also serve the same purposes as reference pages (discussed below).

2. Reference Pages. Reference pages guide you to a vast amount of sources and serve a purpose similar to that of a reference librarian. Reference pages, such as *The New York Times* Navigator, can link you to sources. For example, the Federal Web Locator can link you to agencies and departments affiliated with the federal government, and LookupUSA is a comprehensive directory-assistance resource that can provide information on telephone numbers and addresses of households and business all over the country. Search engines and reference pages will also link you to specific Web pages of individuals, groups, institutions, and businesses that will then provide more detailed information for that particular site.

3. Database Software. There is a variety of software available for qualitative researchers. These programs have the capabilities to (a) record information in the field, thereby serving the purpose of a tape recorder. In addition, as it records, it can also (b) transcribe, sort, and highlight patterns and themes [p. 39 ↓] within the data. Beyond highlighting key texts within the data, the software can (c) categorize and cluster themes and subthemes. Therefore, database software for qualitative researchers has the capabilities to compare and contrast data, to code and sort a wide range of information in less time than the traditional hands-on approach. However, it is important to keep in mind again that the computer and the software do not have the researcher's eyes, ears, mind, and heart. You may choose to transcribe, thematically cluster, and contrast the data beyond what the software program prescribes. There will always be nuances, translations, and idiosyncratic categories that the computer and software is incapable of processing. Some of us still do not use computer software in our work for this very reason. However, if you choose to use database software, make sure it serves you and you do not serve it.

If you do wish to complete your coding process by computer, but not rely on it as a major source, Carspecken (1996) suggests a useful method that is more meaning-based, more hands-on, less intrusive, and more conducive to ambiguity than many of the computer software programs that are marketed for qualitative and ethnographic data. You begin with the file comprising your fieldwork data and a blank file. From this point you proceed along the following course:

1. When an item is worthy of a code, toggle it to the blank file and type a number, a letter, or a name to identify or name the code.
2. Continue in this manner, developing new codes and combining like codes until all the items are identified, ordered, and given a code name. Along the way, you will discover and create subcodes.
3. Group codes together into major overarching themes. You may choose from among various possibilities. Carspecken suggests that you group codes according to the purpose and focus of your study.

This chapter served to provide concise and pithy tips on ethnographic methods for the beginner as well as the seasoned ethnographer. Therefore, this information may be new for some and a reminder for others. I have attempted to respond to the question of what constitutes an ethnographic method by organizing it as a *process* constituted of three parts. Part One encompasses identifying where you are now and choosing a subject. Part Two encompasses preparing for the field (the lay summary and research design) and formulating questions. Part Three encompasses building rapport in the interview and, finally, coding and logging data. Each of these three [p. 40 ↓] parts enhances and overlays the other: They are not isolated from one another. Please remember, your method is not simply a means to an end. It is a meaningful and conscious enactment of learning from and entering into an ethnographic domain of immense possibilities.

Warm-Ups

1. How would you respond to the claim, “We really don't need methods; all we really need is good theory, good intentions, and deep hanging out!”
2. Write a short biography. It can be in the form of a poem, a song, a visual image, or a narrative. What concepts, experiences, or points of view are more dominant in your personal history than others? What patterns or motifs seem to be repeated more than others? Then read your biography to yourself or another individual. Write questions of the biography on your own or in collaboration with another individual.
3. Choose a controversial figure in world politics. Conduct a brief search on the history and background of this individual. Then, write a series of questions for that individual geared to further expanding or engaging what is being discussed in the news.
4. With a partner, perform the sections on the attributes of the interviewer, both in ways that coincide and contrast with the points discussed. Formulate a series of questions based on a characterization of your partner from the models offered. Be creative by combining and overlapping the question models.
5. Write a sample lay summary and research plan based on your research project. Have your partner read it back to you for both of you to collaboratively critique.

Notes

1. The list provided here of components that constitute a lay summary are a compilation of ideas from the following six researchers and their works: Corrine Glesne (1999); Norman K. Denzin (1997, 2001); Phil Francis Carspecken (1996); John Lofland and Lyn H. Lofland (1984); and James P. Spradley (1979).

[p. 41 ↓]

Suggested Readings

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Performance Ethnography: The Role of Embodiment in Cultural Authenticity

Joni L. Jones

During February 2001, I created a performance installation based on my research in Nigeria on the Yoruba deity Osun. The installation, “Searching for Osun,” was performance ethnography that charted my overtly subjective and selective meditation on Nigeria. The audience who came interacted with the aspects of Yoruba life that moved me most—dance and music, divination, Osun’s relationship to children, “women’s work,” and food preparation. I was deeply aware of the ways that my African Americanness at times converged with Yoruba realities and at other times sharply veered away from them. While in Nigeria I felt simultaneously foreign and indigenous, welcome and invisible, comfortable and utterly disoriented. These dynamic tensions among African diasporic peoples were suggested in the performance installation through the juxtaposition of Yoruba art with the work of artists in the Caribbean and the Americas, and in the U.S. performers’ negotiation of Yoruba movement, language, and sensibilities. The performance ethnography sought to disrupt notions of “the real” by encouraging the participants to question what they accept as truth, and to examine how their truths are shaped by their perspectives. This work allows for the melding of many authoritative texts, many realities, by prodding the participants to create their own truths as they move through the installation. This essay is an exploration of the successes and failures of that project.

“Searching for Osun”

As the audience walked toward the Jones Center for Contemporary Art in Austin, Texas, they were met by Yoruba music and storytelling that was broadcast outside on loudspeakers. Inside, the gallery was loosely marked into an altar space and five areas of continuous performance: The Children’s Area, The Market, The Divining Area, The Food Area, and The Drumming Area. Upon entering the gallery, the audience was greeted by Aisha Conner, one of eight performers, who delivered *oriki*-like praises in English. With improvised repetitive poetry, she might thank an audience member for coming to the event, or acknowledge the beauty of that person’s spirit, or pray that an audience member be granted prosperity. Most of the performers primarily occupied specific locations within the gallery, but I moved from location to location offering explanations of Yoruba life, instigating improvised arguments with other performers, and chasing down the one child performer in the company, Kala Rose Anderson, who was sent on endless errands by her elders.



I tie an *iro* (wrapper) around a young girl while she watches women pounding black soap.
Photo: Deanna Shoemaker.

To the left of the entrance in The Children’s Area, the audience found a mural combining images of Austin with images of Osogbo, Osun’s patron city. Crayons, vibrantly colored paper, and glue were available for children and adults who might want to put their own creativity into the mural. The cement floor held the taped outline of Nigeria with a star identifying Osogbo. Video footage of the annual Osun Festival and the Festival of Sixteen Lamps, which precedes the Festival, was continuously running next to a painting by Austin-based artist Reji Thomas. A large yellow, green, and indigo batik of a nude woman by the water, created by Osogbo artist Nike Okundaye, hung in one corner in the middle of the mural. A 6’ x 8’ photograph of Yoruba twins hung in another corner, along with museum-like text, which discussed the details of the Osun Festival and the importance of children in Yoruba social structure. Periodically throughout the two-hour performance, one (or two) of the performers stood beside the nude batik and began a monologue that she had written about her relationship to or understanding of Osun. The performers brought their own personal spiritual traditions to this experience. One woman was Christian, two practiced an eclectic blend of African and Asian spiritualities, another was pagan; yet I asked each to talk about the role Osun—a prominent power in Yoruba spirituality—played in their lives. Osun is the force of life and creation, of attraction and pleasure, of luxury and abundance. In the monologues, one woman talked about her admiration for “precocious little girls,” another discussed her ambivalence around motherhood, another talked of her love of opulent cloth, and another described her sexual coming of age. These monologues were the only time during the



Ane Kidd teaches the audience how to make *pepe* stew. Photo: Deanna Shoemaker.

performance that the performers spoke as themselves; during the rest of the event we maintained our roles as Yoruba women. We wore traditional *iros* (wrappers), *geles* (head ties), and *bubas* (blouses), and we spoke a Yoruba-inflected English that I acquired during my Nigerian visits and that the other women practiced from audio and video tapes. None of us was playing a specific Yoruba woman, but instead we represented an amalgamation of Yoruba women we met, studied, observed. The audience was free to listen to the monologues or move through the space to another area they found more appealing.

Immediately to the right of The Children's Area was the popular Food Area. Here, the audience found traditional *pepe* stew with chicken and rice being served by Ane Kidd, a gregarious performer who insisted that the passersby get a lesson in Yoruba food preparation. A basket of tomatoes, garlic and onions—the primary ingredients for *pepe*—a bottle of palm wine and a container of palm oil—were arranged around the performer. An abstract tree made of ironweed leaves and metal hung over the area, and a caged chicken and rooster added their voices to the raucous gathering. A 6' x 8' photograph of a groundskeeper walking through the Osun groves, a woodcut of a woman pounding yam created by University of Texas professor Christopher Adejumo, and a painting by Nigerian artist Wole Oyeyemi contributed to the visual landscape in The Food Area.

Just behind this area hung a painting by University of Texas professor John Yancey suggesting the Yoruba deity of indeterminacy known as Esu. On a nearby wall, a slide display of creation deities from other spiritual traditions and scenes



Audience members try on clothing in The Market. Photo: Deanna Shoemaker.

from Osogbo clicked by throughout the performance. Next to the slides was a 6' x 8' photograph of the rooftops of Osogbo. Across from this image, the clothing I wear each year in the Osun festival was draped on a metal female frame. The displayed clothing marked the entryway to the altar that was encircled by black cloth creating a shrine. The back of the shrine was a ceiling-high exposed brick wall with a diagonal brick ledge in a small corner of the gallery. River rocks, brass bracelets, honey, cloth, plants, and black-eyed peas—all properties of Osun—were placed in the shrine. A Yoruba carved statue of an Osun devotee carrying her offering of thanks to Osun at the river was a focal point in the shrine. Performers instructed the audience members to remove their shoes, enter quietly, and make prayers and praises to Osun if they would like. By the end of the four weeks of the installation, which included four days of performance, many offerings were made to Osun—several jars of honey, candy, jewelry, pennies to satisfy Osun's love of copper, \$156 in bills, and many quarters and nickels, which acknowledge Osun's sacred number five.

Continuing through the installation, to the left of the altar was The Market, which was devoted to Yoruba women's traditional work. Video footage of women engaged in making black soap, clay pots, and *adire* (indigo cloth) continuously played. Piles of Yoruba clothing that the audience could wear was on the floor. Batiks (multi-colored cloths created through applications of dye and wax), reverse appliqué (quilt-like designs made from a simple under-stitched pattern sewn over a contrasting solid color), *asoke* (woven cloth), and *adire* hung from the rafters. A friend loaned me his father's *agbada*—an opulent embroidered kaftan-



Audience members, clad in clothes from *The Market*, dance while other participants look on.
Photo: Deanna Shoemaker.

like garment, which was spread high above *The Market*. Tina Anderson, the performer who ran *The Market*, showed the audience how to create traditional *adire* by dipping a chicken feather in cassava paste, then painting designs on white cotton cloth with the feather. The audience could watch the video, listen to Tina's explanations, and find their own section of cloth to prepare. In *The Market*, they could also read text that described Yoruba women's crafts.

Walking back past the altar and the slides, then turning right, the audience found *The Divination Area*. The exhibit designer, Stuart Sussman, constructed a corrugated tin roof that was attached to a gallery wall in this area. Dirt was placed under this awning to suggest the outer dwellings of some Yoruba village homes. Performer B.C. Harrison sat at this location giving information about the role of divination in Yoruba culture. She encouraged the audience to touch many of the items of divination—cowrie shells, an *opon* (divining tray), kola nuts—but she would not actually perform divination. Instead, she gave cryptic information that sometimes sent audience members searching throughout the exhibit for answers. Under the tin roof hung a large batik quilt cover by Gbenga Tope bearing the image of a fishtailed woman. This image is commonly associated with Osun and with her sister Yemonja. Adjacent to this batik was a 6' x 8' photograph of the Iya Osun of Osogbo resting at the Osun shrine. Austin-based artist Andy Colquit created a metal staff with bird images that stood in front of the photograph. Birds are a supreme manifestation of female power and are often seen in spiritual ceremonies for Osun. Along the same wall was a table full of books about Osun, Yoruba pottery making, Yoruba cosmology, and Nigerian history.



B.C. Harrison (center in white) explains divination to audience members while some watch the dancing nearby. Photo: Clyde Cooper.

Circling around to the left in The Drumming Area were examples of the Yoruba art of pounded metal, a king's beaded crown and beaded vest on loan to the exhibit by Romeo F. Montalvo, batik paintings by Yetunde Omoniwa, a woodcut by Arlene Polite, and video footage of a Yoruba masquerade suspended high above the space. Under the footage sat a semi-circle of drummers—Eric Dannenbaum, Alli Aweusi, Michael Stevens, I.D. Adewaye, Rachel Pervin, and Gerard Villanueva—who drummed throughout the performance. In this space, the performers gathered to sing Yoruba songs, offer a traditional Yoruba dance led by performer Chandra Washington, and present two dance dramas—one about the founding of the city of Osogbo, and the other describing how Osun thwarted a Fulani invasion. The Drumming Area was also the site for a scene between myself as my Yoruba “character” and Deanna Shoemaker, a European American woman playing the role of Joni the Ethnographer. Deanna was the embodiment of my disorientation while in Nigeria where I was frequently called *oyinbo*, meaning stranger and white person. Our scene occurred early in the two-hour roving performance to establish this tricky identity for the audience. Because Deanna and I shared this unique relationship in the performance, we wove our Osun monologues together for The Children's Area to further explore the multiple, shifting, and blurry identities that were a central theme of the installation.

In this same space there was also a piece by installation artist Vicki Meek, a 6' x 8' photograph of the 1995 Osun Festival, Yoruba rice paper art by Michael Oludare, and a placard describing Yoruba aesthetics. A large table held Yoruba

newspapers, Yoruba wood carvings, the popular game *ayo* (also known as *mancala*), a CD-ROM on the nature of Osun created by Reginald Metcalf, and postcards, which read, “What happens when images of Nigeria are brought to Austin, Texas for a performance installation: cross-cultural understanding or reinforcement of stereotypes?” The postcard cover image was from Osogbo and read, “Greetings from Austin!” The audience addressed messages to friends, and I mailed them after the performance. The exhibit preparator, Peter Nurczynski, created maps of the installation to help the audience chart a course through the space, and to identify each of the artworks being exhibited.

Performance Ethnography and Embodiment

“Searching for Osun,” was an example of cultural exchange known as performance ethnography, which is, most simply, how culture is done in the body. This method builds on two primary ideas: 1) that identity and daily interactions are a series of conscious and unconscious choices improvised within culturally and socially specific guidelines, and 2) that people learn through participation. If people are genuinely interested in understanding culture, they must put aspects of that culture on and into their bodies. Performance ethnography translates fieldwork experiences into performances among the researcher, artifacts from fieldwork, and audiences. While such performances may entertain, the aim of the work is to explore bodily knowing, to stretch the ways in which ethnography might share knowledge of a culture, and to puzzle through the ethical and political dilemmas of fieldwork and of representation.

This audience-centered brand of performance ethnography is not the only type of performance ethnography possible. D. Soyini Madison is currently scripting a performance based on her work in Ghana with *Trokosi*, the practice of ostracizing girls who have been sexually abused. She plans to direct other performers through the Ghanaian debates over this practice and present this work proscenium-style for audiences. Myron Beasley created a performance ethnography in which the individual performers presented autoethnographic installations about their experience with Yoruba culture as African American gay men. The performers stood near their installations and explained the different elements to the roving audience. Olateju Omolodun enacted a performance about being an African child growing up in the United States. She used her own experiences as the basis for the work, and she performed with women she had cast in various roles. Like Olateju, I also performed in my 1994 ethnographic performance entitled “Broken Circles: A Journey Through Africa and the Self.” In this way, she and I extended Victor Turner’s dictum that “if anthropologists are going to take ethnodramatics seriously . . . we will have to become performers ourselves” (101). Using what Stephen Tyler suggests as an emergent ethnography in which “the form itself emerges out of the joint work of the ethnographer and his native partners” (127), the features of the performance cannot be prescribed prior to the ethnographic encounters. And although a prescription for performance ethnography would be restrictive, I have followed certain principles in the development of

performance ethnographies. These principles underscore the personal nature of fieldwork and the bodily understandings that can be derived from performance.

1) The performance should center around an idea or a question rather than provide a general “you are there” atmosphere. The idea or question constitutes the **context** for the performance. “Searching for Osun” asked two overlapping questions: how does an African American construct identity in Nigeria, and what is the nature of Osun? In establishing the context, specific referents from fieldwork (clothing, articulation of sounds, foods) help demonstrate the challenges inherent in the questions or issues. The referents not only include tangible artifacts and actual members of the culture being presented, but also video footage and audio tapes that give the audience the “real” culture to contrast with the world created in the performance.

While the performers were in The Drumming Area dancing a choreographed sequence of Yoruba movements, an audience member spontaneously joined our dance. She first began to dance to the drummers, then to the dancers and the audience. Her clothing, her movements, and her deportment all suggested that she was indeed a Yoruba woman. It turned out that she was not only Yoruba, but was actually from Osogbo and was therefore very familiar with the ethnographic details of the performance. Her dance, her carriage, her speech, and her relationship to the audience became referents by which the audience could contrast the other performers. Here, the audience could see the U.S. performers stretching to find the Yoruba qualities in our bodies. I hoped that the contrast between referents throughout the gallery, the performers, and the audience would prod the audience to think about the central idea of identity that helped create the context for the work.

2) The performance should grow as a collaboration between the ethnographer and the community being presented. In this way the ethnographer remains **accountable** to her or his fieldwork community. Distance and time may make it impractical to work with community members on the development of the text or have them present during the performance, however this important sharing reminds the ethnographer that they have developed a relationship of mutual influence with the fieldwork community members.

The \$156 that was placed in the shrine during the performances was taken to Osogbo several months later. It was presented to the Iya Osun who serves as the major conduit between Osun and humans. This monetary offering, then, was given the highest possible Osun consecration. Giving the money to the Iya Osun of Osogbo was an acknowledgement of the relationship between the fieldwork community and my ethnographic representations. The Yoruba shared ideas, images, and feelings with me, and I, in turn, offer what I can to them. This relationship is ongoing and reciprocal. It does not end with this project.

After the Yoruba woman joined the performance, the performers’ accountability instantly rose. We had a Yoruba woman among us who would see

the many places where our performances had gaps. Some of the performers said they were afraid to talk when they knew she was present because they feared this woman could hear how their Yoruba accents were poorly executed, or that the woman might even be offended if they did not perform Yorubanness well.

There are some Yoruba living in Austin and teaching at the university. I invited those I knew and was gratified that they appreciated my efforts. Although I could not create “Searching for Osun” with the Yoruba with whom I worked in Nigeria, I could be sure that some Yoruba were present at the performance in Austin, and in this indirect way make myself accountable to representatives of my fieldwork community.

3) Although much current ethnographic work is fully aware of its **subjectivity**, I would still argue that we must point toward the role that subjectivity plays in the performance. Ethnographers must determine how they will situate themselves in the work. Ethnographers do not present the culture but are conscious of how they act as interpreters of the culture. This powerful subjectivity can become a theme to be examined in the performance.

I struggled with how much of my story to include in the performance. With my first attempt at performance ethnography in 1994, Joni the Ethnographer told her story to an audience complete with the travel tropes of arrival, disorientation, and departure. I felt that this autoethnography, in which I was the subject or context, began to obscure the ethnographic details of Yoruba life, and after a few performances I felt as though I wasn’t learning much new about myself or the Yoruba. The improvisational nature of “Searching for Osun” allowed me to be explicit about the subjectivity—through my monologue, through the scene in which Joni the Ethnographer talks to a Yoruba woman, through the various texts displayed around the space—and pushed me into new understandings about identity, as I had to map my identity anew with each audience encounter or each unrehearsed conversation with a performer.

4) **Multivocality** helps to mitigate the authority of the ethnographer, and provide varied, even contradictory perspectives that the audience must synthesize. The active process of synthesizing turns the audience into collaborators in the experience as they sift through the different points of view. Multivocality may be achieved by casting several persons in the production, or through the ethnographer’s embodiment of particular persons from fieldwork, or in encouraging the audience to share their perspectives during the performance. Here, issues of the ethnographer’s performance ability become important to the audience’s understanding of how culture is reflected in body knowledge.

In Yorubaland, children are humble and deferential with their elders. They often serve the elders of the community by doing errands, preparing meals, and tending to smaller children. Although they surely tire of this work and vent their frustrations privately, they would be punished if they refused to obey an elder or if they showed their annoyance in public. In “Searching for Osun,” the youngest

cast member was often fidgety and uncooperative during rehearsals. She is a bright self-possessed child who is accustomed to treating adults like peers. It was difficult for her to accept how she needed to behave during the performance. She simply did not want to practice being submissive. If she didn't convey this aspect of Yoruba culture, if she would not allow her body to conform to different habits, the performance would lose this ethnographic detail. Her ability to perform was directly related to what the audience would understand about Yoruba children. If multivocality is a goal in the performance, the performers must skillfully execute the features of the culture, or the different voices and perspectives will simply be lost.

5) **Participation** differentiates performance ethnography from other forms of documentation and representation, and allows performance ethnography to take advantage of its live nature. Through participation, the audience can contrast their own culturally inscribed bodies with those from the community being shared. They get an opportunity to "practice" the physical elements of culture through the performance. Participation is where some of the deepest understandings occur. We learn a great deal about cultural continuities and discontinuities, about the malleable and contingent features of identity when we humbly attempt to perform across cultural divides.

I was able to realize my vision most fully of what performance ethnography about Osun might be with "Searching for Osun"; however the space itself was a major weakness in the work. In 2000, I staged a simpler version of "Searching for Osun" in the George Washington Carver Museum in a predominantly African American section of Austin. There were five active areas, but because the museum was so small, the audience could experience all five areas simultaneously. The close quarters didn't allow for many people to stand back and stare. They were immersed in action all around them. The Drumming Area was particularly small, which proved to be advantageous to the performance. Audience members were often crowded around the drummers because there was little room to get much distance from them. The audience would spontaneously dance, and those who did not wish to dance could stand across the room and experience the rhythms without appearing to be conspicuously still. At the Jones Center for Contemporary Art, The Drumming Area was the largest of the five areas. When the performers entered for one of the dance dramas, there was a clear demarcation between the performers and the audience, who mostly sat on the floor and watched during these moments. It remained difficult to reduce the sense of being on display while in The Drumming Area at the Jones Center. At the Carver Museum, the audience was on its feet most of the time, making the boundaries between performer and audience more fluid and therefore easier to cross. Participation was significantly hindered in The Drumming Area at the Jones Center.

Participation was also affected by the atmosphere at the Jones Center. The stark white walls were difficult to enliven. Stuart (the designer), Peter (the prepator), and I talked about what could be done to make the space more inviting, to counter the gallery conventions of quiet, solitude, stillness, and "don't



Audience members dance in clothes from *The Market*. Photo: Deanna Shoemaker.

touch.” Fabrics hanging from the ceiling helped bring warmth to the space, but the buffed concrete floors, the sharp right angles the walls created, and the very polished finished look that the final effect achieved worked against the communal, spontaneous atmosphere that would make participation flow naturally. While several audience members crossed the invisible but distinct line separating the performance from the onlookers, I think many more would have ventured forward if the space had been more conducive.

6) The **ethics** of representation remain a challenging issue for ethnographers. Even when accountability has been fully considered, the possible power inequities between the ethnographer and the community being shared can compromise the integrity of the work. As Dwight Conquergood has asserted, the work can move toward commitment rather than detachment, respect rather than selfishness, dialogue rather than exhibitionism, mutuality rather than infatuation.

I hoped to address ethics, in part, by the very location of the work in a gallery. I wanted this location to indicate my awareness of how black bodies have been displayed for all manner of unethical reasons in similar educational and artistic settings. By mounting this work at the Jones Center for Contemporary Art, I wanted the audience to consider the ethical complexities of presenting Yoruba realities out of context and in an environment dangerously reminiscent of sideshows and entertainments. Performance work presented in gallery spaces has been critiqued for its appropriation and fetishization of non-Western cultures. To make sure this point was not lost, Stuart and I created an exhibit brochure, which discussed this issue head on.

Performance Ethnography and Authenticity

An African American search for authenticity is predicated on a hyphenated existence—the very hyphen creating a sense of inauthenticity. Add to this hyphenated experience the race-based oppressions that plague people of African descent throughout the diaspora, and it becomes clearer why Africa (unhyphenated, uncolonized) has been positioned as “homeland” and haven for some African Americans. When African Americans position Africa as an authentic reality, it reflects their own feelings of displacement in the diaspora, what folklorist Regina Bendix calls a “peculiar longing” for “unmediated genuineness” that is a “reaction to modernization’s demythologization, detraditionalization, and disenchantment” (8). The investment in Africa as a space of authenticity persists in spite of the vigorous and widespread critiques offered by anti-essentialists (especially Kwame Anthony Appiah and Stuart Hall), who specifically challenge the excesses of some branches of Afrocentricity, and by “anti-anti-essentialists” such as Paul A. Gilroy and Joseph Roach. Gilroy and Roach postulate a “Black Atlantic” and “Circum-Atlantic” respectively, a literal and figurative terrain comprised of political, aesthetic, and social commonalities in key regions of the African diaspora where mutual influences have proceeded in multiple directions.

Although I am persuaded by the arguments these scholars make against essentialism, especially the social, cultural, and historical continuities that are posited by the “anti-anti-essentialists,” these scholars seem to disregard the passionate longing that undergirds the hope of authenticity. The search for cultural authenticity, much like the search for Osun, is a search for psychic fulfillment. Performance ethnography has led me to believe that by relinquishing the desire for authenticity, one does not give up some vital aspect of blackness or spirituality, but opens up blackness and spirituality to greater variety, ambiguity, and therefore possibility. I acknowledge and respect (and sometimes feel) the desire for fulfillment that authenticity brings while simultaneously believe that, as Bendix states, “In emphasizing the authentic, the revolutionary can turn reactionary” (8), and people are left in bounded isolation rather than recognizing our shared humanity. Performance ethnography is my way to complicate authenticity.

In 1999 when I returned to Nigeria for the fifth time to attend the annual Osun Festival, I also participated in the Osun initiation of an African American woman. Because I recently had been initiated, I was aware of the many differences between what the practitioners did with her and what these same women had done with me two years earlier. The two prominent Yoruba families who presided over the initiation even quarreled about what should be done next and why. At one moment during the three-day ceremony, the initiate-in-training leaned over to me and said, “I am so glad I am here because I am getting the true tradition.” This remark seemed to suggest that the many Lucumi, Santeria, and Vodoun practices in the U.S.—all informed by Yoruba cosmology to varying degrees—were not “true,” that initiations conducted outside of Africa were somehow of questionable validity. If one manifestation is deemed authentic, that implies

that other manifestations are fake. Was the initiate's relationship to Osun more sound because she was initiated in Osogbo rather than Brooklyn? Could "true tradition" occur even when the practitioners needed to debate exactly what should happen next? This initiation, like all cultural practice, is a spontaneously negotiated series of moves that forges its validity in the very process of the negotiation.

With "Searching for Osun," I wanted to examine what constitutes authentic identity and authentic performance and how these constructions are made. Identity issues were foregrounded in my choice to cast a European American woman as Joni the Ethnographer. Many audience members expressed surprise or shock when Deanna introduced herself as Joni, the professor who worked in Nigeria. Deanna performed her role so well that some of those audience members who did not know me prior to the performance accepted that she was Joni, and they couldn't reconcile her phenotypic whiteness with the ideas of blackness that she talked about throughout the performance. Eventually, she and I had to take a few people aside and tell them that she was pretending to be me. Even with this explanation, one audience member insisted that Deanna (believing she was Joni) contact her so Deanna could tell her more about how she mounted "Searching for Osun." This person's response made me wonder if my intention to push an examination of authentic identity could live within the "pretend" world of performance. The conventions of performance may remind an audience that what they are seeing is a conscious construction, but these conventions may not help an audience determine the boundaries of that construction. In some ways this confusion was consistent with the disorientation we often feel when we travel, but in other ways the confusion prevented some spectators from understanding the cultural context, or the central issue of the piece: that identity is constructed, contested, and contingent. For many participants, "Searching for Osun" was more a recreation of Nigeria than it was an interrogation of the very idea of recreation.

As the audience watched the Yoruba woman dance alongside the performers, or as they watched the video footage of a woman making traditional cloth next to a performer engaged in the same action, they had an opportunity to examine both authentic identity and authentic performance—and it is here where the two ideas fruitfully meet. Authentic performance occurs when the details of that performance are so precise that they create an authentic identity—a culturally specific, distinctive, comfortable, full identity. Authentic performance relies on the poise and the improvisational skills of the performer, for it is through improvisation that the performer must imaginatively invent reality and discover what feels true for the "character." The video and live referents serve as a model for the performers and as a standard of evaluation for the audience. The audience could see how my back did or did not undulate with the confidence and grace demonstrated by the Yoruba woman. The audience could practice this undulation and thereby learn more about their own everyday movements, and how those movements help form cultural specificity.

This authentic identity has less to do with essentialism than it does with practice—a tireless striving for the physical details that make up cultures. Blackness is a series of acquired behaviors with political, social, and material ramifications; it is not a conglomeration of indelible heritable characteristics. What some call essentialized features of race may more accurately be the predominance of certain acquired behaviors and attitudes found within particular groups. Rhythm is not inherited, but if one grows up in a family surrounded by music, in a family that encourages family members to dance at every family gathering, then one is likely to acquire a sense of rhythm, and that sense of rhythm will be particular to the kind of music being shared and the kinds of expectations about rhythm that the family holds. In this way, rhythm is only “in the blood” after a persistent physical relationship with rhythm.

With performance ethnography, one determines authenticity by noting the consistent physical details of the performer, and by comparing those details with the referents (video, audio, persons from the culture) that are present. Performance itself creates a particular authenticity that is rooted in the present, in the experiences here and now that are collaboratively and improvisationally generated.

Performance offers a new authenticity, based on body knowledge, on what audiences and performers share together, on what they mutually construct. As a form of cultural exchange, performance ethnography encourages everyone present to feel themselves as both familiar and strange, to see the truths and the gaps in their cross cultural embodiments. In this exchange, we find an authenticity that is intuitive, body-centered, and richly ambivalent.

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Chapter 5: Methods and Ethics

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A code of ethics cannot guarantee ethical behavior. Moreover, a code of ethics cannot resolve all ethical issues or disputes or capture the richness and complexity involved in striving to make responsible choices within a moral community. Rather, a code of ethics sets forth values, ethical principles, and ethical standards to which professionals aspire and by which their actions can be judged.

—National Association of Social Workers, *Code of Ethics* (1999)

[Researchers] are not only responsible for the factual content of their statements but also must consider carefully the social and political implications of the information they disseminate. They must do everything in their power to insure that such information is well understood, properly contextualized, and responsibly utilized. They should make clear the empirical bases upon which their reports stand, be candid about their qualifications and philosophical or political biases, and recognize and make clear the limits of anthropological expertise. At the same time, they must be alert to possible harm their information may cause people with whom they work or colleagues.

—American Anthropology Association, *Code of Ethics* (1998)

[p. 110 ↓] Chapter 4 raised a series of questions pertaining to the ethics of ethnography with very few answers. In this chapter, we will attempt to respond to the questions raised in Chapter 4 by reviewing the code of ethics and position statements from the American Anthropology Association (AAA), the American Folklore Association (AFA), and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). From their specific disciplinary perspectives, each field contributes significant methodological considerations focused expressly on ethics. The disciplinary fields sometimes differ and contradict each other in viewpoints and approaches, particularly around issues of informed consent, confidentiality, and compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB). However, by examining a cross section of key positions, the codes of ethics from the various institutions will provide a foundation and a guide for an ethical method that adheres to different standpoints, contexts, and purposes.

Codes of Ethics for Fieldwork

In the following, I provide a summary of the codes from each field with an emphasis on the field of anthropology because of its detail and comprehensiveness. It is important to keep in mind that these various fields overlap in their ethical methodology more than they diverge. At points where a particular field differs from or has more of an extended perspective than another, it is noted and distinguished in italics.

Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association

The four points listed below serve as a summary of the core ideas in the *AAA Code of Ethics*, approved June 1998, and they also serve to summarize the central ideas in the AFS and NASW. They are taken from the “Briefing Paper on the Impact of Material Assistance to Study Population” (Luong, 2001, p. 2).

1. To avoid harm or wrong
2. To respect the well-being of humans and nonhuman primates
3. To work for the long-term conservation of the archaeological, fossil, and historical records
4. To consult actively with the affected individuals or group(s), with the goal of establishing a working relationship that can be beneficial to all parties involved

[p. 111 ↓] We will now examine in more detail the ethical codes related to (a) openness and transparency, (b) the study population, (c) the scholarly community, (d) remuneration, (e) reciprocity, (f) informed consent, (g) harm and negative impact, and (h) confidentiality.

Openness and Transparency

In proposing and conducting research to funders, colleagues, persons studied, and all those *relevant parties affected by the research*, all researchers must be honest and straightforward concerning the following:

1. Purpose(s) of study (The goals of the project or rationale for study).
2. General impact of study (Who or what will the project effect? What difference will it make on society?)
3. Sources of support (Who is funding or supporting the project?)

Study Population

The primary responsibility is to those studied (people, places, materials, and those with whom you work). This responsibility *supercedes* the goal of knowledge, completion of project, and obligation to funders or sponsors. If ever there is a conflict of interest, the people studied *must come first*. In addition, researchers must make every effort to ensure that their work does not *harm the safety, dignity, or privacy* of those with whom they work.

Researchers must make sure in the very beginning of the study whether or not the subjects choose anonymity. If this is the case, researchers must make every effort to assure the population their privacy. They must also make subjects aware that, despite their best efforts, there are no absolute guarantees.

Researchers must acquire informed consent in advance of the study, as well as intermittently throughout the study at key points of vulnerability or when gathering threatening or delicate information. Informed consent is a vital component of ethical inquiry and may in most cases

take several forms both written and oral. Informed consent is also very controversial; we will discuss the problems that arise with informed consent later in the chapter. In most cases, informed consent does not require a written signature form. According to the AAA (1998), “It is quality of consent, not the format, that is relevant” (p. 4).

Researchers who enter into an enduring or binding relationship with their subjects must adhere to informed consent and *openness* or they must negotiate the *limits of the relationship*.

[p. 112 ↓] Although researchers gain professionally and personally from those they study, it is important not to exploit or respond in ways that are inappropriate.

Responsibility to the Scholarly Community

There will always be ethical dilemmas in every research project. Therefore, there should be a section in every proposal that indicates potential problems and the researcher's ethical concerns and guidelines. The following points, from the *AAA Code of Ethics* (1998, pp. 4–5), may serve as a guide.

Researchers belong to various research communities, bear a responsibility to those communities to represent them ethically, and are subject to the *general rules of conduct* for that community. They should also *not deceive or knowingly misrepresent* (i.e., fabricate evidence, falsify, plagiarize), *or attempt to prevent reporting of misconduct, or obstruct the scientific/scholarly research of others*. Moreover, researchers should support the research of future colleagues by preserving opportunities for them to *follow them to the field*. In other words, don't burn bridges; there are others who will come after you. Do not do anything that will close the door for them.

Researchers should apply their work and findings appropriately doing more good than harm and should make their data available to the scholarly and research community. Researchers should make every effort to preserve their fieldwork data for *use by posterity*.

Note: Hate Groups, Advocacy, and Responsibility

The following positions on advocacy and responsibility come from the *Commission to Review the AAA Statement on Ethics Final Report* (AAA, 1995, p. 8).

- Do researchers have an obligation to *promote the general welfare* of all populations studied? It would seem not, for example hate groups, terrorists, drug cartels, and like groups.
- Promote takes on many meanings through research: identifying a problem, putting a problem in context, and developing options for responding; by educating various audiences; and by advocating a particular solution or cause.
- In terms of advocacy, “The commission understands and supports the desire of

some anthropological researchers to move beyond disseminating research results and education to a position of advocacy” (p. 8). This does not mean, however, that the researcher is *necessarily* to be an [p. 113 ↓] advocate for or to be expected to *promote the welfare* of a group or culture studied.

The anthropological researcher, however, does have duties to the people studied, including doing no harm or wrong, providing full disclosure and informed consent, offering warnings of possible outcomes (good or bad) of the research for the people involved, and weighing carefully the risks and benefits of the study for the people being studied (p. 9).

Remuneration

What is fair compensation—“wages for labor” or “pay” for work and assistance (e.g., driving a car, helping with demonstrations or interviews, intellectual property rights or cultural knowledge, or traditional knowledge)—for members of the population studied? According to the AAA's “Briefing Paper on Remuneration to Subject Populations and Individuals” (Wagner, 2000), the ethical consideration of remuneration includes the following points:

- Appropriate and fair remuneration is culturally situated.
- Remuneration is an ongoing process negotiated by the researcher and guided by the population under study.

The international documents are clear that all people should receive equal pay for equal work. Likewise, they are clear about placing the ownership of heritage and the appropriate ways to handle issues such as remuneration in the hands of the people being studied (Wagner, 2000, p. 3). Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Amnesty International, 1948) states, “Everyone without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work,” and “Everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration” (p. 4). Article 18 states that indigenous peoples deserve “fully all rights established under international labour law and national labour legislation” (p. 4). Furthermore, they should not “be subjected to any discriminatory conditions of labour, employment or salary.” And Article 27 states that “everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author” (p. 5).

Reciprocity and Material Assistance

As a form of reciprocity, researchers often provide material assistance to individuals with study populations who have assisted them in their work. [p. 114 ↓] However, this raises questions about the consequences that well-intentioned reciprocity may have. Researchers may not be able to predict *the consequences of the material assistance to the study population*. The answers to questions regarding material assistance—when, how, why, and so forth—are not exact, but rather are contingent on the researcher's judgment and knowledge of the study population in its historical, social, and physical environments, as well as on careful consultation

with other experts and with as many potentially affected individuals as possible (Luong, 2001, p. 2).

In conformity with the *AAA Code of Ethics* (1998), material assistance to the study population should do the following (Luong, 2001):

- Avoid exacerbating conflicts within the study population or conflicts of the study population with other populations.
- Avoid increasing the health risks of the study population or other populations.
- Avoid markedly disrupting social relations within the study population.
- Avoid damaging local archaeological, fossil, and historical records.
- Avoid negative impacts on the environment of the study population.

Informed Consent

It is understood that the degree and breadth of informed consent required will depend on the nature of the project and may be affected by requirements of other codes, laws, and ethics of the country or community in which the research is pursued. Furthermore, it is understood that the informed consent process is dynamic and continuous: The process should be initiated in the project design and continue through implementation by way of dialogue and negotiation with those studied.

According to the AAA's *Briefing Paper on Informed Consent* (Clark & Kingsolver, 2000, p. 2), the following is a list of characteristics researchers should seek to meet in obtaining the informed consent of participants. Researchers should

- Engage in an ongoing and dynamic discussion with collaborators (or *human subjects*, in the language of some codes) about the nature of study participation, its risks, and its potential benefits; this means actively soliciting advice from research participants at all stages, including planning and documentation.
- Engage in a dialogue with human subjects who have previously or continuously been involved in a particular study about the nature of ongoing participation or resuming participation in a study. This dialogue should include the nature of their participation, risks, and potential benefits at this particular time.

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- Discuss with potential research subjects the ways study participation may affect them when research data are disseminated. For example, if photographs documenting their participation in a particular event or situation at a certain time could prove incriminating if viewed by a wide audience, this eventually should be discussed.
- Demonstrate, in the appropriate language, all research equipment and documentation techniques prior to obtaining consent so that research collaborators, or participants, may be said to be adequately informed about the research process.
- Inform potential subjects of the anonymity, confidentiality, and security measures taken

for all types of study data, including digitized, visual, and material data.

- Seek to answer all questions and concerns about study participation that potential subjects may have about their involvement in the research process.
- Provide a long-term mechanism for study subjects to contact the researcher or the researcher's institution to express concerns at a later date and/or withdraw their data from the research process.
- Provide, if possible, alternative contact information in case a potential research subject or collaborator does not want to participate but does not feel able to communicate that directly to the researcher.
- Obtain official consent from the human subject to participate in the study prior to the collection of any data to be included in the research process. The form and format of official consent can vary, depending on the appropriateness of written, audiotaped, or videotaped consent to the research situation. Those granting the permission should be involved actively in determining the appropriate form of documenting consent.
- Write and submit forms pertaining to informed consent, and obtain approval by the appropriate committees and/or review boards prior to recruiting subjects, obtaining informed consent, or collecting data.

Due to the particular nature of folklore research, the AFA takes a more critical stand on informed consent. The "Documentation of Informed Consent" from the *Statement of the American Folklore Society on Research with Human Subjects* (n.d.) states the following:

Folklorists inform their consultants about the aims and methods of research. The nature of the relationships that folklorists build with their consultants, however, is such that a written, signed, legally effective document would be [p. 116 ↓] inimical to the relationship upon which folklorists' research is based. Folklorists cannot go as guests into people's home communities, build trust and friendships, and then present a legal document for signature. Nor can they ask for signatures to be witnessed.

Informed consent is given orally, and possibly can be recorded on audio or video, but introducing a written legal document into the folkloristic-consultant relationship would generally prove an insult to the consultant and bring folklore research to a halt. Institutional review boards should alter or waive the requirements for written informed consent in the case of folklore and other forms of ethnographically based research (p. 2).

Negative Impact

According to an AAA briefing paper on the potential negative impact of study work (Watkins, 2000), it is the researcher's duty

to avoid harm or wrong, understanding that the development of knowledge can lead to change which may be positive or negative for the people or animals worked with or studied.... For example, because of the social stigma attached to cannibalism by

Western society, a researcher might wish to consider the ways that such a statement concerning the practices of a marginal culture might be used to further marginalize the culture. (p. 2)

The following is a list of guidelines from the briefing paper to assist the researcher in considering the “potentially negative influences” their publications of factual data may have on the populations they study (Watkins, 2000, p. 4). Researchers must

- Identify at the onset of any project the possible personal, social, and political implications that the publication of factual data concerning a study population may have on that population.
- Involve the study population throughout the entire process of the project (from the formulation of the research design through the collection of the data, the synthesis of data, and the publication of data) in such a way that the cultural context of the population under study is represented within the project to as much an extent possible.
- Weigh the scientific and anthropological importance of the data against the possible harm to the study population.
- Integrate the data in such a way that its role within the cultural context is fully explained.
- Present the data in such a way that sensationalism is minimized while the contextual comprehension of the data is maximized.
- Report truthfully any scientific or cultural biases that may be inherent in the presentation of the data.

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- Explain the importance of the data under discussion both to the scientific and local communities in language understandable by each community and disseminate the information in both communities as widely as possible.

Moreover, although advocacy is a personal choice that each researcher must make, it is imperative that the researcher acknowledge the scientific need for balance in anthropological reporting.

Folklorists and social workers are both obviously concerned with issues of ethics, but the disciplines remain two different fields; that is, their purposes, relationships, contexts, and goals are not the same. The social worker will be concerned with issues of ethics and confidentiality that are not always or generally the same concerns as those of folklorists or anthropologists. The *NASW Code of Ethics* (1999) states,

Social workers should protect the confidentiality of all information obtained in the course of professional service, except for compelling professional reasons. The general expectation that social workers will keep information confidential does not apply when disclosure is necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm to a client or other identifiable person. In all instances, social workers should disclose the least

amount of confident information necessary to achieve the desired purpose; only information that is directly relevant to the purpose for which the disclosure is made should be revealed. (p. 8)

The ethical responsibility regarding privacy and confidentiality is outlined in more detail in the *Code of Ethics* from the NASW (1999). Because social work, more explicitly, involves “particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty,” the challenges of privacy and confidentiality are of great importance (p. 1). Outlined below is a summary of central points on the issue of confidentiality in the NASW code that I have adapted for broader fields and areas of ethnographic fieldwork. Researchers should

- Respect consultant's privacy. Private information should not be solicited unless necessary for the research project.
- Not disclose confidential information to a third party unless given explicit permission to do so. Researchers should not discuss confidential information in any setting unless privacy can be ensured, and should “not discuss confidential information in public or semipublic areas such as hallways, waiting rooms, elevators, and restaurants” (p. 8).
- Protect privacy and identifying information particularly in the use of electronic mail, computers, facsimile machines, telephones, and telephone answering machines, when possible.

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- Protect the confidentiality of deceased persons.
- Protect confidentiality and privacy in the event of the researcher's own dismissal, incapacitation, or death.

Note: Institutional Review Board

In 1974, the federal government mandated the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at all universities that accepted federal funding for research involving human subjects. This was instituted because it was understood that science is not value-free, nor does it always contribute to the greater good or well being of others. Past incidents where medical research resulted in physical and mental harm had devastating effects (such as the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, the Willowbrook Hepatitis Experiment, and the Milgram shock experiment).

Corrine Glesne (1999) outlines the five basic principles that guide the decisions of the IRB in their proposal review (pp. 144–145):

1. Research subjects must have sufficient information to make informed decisions about participating in a study.
2. Research subjects must be able to withdraw, without penalty, from a study at any point.

3. All unnecessary risks to a research subject must be eliminated.
4. Benefits to the subject or society, preferably both, must outweigh all potential risks.
5. Experiments should be conducted only by qualified investigators.

The IRB has come under a great deal of criticism by researchers who fall outside a biomedical model and by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). The criticism may be summarized by the following points:

- Failure to recognize new modes of interpretive research that is more process oriented, collaborative, culturally located, and contentious (i.e., performance ethnography, autoethnography, oral history, and advocacy-/activists-oriented research).
- Infringement on researcher's First Amendment rights and academic freedom by surveilling inquiries within the humanities, such as research seminars and dissertation projects.
- The failure of the IRB to “recognize the need to include members who understand the newer interpretive paradigms” (Denzin, 2003, p. 254)
[p. 119 ↓]
- The inappropriate and ineffective application of the IRB's Common Rule (i.e., the inconsistent judgments and measures of approval from one institution to another [p. 255]).

Too many researchers are choosing not to conduct research with human subjects because of the difficulties in some universities with the IRB. The board has been hotly criticized because it uses a bioscientific model that too often works against the kind of ethical concerns in the social sciences and humanities. Norman K. Denzin (2003) provides a clear and cogent critique of the IRB:

The IRB framework assumes that one model of research fits all forms of inquiry, but that is not the case. ... The model also presumes a static, monolithic view of the human subject. Subjects and researchers develop collaborative, public, pedagogical relationships. The walls between subjects and observers are deliberately broken down. Confidentiality disappears, for there is nothing to hide or protect. Participation is entirely voluntary, hence there is no need for subjects to sign forms indicating that their consent is “informed.” The activities that make up the research are participatory; that is they are performative, collaborative, and action and praxis based. Hence participants are not asked to submit to specific procedures or treatment conditions. Instead, acting together, researchers and subjects work to produce change in the world. (pp. 249–250)

Reviewing the codes of ethics from the fields included provides important guidelines in

proceeding toward an ethical methodology. For each of the disciplines, formulating an effective statement took time, hard work, cooperation, and thoughtful deliberation by individuals committed to establishing guidelines for ethical fieldwork methods. For the complete documents and codes, you may download them on the AAA, NASW, and the AFS Web sites.

We will now examine how these codes are elaborated, complicated, tested, and challenged. The listing of codes may appear, on the surface, to be relatively easy to follow, but there will always be added dimensions and unexpected problems to consider. The next section will focus on three classic essays that extend the questions and topics covered in the above listing of codes to help us anticipate what other ethical dilemmas we might encounter in the field. Those essays are “Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas of Field Research,” by Gary Allen Fine (1993); “Conceptual Errors Across the Curriculum: Towards a Transformation of the Tradition,” by Elizabeth Kamark Minnich (1986); and “Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical [p. 120 ↓] Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance,” by Dwight Conquergood (1982b).

Extending the Codes

Moral Dilemmas

In Fine's (1993) essay, he lists the challenges ethnographers face in meeting three overarching ethical conventions of fieldwork. He describes them as “classic virtue,” “technical skills,” and “the ethnographic self.” He provides counter examples for each of these ideals that I will discuss in this section. For classic virtue, the notions of (a) “the kindly ethnographer,” (b) “the friendly ethnographer,” and (c) “the honest ethnographer” are tested by certain concrete situations. First, you strive to be *kind*, but your kindness is not always realized or appreciated. You may unintentionally insult those you meet or you may end up being thought of as a “fink” or a traitor. Second, you are *friendly* and value friendliness as a virtue, but there are people you meet that you genuinely dislike. Third, you try to be *honest* as you propose your study and describe your intentions, but you do not always know with certainty or cannot say with complete honesty what the details or discoveries will be for your project until you are actually in the process of completing it. In each case, classic virtues are questioned; however, ethics demands that although you may not like some of the people that you meet, although your intentions may be questioned and misunderstood, and although you cannot always with complete honesty represent your project before it has begun, you must remind yourself that it is not a perfect world and working with human subjects will always be a complicated and contradictory enterprise; therefore, you continue to strive for the ideals of kindness, friendship, and honesty while anticipating the challenges.

For technical skills, Fine (1993) argues that the aspirations of (a) “the precise ethnographer,” (b) “the observant ethnographer,” and (c) “the unobtrusive ethnographer” become difficult in the following situations. First, you understand that possessing technical skills as an ethnographer often suggests that one must be as *precise* as possible in interpreting the lives of others; however, precision falters when we realize that all of our interpretations are filtered by our own subjectivity and interpretive paradigms, as well as by our own idiosyncratic writing styles. Sometimes, ethnographers have more in common with playwrights than with scientist. Second, we understand that one of the cornerstones of ethnography is the ability to be a keen *observer*;

however, we can never grasp or present the [p. 121 ↓] whole picture (Fine, 1993). There is always something that will be left out, and there will always be elements of observation that are vitally important to one ethnographer's sensibilities and less important to another's. Third, in most of the literature on qualitative research methods, one of the most important attributes is for the ethnographer to be *asunobtrusive* as possible in order not to disturb the natural surroundings of the site or to divert attention away from the innate actions within the field toward actions that are influenced by the "approval" or "disapproval" of the researcher. Try as we must, our presence does make a difference; sometimes, it can be of little importance, and at other times it may drastically affect the fieldwork site.

Technical skills are a part of the methodological process, but they are also an ethical concern, because precision, observation, and ethnographic presence necessarily carry with them moral judgments, interpretive implications, and the responsibility of representation. As we aspire to fine-tune our technical skills, we will not perfect them, because we are not perfect beings, but we strive to do the very best we can.

The final category, the ethnographic self, focuses on the positionality of the ethnographer and when the aspirations to be (a) "the candid ethnographer," (b) "the chaste ethnographer," (c) "the fair ethnographer," and (d) "the literary ethnographer" become shaken. First, you make every attempt to be forthright and *candid* about all that you see, hear, and experience in the field; however, you may need to decipher what must be stated from what need not be stated. There will be times when you make mistakes, when you feel foolish, fearful, or awkward, and when fieldwork encounters are threatening, embarrassing, or intimate. Candor is desired, but it has limits. It is important to reflect upon the consequences of candor. Gratuitous candor that does not benefit anyone, and where there are no real lessons learned, frankness can read like crass indulgence or shallow sensationalism. You might ask yourself what purpose does candor serve? Am I putting myself in jeopardy for the sake of a candor that rubs against personal and professional respect, intimacy, and vulnerability? How does my need for candor affect and represent Others?

Second, chastity is another virtue in the field; although there have been particular accounts where the researcher reports moments of intimacy, they are rare and often denounced. Intimacy, desire, and sexual encounters in the field do happen, but, again, one must consider the consequences in terms of power relations, cultural insensitivity, safety, and the potential for emotional harm. You must be ever-so self-reflexive and contemplate your intentions and the possible effects of making public those private encounters and personal moments in the field. Sometimes the personal and the private are profoundly important and provide the greatest impact for the reader in [p. 122 ↓] understanding larger, more universal realities and implications. The question becomes why should we care about private matters? Where do they lead us?

Third, if we can attribute certain rules to ethnography, the attribute of *fairness* would be one of them. We are reminded as qualitative researchers again and again of the importance of being fair. Fine (1993) states,

What does it mean to be fair? Is fairness possible? The label “fair” can consist of two alternative meanings: that of *objectivity* or that of *balance*. Each is problematic, and each is far from universal in qualitative research narratives. Some suggest that they should not even be goals. Qualitative researchers need not be warned about the difficulty, if not impossibility, of pretending objectivity. Objectivity is an illusion—an illusion snuggled in the comforting blanket of positivism—that the world is ultimately knowable and secure. Alas, the world is always known from the perspective, even though we might agree that often perspectives do not vary dramatically. ... Few ethnographers accept a single objective reality. (p. 286)

Fourth, the ethnographic self is conventionally known and presented through writing; therefore, all of us who present our work in the form of writing become the literary ethnographer. Writing is a domain in qualitative research and ethnography that has become a topic of much deliberation about the descriptions it offers (e.g., poetic, impressionist, performative, interpretive). The challenges and demands of writing will be taken up in more detail in the next section; however, Fine's (1993) comments are worth mentioning as an initial consideration of how some ethnographers may be more preoccupied with the writing craft; that is, they are conscious of writing styles and devices to the point that the encounters and actualities of the ethnography become overshadowed by language use, metaphors, and poetic devices. Fine suggests that “the writing can hide lack of evidence. ... The writing carries too much meaning, and inevitably meaning gets shuffled and is imprecise” (pp. 288–289).

The ethical implications related to the ethnographic self in terms of candor, chastity, fairness, and writing are based upon the fact that it is the ethnographer who becomes both the transmitter and the interlocutor for a world that is largely shaped by his or her positionality. Our candor, chastity, fairness, and writing are always contingent on the unique situation; however, these elements must always be aligned with basic codes of ethics that are part of self-reflexive and conscious deliberations.

Conceptual Errors

Adding to the challenges offered by Gary Alan Fine, the feminist critic, Elizabeth Kamark Minnich (1986) outlines four overriding perceptions or [p. 123 ↓] conceptual errors that have dominated Western epistemology relative to its erasure of difference and the Other. Minnich's analysis will assist the critical ethnographer in unveiling and recognizing certain taken-for-granted practices, particularly in the academy, that cut against the grain of an ethics of ethnography as it relates to notions of Otherness. For the purpose of parity and justice, Minnich's work brings us to a deeper recognition of the relationship between knowledge, power, dominance, and the Other.

The first conceptual error that Minnich (1986) describes is *faulty generalization*. This is where differences and distinctions become ignored and discounted. In faulty generalization, one type or category of human being represents all others. According to Minnich, faulty generalizations take for granted or naturalize one kind of human being as the universal human while claiming that this singular category represents everyone else.

A common example of faulty generalization is the meaning and use of *man* and *mankind* as a universal signifier for everyone. In many forms of usage, these terms literally and intentionally refer to males at the exclusion of all other human beings (i.e., women and children). This is obviously a faulty generalization in reasoning, intent, and usage. However, these terms, when *intended* to include *all* human beings, remain an inherited faulty generalization that fails to critically disrupt the historical reasoning and intent of its own traditional exclusion.

The second conceptual error is *circularity*. This is where value judgments and ideas of rationality are derived from one particular tradition and then used to prove why other traditions or other concepts of rationality are unreasonable or unworthy. Circularity does not account for the fact that value and reasoning from any one individual, cultural tradition, or intellectual perspective is partial, idiosyncratic, and constructed. Minnich (1986) describes it this way: “In all fields, we find somewhere the intellectual equivalent of redheads defining red hair as a necessary possession of humans, and then using their definition to prove that it is true that only redheads are properly human” (p. 12).

An example of circularity is the proclamation by one religious doctrine that it in and of itself is the one and only doctrine that holds the absolute Truth. In other words, religions A, B, and C have different doctrines, and within each different doctrine they all claim to represent the absolute Truth while claiming the others false. This is circular thinking, because it is equivalent to making the claim that only C is a good religion because C makes the claim that it is the only good religion.

The third conceptual error is *peculiar theoretical constructs and inadequate paradigms*. This is where “ideal” models or illustrations suggest universal applicability without explicitly stating that they do. In other words, “metaphors, normative notions that make no claim to be generalizations [p. 124 ↓] from any real sample,” are employed in such a manner that they stand in as a general truth (Minnich, 1986, p. 17). Minnich retells a classic example to make this point:

The story of the blind people and the elephant is a Jain story: the elephant that felt to one like a rope; to one like a tree trunk; to one like a barrel; to one like a fan; to one like a tube is all of those things. Together, the blind people knew the elephant; one by one, they were partly right, and only wrong if they thought they were wholly right. (p. 17)

The fourth conceptual error is *falsification of the status of knowledge*. This is where scholars and teachers “confuse the subject matter as constituted by the particular history of their field with the subject matter itself” (Minnich, 1986, p. 23).

One example of falsification of the status of knowledge is when European and Euro-American artists are the only artists included for a course in the study of art history. One may surmise from this that Europeans and Euro-Americans are the only people that have a history of art. When only one kind of people is represented in a course of study, that representation is often mistakenly understood as the field of study itself. Another example occurs when the *construction and interpretation* of knowledge, rather than knowledge itself, is taught as reality.

Minnich explains it this way: “When historians confuse the past as it has been recorded, interpreted, and studied by historians with the past itself, [an] error has been committed. By that view, until recently indeed women and most men had very little if no history—and hence, no past” (p. 24).

These conceptual errors as articulated by Elizabeth Minnich describe the manner in which dominant regimes of knowledge marginalize, ignore, and devalue other ways of knowing and being that are outside that prevailing regime or culture. When applied to an ethics of ethnography, they direct us at several levels toward the following ethical contemplations. As ethnographers, we should strive

- to be more self-reflexive and self-critical of our own value-laden perspectives and not take our own perspectives for granted; to question ourselves and to think honestly about the attitude and disposition we hold for the subjects of our study before we enter the field. Subjects demand that we articulate and make known our own subjectivity, partiality, and biases as we interpret and represent Others.
- to be more mindful of where our theories and paradigms come from and to ask ourselves what voices, representations, and experiences are being excluded on one hand and too quickly universalized on the other.

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- to be more precise concerning both our theoretical and methodological choices. Do we need to explore other frames of analysis that may be more applicable to the uniqueness of a particular context? We must ask ourselves if the analytical and methodological frameworks are relevant and appropriate. Interpretive analysis is not a one-size-fits-all proposition.

Minnich (1986) concludes by assuring us that “the errors are not necessary, not by nature, not by requirement of rationality, not by anything” (p. 29). She then introduces a call to action of sorts by stating that these errors, in the past, “were committed by a particular people in particular times, and they can be undone by a kind of critical thinking that is directly related to action” (p. 29).

Dialogic Performance

We will turn to the action of ethnography in the work of performance scholar, ethnographer, and activist Dwight Conquergood. In his popular essay “Performing as a Moral act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance” (1982b), Conquergood presents five stances relative to ethics, four of which are fundamental problems or offenses to ethical fieldwork in varying degrees and circumstances. However, the fifth stance of *dialogical performance* contributes to an ethics of ethnography that provides a methodological approach that resists conceptual errors based on exclusivity and repressive paradigms of knowledge.

The first ethical offense is what Conquergood (1982b) calls *the custodian's rip-off*. This is where fieldworkers enter the field for the single purpose of “getting good material” to further their own self-interest and ambition. Human beings are used as raw material that must be

acquired or collected to successfully get the job done. In the custodian's rip-off, researchers are only concerned with getting what they want for themselves and for their projects, with little or no consideration of how their presence affects the dignity, safety, traditions, order, economy, and health of the people they meet.

The custodian's rip-off occurs when the researcher enters the field without respectful regard for subjects, but measures the time and trust given to him or her by the success and effectiveness of the research project. In her very fine study of domestic workers, Judith Rollins (1985) describes a researcher who asked for a family recipe that her interviewer, an elderly domestic worker, cherished deeply. The recipe had been in the elder woman's family for generations and it was a symbol of the history of love and caring the women in her family enacted through the art of cooking and domesticity. It was a special recipe that was created by the lineage of her [p. 126 ↓] mothers with their writing and imprints on the original copy. The recipe was one of her most valued possessions, a remembrance of her youth, the women who loved her, and early years of protection and joy. The researcher pressured the older woman to please let her borrow the recipe as an artifact to interpret for her research. Although the elder was very reluctant, she wanted to help the young woman who insisted that she understood the value of the recipe and vowed she would return it. Wanting to help, and believing the researcher's promise that she would take great care of the valued recipe and return it, the elderly woman let the researcher borrow it. The researcher took the recipe to analyze for her project and forgot to return it to the woman. The elderly woman never saw her recipe again. She expressed to Rollins the sense of loss, pain, and deep regret over the broken promise.

The second offense, *the ethnographer's infatuation*, is where the field-worker succumbs to romantic infatuation and superficial identification with the people of the study. The ethnographer is enamored with the Other in a shallow reverie over "aren't we all the same." Conquergood (1982b) states, "Although not as transparently immoral as the custodian's rip-off, this performative stance is unethical because it trivializes the Other. The distinctiveness of the other is glossed over by a glaze of generalities" (p. 6). The Other becomes an object of the researcher's admiration without a will or voice of its own. The ethnographer, secure in his or her own "protective solipsism," obviates differences and negates the possibility that the Other can reverse positions and become the judge, critic, and interpreter of the researcher or ethnographer.

The ethnographer's infatuation occurs when ethnographers go into the field imposing their own romantic lens over difficult realities. The ethnographer will overlook deep-seated contradictions, detailed symbolic meanings, and troubling questions in the field for glorifying appearances and shallow romanticism. For example, the researcher may encounter terror, poverty, human rights abuses, or social injustices, but then overlook the details and consequences of their severity and replace them with palatable banalities and general clichés about a common humanity. For example, I equate infatuation in my own fieldwork with those researchers I have observed who elide the complexities of human rights abuses only to excuse certain practices, such as various types of servitude or female incision (what is pejoratively referred to as "female genital mutilation"), as characteristic of the culture's intriguing uniqueness. Some will take the radical relativist stance that every culture has the right to its own idiosyncratic practices—always fascinating and permissible—without criticism, particularly from outsiders.

The third offense is the *curator's exhibition*. Whereas the enthusiast is enthralled by a shallow identification and sameness, the curator is [p. 127 ↓] fascinated by exotic difference and distance. We move from the shallow to the sensational. Conquergood (1982b) states, "This is the 'Wild Kingdom' approach to performance that grows out of a fascination with the exotic, primitive, culturally remote. The performer wants to astonish rather than understand" (p. 6).

In the curator's exhibition, the researcher becomes so enamored with difference that subjectivity and meaning is erased. While living in Ghana, a mask carver told me a story of a researcher who was enthralled with the "exotic" artwork of West African carvings. He was so ready to mark difference that he misinterpreted the meanings of a particular genre of carved masks and wrongly defined them as fetish symbols used in ceremonial witchcraft to bring destruction upon one's enemies. The carver, who is Catholic and doesn't believe in witchcraft, said the masks are actually carved to represent contemporary life in Ghana, largely for the purpose of selling to tourists.

The fourth offense is the *skeptic's cop-out*. The skeptic remains detached and determined that he will not enter domains of Otherness. With cavalier certainty, he claims he cannot embody or engage an identity outside his own. This stance forecloses engagement. Conquergood (1982b) states, "The skeptic's cop-out is the most morally reprehensible corner of the map because it forecloses dialogue. The enthusiast, one can always hope, may move beyond infatuation to love. Relationships that begin superficially can sometime deepen and grow" (p. 8). Conquergood compellingly describes the skeptic as "detached and estranged, with no sense of the other, sits alone in an echo-chamber of his own making, with only the sound of his own scoffing laughter ringing in his ears" (p. 8). The skeptic's cop-out shuts down the potential for engagement with the Other; therefore, we are left with no evidence or example of their entry into domains outside their own.

It is the fifth stance, located in the center of the four offenses outlined above, that to Conquergood (1982b) now becomes the ethical alternative. Conquergood describes this stance as *dialogical performance*. The four extreme corners of the map, from *detachment* to *commitment* and from *identity* to *difference*, reside in tension outside the frame that centers and focuses upon dialogical performance. Dialogical performance and genuine conversation are at the center and superimposed over the single connecting point where the offenses each meet. Commenting on "the strength of the center" where dialogical performance is situated, Conquergood explains that this center of dialogue "pulls together mutually opposed energies that become destructive only when they are vented without the counter balancing pull of their opposite" (p. 9). Dialogical performance becomes the centerpiece, representing the moral ground that keeps the counter-balancing pull in operation:

[p. 128 ↓] The aim of dialogical performance is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another. It is a kind of performance that resists conclusions. It is intensely committed to keeping the dialogue between performer and text open and ongoing. Dialogical understanding does not end with empathy. There is always enough appreciation for difference so that the text can interrogate, rather than dissolve into, the performer. That is why I have charted this performative stance at the center of the moral map. More than a definite position, the dialogical stance is situated in

the space between competing ideologies. It brings self and other together even while it holds them apart. It is more like a hyphen than a period. (p. 10)

Conquergood (1982b) provides for ethnographers clear modes of ethical considerations. Each mode is a further call for reflecting upon our own positionality as it relates to ethical methods. We may determine that it is the nature of our work to be dialogical; therefore, the other four stances outlined here are too extreme. Would any thoughtful ethnographer really commit any of these stances? The significance of this mapping, as Conquergood states, is for us to consider the quintessential offenses as well as the relative offenses that commonly occur along the frames of each. We may not always assume we are incapable of committing such offenses, but we must instead be humble enough and circumspect enough about the power and privilege that we hold as researchers and about our own positionality along the axis of the five stances.

Warm-Ups

1. An inexperienced fieldworker is conducting fieldwork at a senior citizen daycare center. She has been working at the center for more than two years. After providing informed consent at the beginning the project, her primary consultant has just informed her that he does not wish to be included in the study. He asks that all interviews and other relevant data relating to him be excluded from the study. If the student does not include data from this consultant, most of her research will not be of use. She will not be able to complete her research in time for graduation. What should she do?
2. Referring to the Fine (1993) discussion, what would be the three most challenging lies for you in the field? What do you anticipate would be the consequences?
3. According to the Minnich (1986) discussion, what conceptual errors have you internalized and enacted the most during your academic experiences? What have been the consequences?

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4. According to the Conquergood (1982b) discussion, what are the moral transgressions that you have witnessed the most and most. Which ones do you feel you most want to avoid and why?

Suggested Readings

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Chapter 8: It's Time to Write: Writing as Performance

[p. 181 ↓]

For me and most of the other writers I know, writing is not rapturous. In fact, the only way I can get anything written at all is to write really, really shitty first drafts. ...

—Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird* (1998)

But the foremost reason I write might at first strike you as petty. I write for revenge—that time-honored but somewhat clichéd motivation. Living well isn't the best revenge, I can tell you from experience. Writing well, on the other hand, is.

Revenge against apathy, against those who are not interested in listening to the voices that surround them—wife, husband, brother, daughter, father, friend or nameless traveler.

Revenge against the bullets of assassins, against the wild forces that trample the earth, against the terror and tragedy that is in every life.

Revenge against the Devil and, pardon the blasphemy, revenge against God, for slaughtering us in the crossfire of their eternal quarrel.”

—Bob Shacochis, “Writing for Revenge” (2001)

[p. 182 ↓] I remember when a colleague phoned to say that one of her graduate students had completed his fieldwork almost a year earlier, but still was not able to sit down and begin writing. She felt he had put off the writing for too long, finding every excuse not to write. Having made several attempts to get him to write, she was becoming more and more concerned with his procrastination. My colleague asked if I could suggest books or sources that she might recommend to help him get started writing.

I remember another occasion when one of my brightest students and most skilled fieldworkers sat across from me in my office utterly frustrated: “Soyini, writing is such a pain! It is actually depressing. I love fieldwork, but the thought of sitting down and trying to write it all up is such a burden! Where do I begin? There is just too much to write about. I experienced so much in the field. Yet, when I sit down to write, it takes me forever to just get that first sentence written. Nothing seems to make sense. It takes me forever to really get flowing with my writing and even then I'd rather be anywhere than sitting down trying to put words together on a page.”

My only concern in sharing these two anecdotes is that most of my students may think I am writing about them. Writing is a baneful charge for too many of us. This chapter is a synthesis of some of the most effective writing methods that I have discovered over the years. But more

importantly, the chapter augments these methods by recognizing the performative aspects of what it means to write. Hopefully, understanding writing through the lens and metaphor of performance might be a soothing balm for the pains of writing.

Getting Started: In Search of the Muse

Writing comes more easily when you have something to say.

—H. L. Goodall, Jr., *Writing the New Ethnography* (2000)

Never sit down to write until you know what you're going to say.

—Kenneth Atchity, *A Writer's Time* (1986)

Forget talent! If you have it fine. Use it. If you don't have it, it doesn't matter. As habit is more dependable than inspiration, continued learning is more dependable than talent.

—Octavia Butler, *Blood Child and Other Stories* (1996)

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Research Questions and Statement of Purpose

There are very few gifted individuals who can sit down with no plan in their head, but with the will to write, and suddenly craft pages and pages of thoughtful, engaging, and lucid sentences. Particularly if the writing follows the form of an essay and especially if we are writing ethnographic accounts, we must have a clear notion of what it is we want to say *before* we begin to write. Most of us, even the best writers, will flounder and become hopelessly frustrated if we do not have a loosely formed sequence of ideas to draw from. Staring at a blank page is the first step, and it is often the hardest step to overcome, but you can take that step with a lot more ease by knowing the very bare essentials or the raw ideas of what you want to write about. Goodall's (2000) words are simple and true: Before you begin remind yourself, *Writing comes more easily when you have something to say*. And, please remember, knowing what you want to say is the best cure for writer's block! (Goodall, 2000; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Wolcott, 2001). Now, you might ask yourself, "What is it I want to say?"

The Muse Map and the Road Map

The road map, or what I like to call the *muse map*, becomes a sort of list that comprises all you want to say and the order in which you want to say it. The muse map is the bare bones of what you are about to write. It can serve as informant, guide, and catalyst, keeping your writing going when your mind goes blank or when thoughts start to jumble. It also transforms the intimidating glare of the blank page from an absent space to a playing field for jotting down words and playing with ideas. The muse map overlooks the absent space and welcomes the expressive irreverence of the playing field. In the playing field, you lay words to the page

playfully—without the need for perfection, permanence, or propriety—only to free your first ideas with as much confidence and joy as possible so they can live whimsically on the page until more and others come along. Remember, a really, really shitty first draft is okay!

Creating Your Muse Map

You begin with your notes or your coded data (see [Chapter 2](#)), which comprise the raw material of your field notes and theoretical paradigms.

From your notes, you further refine and order your themes and concepts forming annotated topics or descriptive units that may take the form of major topics, subtopics, and, if necessary, sub-subtopics. Please, do not write **[p. 184 ↓]** your paper directly from your notes before you create your muse map unless your notes are already synthesized into main points and ordered.

Although not exactly the same, your muse map resembles the format of a formal outline, an idea tree, a series of clusters, or an annotated list of primary and secondary ideas. Your muse map is different from these, however, because you will experiment with a format or combination of formats. Moreover, you are learning through the process of reviewing, delimiting, and sequencing ideas. You are jotting down the map that is unfolding on a separate sheet of paper or on a computer. The muse map is not identical to the conventional outline format, because you are designing it to your specific needs. You may include small drawings and symbols to signal certain ideas; you may use your own style of shorthand, or color code certain points for emphasis. Feel free to keep it simple or go for the detail. More detail helps if you need more direction and guidance as you write; however, less detail is better if more direction feels too overbearing or restricting. Make the map you need to keep the writing going and focused.

Enjoy how much you are learning and feel confident in the clarity the process fosters. The point is that you must feel unrestricted in creating the most effective means of delimiting your morass of notes so that you may then list and order your ideas. Whatever format is most comfortable for you is fine. What is most important is that *you get the essential ideas—the bare bones—down on paper and place them in a sequence and an order*. Keep in mind OED—that is, remember to *order essential ideas*. This is all the muse map is about: It constitutes the very core ideas of your writing project and the sequence in which you wish to present them.

Writing your muse map is a process. As you are deciding what bare bones you want to include and are then grouping them and placing them in order (very much like coding and logging data, discussed in [Chapter 2](#)), you are, of course, jotting it down. I usually begin the basic draft of my map by writing in long hand with a yellow pad and pencil. Then, I type it out on the computer and print it out. It takes time, but the muse map is perhaps the most important step in the writing process. It truly is the bones of the final written product, but, more important, it becomes the muse that keeps the ideas and the writing flowing.

If you feel the term *muse map* is a bit too New Age, let it go. I only conjure it up so you may think about what a muse does performatively. But, if *muse map* feels a bit silly, you can always go back to the term *outline* and imagine your outline as your muse (or not). I happen to call this

process the *muse map* rather than an *outline* or a *road map*, not because it is so drastically different in form or content from a conventional outline, but because performatively and psychologically the *muse map* does something different. [p. 185 ↓] It conjures the mythic meaning of the muse and performs the function of that guiding force, keeping the ideas and the words flowing, counteracting the dread of the absent space and writer's block. *Muse map* reminds me that this “outlining” is more than just outlining; it is a learning process whereby I inscribe, creatively and idiosyncratically, for my own needs, the essence of my ideas in an order and priority that will keep my writing going. More to the point, the *muse map* might stop the writing and inspire it to change and go in another direction entirely.

Schedules and Time Management

Discipline is the key to all that follows, the bedrock of productive writing. Talent is not a rare commodity. Discipline is. It requires determination more than self-confidence, the commitment of your will to the dream.

—Kenneth Atchity, *A Writer's Time* (1986)

The most brilliantly constructed *muse map* in the world and the most gifted writer on the planet will fall completely short of the mark without *time*, *organization*, and *deep discipline*, or what I like to call my best friend TODD. Some of the best talents have lost great opportunities and missed important deadlines, because they did not know how to manage their time. They cannot seem to get organized. The time management and organization required to complete ethnographic writing are fueled by deep discipline.

Deep discipline is not simply being disciplined for fear of being punished, or being disciplined because it is your duty or because it is the right thing to do. This is discipline and it is good and fine—we all need it and have it in varying degrees—but it is not *deep* discipline. Deep discipline is more substantive: you are disciplined because you have a guiding, inner purpose that motivates you to make certain choices over other choices. Enacting this purpose is a priority that not only demands certain sacrifices, but also inspires them. Deep discipline is always accompanied by a level of self-determination and the pleasure that comes with the feeling of having direction and self-control. One of the perks of deep discipline (and discipline) is the wonderful ability to create habit. At those moments when purpose and deep discipline are challenged, we can always rely on the habit that discipline created. I remember Octavia Butler saying at a writer's conference that “Habit is more dependable than inspiration.”

Keeping in mind the importance of TODD in the completion of your writing project, I have also listed important time management techniques that will help you as you achieve TODD:

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- Set goals with the determination to keep them. Don't kill yourself: Set realistic goals that are achievable. If your goals place unreasonable demands upon you, it is more than likely that you will become discouraged.

- Prioritize and create a master list of things to do. Keep in mind what is most important. Think in terms of what *must* be done, what *should* be done, and what *could* be done.
- From your master list, create a list for the month, the week, and the day. The combination of lists helps to prioritize your things to do, but it also helps organize the time needed to do those things.
- Remember, prioritize! Learn the Jelly Bean lesson. I remember seeing this demonstrated by Stephen Convoy on television many years ago. You have three glass containers: One container is filled with jellybeans, another is filled with three large rocks, and the third is empty. You must fit the empty container with both the rocks and the jellybeans. The rocks represent what is most important to you—that is, your goals. The jellybeans represent what is not so important—that is, watching television, shopping, cleaning the house, Internet surfing, the telephone, and so forth. Now, you are asked to place the jellybeans in the large empty jar. After all the jellybeans are emptied into the jar you are then asked to place the rocks. All the jellybeans are in the jar, but there is no room in the jar for the rocks. Indeed, you can barely fit one rock into the jar. Then, you are asked to empty the jar and place the rocks in first. After placing all three rocks inside the jar, you are now asked to put the jellybeans inside the jar. Most of the jellybeans fit inside the jar with all the rocks. Is this lesson pretty obvious? First things first!
- Schedule tasks for high energy and prime body rhythm times. There really are times of the day when the body and mind are better at certain tasks than other times. Listen to your body and try to schedule your work around its rhythms. For me, writing is best in the morning and proofreading my work is better later in the day.
- Develop a routine: Designate tasks on specific days and times. Routines do not always have to be dull and repetitive. They can enhance productivity and energy, as well as provide a sense of direction and self-confidence.
- Proportion your efforts to the worth of the tasks and create a timeline. This was a very important lesson that I learned the hard way. So many of us “sweat the small stuff”: Don't waste a lot of time and effort on items that are not a priority. Give them the least amount of effort in order to complete them so you can free your time for what is most important.

[p. 187 ↓]

- Assign deadlines to priorities to keep them from becoming emergencies. Self-imposed deadlines require you to complete a task before it becomes an emergency and so are one of the best stress relievers invented.
- Avoid procrastination by dividing tasks into small units. Procrastination can imprison us, because we are trapped into worrying about what is not yet done. If you are faced with a large task, do a bit at a time each day or throughout the day. Peck away until the job gets done.
- Always identify what is the right thing to do! There are a lot of distractions and seductions, but before you are tempted to go with you friends to the mall or stay up later than you should, ask yourself, “Is this really what I need to be doing?”
- Do one thing at a time. Multitasking is fine, and some of us are more skilled at it than others, but if you can, please try as best you can to do one thing at a time. Doing so creates better quality work, and, moreover, is gentler on the body and mind.

- Take advantage of hidden time and wait time. Most all time management tips include this point. There is a great deal of “unused” time that can be used in completing certain tasks. Waiting can be turned into a really productive time.
- Just say “No!” This sometimes takes courage, but you have a right and an obligation to yourself and your goals to say “no” sometimes. With practice, it really does get easier.
- Do it, delegate it, or dump it! Decide which of these options is best based on what you think is really worth doing. If you can dump it, you should. If you can delegate it, then do so without guilt. If it is worth doing and only you can do it, then do it.
- Review and plan at night or first thing in the morning. This helps set the day without the mushy feeling of not being sure what you need to do or how to begin your day.

Remember: Be self-determined and stay the course!

First Draft and Free Writing

After you have completed your muse map, it is time now to start writing. With your muse map as your director and guide, start placing ideas on the page. As each idea lands on the page, you are elaborating, joining, and transitioning from one idea to the next. You are *not stopping to think or deliberate* about what you are writing. You have already done that when you [p. 188 ↓] made your muse map. You are *not stopping to correct, check, or perfect* your writing. If you feel you must stop to think or correct, take *only a few seconds* to get yourself in order, then start writing again. But remember—stop only if you feel you absolutely must and immediately start writing again.

In the words of writer Natalie Goldberg (1990), “*Keep your hands moving!*” (p. 3). This might be very difficult and feel unnatural to you if you have the inclination or have formed the habit to stop frequently to read over and correct your writing. But resist it as best you can and keep the hand moving. One technique to help you keep going is to use question marks or dashes when you get stuck trying to think of the right word or even the right phrase. Instead of stopping to think of the word or to properly craft the phrase, write or type a question mark keeping the overall flow of your ideas uninterrupted. You will notice that when you feel you can't capture the right word or phrase and you skip over it (with a question mark or a dash), you complete that section and you come back to the missing word. It will come to you. It is generally the case that when the words do not come to mind immediately, if you keep going they will come to you later on (right after you read the passage, or in few hours or days). Skip the parts that would interrupt your thinking and that would keep your hand from moving. It is a matter of filling in the blanks. Rest assured, the right word will come to you.

The purpose in keeping the hand moving is not to be in the frustrating position of creating ideas *andediting* them at the same time. Let the editor in you rest for a while and let the playful creator free to express itself on the playing field of the page. Let it truly be *free writing*. Harry F. Wolcott (2001) states,

Writers sometimes referred to as “bleeders” follow the opposite of freewriting. I do not know the origin of the term, although it brings to mind an observation attributed to sports

journalist Red Smith: “There's nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and open a vein.” Bleeders are methodical. Their approach reflects a combination of confidence and command about writing, along with some personal qualities (hang-ups?) about having everything just right. They worry over each sentence as they write. They do not press ahead to the next sentence until the present one is perfected.... If you recognize the bleeder tendency in yourself, and you cannot imagine romping through an early draft and subsequently discarding material with abandon, then perhaps a tightly detailed outline (or Table of Contents) is sufficient to get you started on the slow-but-steady production of a first draft. (pp. 26–27)

Wolcott also adds that, when the writing is not coming forth, he will turn from the keyboard and take out his yellow notepad and ballpoint pens to get the words down on paper.

[p. 189 ↓]

The Anxiety of Writing: Wild Mind and Monkey Mind

That big sky is wild mind. I'm going to climb up to that sky straight over our heads and put one dot on it with a Magic Marker. See that dot? That dot is what Zen calls monkey mind or what western psychology calls part of conscious mind. We give all our attention to that one dot. So when it says we can't write, that we're no good, are failures, fools for even picking up a pen, we listen to it.

—Natalie Goldberg, *Wild Mind: Living the Writer's Life* (1990)

Natalie Goldberg (1990) equates our struggle to write with the battle between wild mind and monkey mind. Wild mind in Western psychology is understood as the *unconscious*. But Goldberg sees wild mind as much larger than the unconscious: It is the big sky and all that surrounds us, from our dreams and desires to everyone we ever met or wanted to meet; it is all our experiences and imagined experiences; it is “mountains, rivers, Cadillacs, humidity, plains, emeralds, poverty, old streets in London, snow, and moon” (Goldberg, 1990, p. 32). Wild mind is everything. However, monkey mind is that small dot in the big sky of wild mind. Monkey mind is consumed by control, and it rules by constraint, admonishment, and judgment. Monkey mind is always chiding us and demanding restraint. Monkey mind abhors the daring, the beauty, and the magnanimity of wild mind. “So our job as writers,” according to Goldberg, “is not to diddle around our whole lives in the dot but to take one big step out of it and sink into the big sky and write from there” (p. 33).

Wild mind and monkey mind are at battle when we free write. We turn to wild mind to keep the hand moving on the playing field of the page, but we feel the pressure of monkey mind trying to take control by correcting us, second guessing our first thoughts, and telling us we are dumb or the writing isn't good enough. Goldberg (1990) suggests, “Let everything run through us and grab as much as we can of it with a pen and paper. Let yourself live in something that is already rightfully yours—your own wild mind. ... Can you do this? Lose control and let wild mind take over? It is the best way to write. To live, too” (p. 34).

Continents, Islands, and the Editor

Kenneth Atchity (1986) provides us with another metaphor that captures the tension between the freedom of wild mind and the constraint of monkey [p. 190 ↓] mind in the form of three spheres: *continents*, *islands*, and *the editor*. The continent of reason, according to Atchity, is the “rational part of the mind, the logical and conventional part we all share in common” (p. 6). The continent is a “more efficient thinking machine” than the islands, which are the many elements of “intuitive consciousness, those countless idiosyncratic centers of perception that are different for each of us” (p. 6). When we begin to write, the continent of reason begins to form sentences, but the many intuitive islands of the mind don't like it; they think, “It's a ridiculous way to start your story—too weak!” (p. 6). The islands reject what reason has written, and “the islands have a million better ideas and each and every one of them starts thinking about better sentences” (pp. 15–16). At this point, the battle between the continent of reason and the multitude of islands begins. As the many islands express all their many different ideas against the continent of reason, another part of the mind, which Atchity describes as the *managing editor*, now appears on the scene. He states,

As the day wears on, ideas from the strongest islands begin announcing themselves to that part of your mind I call “the Managing Editor.” The rational mind has programmed the intuitive islands to reject its arbitrary decision because it knows what the islands have to say is likely to be more powerful than anything it can come up with through sheer intellectualizing. (pp. 6–7)

Atchity (1986) asserts, “Learning to write is learning your own mind” (p. 14). His illustration of the islands, continent, and editor, like Goldberg's wild mind and monkey mind, animates the psychology of writing by giving graphic characterizations to the working of the mind. “The islands of consciousness are free floating and changeable. ... A new island can be formed instantly from a new impression. ... Individuality and originality are island characteristics,” writes Atchity (p. 15). The continent of reason “is relatively stationary and immovable ... the Continent is the consciousness of society and culture, and is constructed by our education” (p. 15). The Continent is slower and more deliberate than the impressionable islands, because it must “search its warehouse of memory to find a category to which to relate the new impression so that it can use that new impression in dealing with the world outside the mind” (p. 15). As the Continent is motivated by reason and structure, the islands are energized by originality and the polyvocality of their individual impressions.

Atchity's (1986) and Goldberg's (1990) metaphors are versions of Turner's (1982a, 1982b, 1985) structure and antistructure doing battle in the writer's mind. The centripetal and centrifugal, the wild and the monkey, are in rousing competition. No wonder writing for some is a frustrating and sometimes painful experience. Again, in Atchity's words:

[p. 191 ↓] The interaction of islands and Continent—the tension between them—causes the productive energy identified with the Editor's creative awareness. Once it has been formed from the island-Continent tension (and the acceptance of that tension as the neutral stat of things), the Managing Editor focuses like a spinning laser beam to illuminate activities on the islands and on the Continent, moving slowly or quickly

depending on the writer's energy level. ... Writing is the Editor's ordering of materials from all the islands into the language and structure of the Continent, managing the analytical mind to have it organize images from the non-analytical mind. No wonder writing causes anxiety. (pp. 15–16)

In summary, the following points may serve as helpful reminders as you approach your writing project.

- Remember TODD: Develop a schedule and block out time to write.
- Know what you want to write before you start and create your muse map.
- Let your muse map be your prompter and guide in keeping the hand moving.
- With your muse map as your springboard and safety net: lose control and play.
- Honor wild mind and try not to heed the controlling impulse of monkey mind: Try not to stop, think, or correct punctuation, grammar, or spelling.
- If you get stuck trying to think of *le mot juste*, skip it, type in a question mark, and keep writing.
- If you get stuck writing larger sections or transitions, move away from the computer. Treat yourself to a change of scenery (go to a café or a park) and then get out your writing pads and pencils.
- When you have employed the services of the muse map—transformed empty pages to playing fields—take a break. Congratulate yourself for having completed the hardest draft of all, the first draft.
- After your lovely break, come back, put on your editor's cap, and begin crafting your work.
- Reading your drafts out loud, as you complete each section, is one of the best methods to truly “realize” what you have written and notice what needs more work.

Writing as Performance and Performance as Writing

Because of you I have listened to others. I have performed in writing, sometimes in writing, sometimes instead of in talking, touching, and staging, our narrative rites.

—Della Pollock, *Telling Bodies Performing Birth* (1999)

[p. 192 ↓] In Della Pollock's path-breaking essay “Performing Writing” (1998), she defines performative writing as (a) evocative, (b) metonymic, (c) subjective, (d) nervous, (e) citational, and (f) consequential. This section draws primarily from Pollock's important contribution to performative writing and serves to extend her six components of performative writing through the interactive characteristics of the relational, evocative, and the embodied, and concludes by reiterating Pollock's idea of the consequential.

Performative Writing as Relational

Understanding performative writing as something relational means you are writing for an audience of readers and you *care* about them. You are invested in them, because you are hoping that what you write makes a difference to them and that it makes some kind of contribution. You want your words to matter to your audience. In performative writing, you want your readers to come away with something they did not feel or know before they read your words. Your writing is an offering, because you care about what they receive from your writing and how they receive it. Performative writing is relational because it is generous. You consciously extend yourself to your readers. You want them to take in your words without it being complicated for the sake of being complicated.

What I mean here is that writing that is hard to read or writing that is hard for the sake of being difficult is not smart writing. Making the writing complicated doesn't necessarily make it more substantive. You should not unnecessarily overwork or overburden your readers for the purpose of proving yourself smarter than them. It is more important that your readers grasp and encounter your writing than it is for them to be impressed by how deep or brilliant you are. This does not mean that simplicity is always a virtue either. Sometimes keeping it simple is really just simplistic thinking. In performative writing, there is virtue and beauty in the complex if it is purposeful and not gratuitous or self-indulgent. Complexity can be the most generous offering, because it demands growth, challenges the expected, and disturbs the complacent. Relational writing means that you find the very difficult balance between the necessity for simplicity and the necessity for complexity because you are offering your words to Others and you care about what it does *for* them.

Performative writing emphasizes the relational. This does not, however, mean that all writers should claim the relational as a quality of their work. Some writers will argue that they write for themselves and for the passion that enlivens their own being. They argue that they write from the center of their individual heart, soul, and life-world, in which the reader is welcome [p. 193 ↓] to share. They write with the conviction that they will be true to their own voice, and the readers will then enter as a result of that truth.

Performative writing emphasizes the relational dynamic between writer and reader in a spirit of caring about the dialogic and communicative quality of the connection. This does not mean that the performative writer must repress his or her own unique voice or soul to appease the reader. Nor does it mean that the performative writer *only* writes *for* the reader, or that every word or idea is focused on what the reader might think, but we do not fixate on our own individuality either.

Performative writing as a relational act means we do not write purely as individuals. We live in a world with Others, and their imprint is upon who we are and what we write. Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) states,

Everything that pertains to me enters my consciousness, beginning with my name, from the external world through the mouths of others (my mother, and so forth), with their intonation, in their emotional and value-assigning tonality. I realize myself initially through others: from them I receive words, forms, and tonalities for the formation of my initial

idea of myself. ... Just as the body is formed initially in the mother's womb, a person's consciousness awakens wrapped in another's consciousness. (p. xx; qtd. in Goodall, 2000, p. 140)

An example of how performative writing both affirms and complicates Bakhtin's (1984) words in the way we realize as well as lose ourselves and the Other is illustrated in the performative writing of performance scholar Judith Hamera (1996, 1997, 2002). The following passage, from Hamera's (2001) ethnographic study on virtuoso dance, discusses how the relational simultaneously encompasses dancer, audience, ethnographer, and the ethnographer's ability to write about it all. In this essay, Hamera describes how she is remade through the dancer and the dance, and discusses the challenge of what this means when the ethnographer must grapple with language and discourse to bring that embodied presence to the page:

Roxanne told me that she and Oguri dance out of what she called a strange obligation, and unpeaceful obligation, because she said, they took it seriously when a member of their audience told them she never came in with a problem their dances couldn't solve. I find this ironic because I never come in with a discursive, representational solution that these dances couldn't make problematic. The issue is this: Roxanne is a dancer of enormous grace and power but Oguri overwhelms. His body, his movement vocabulary, his ethos are almost excessively present. He is always almost too much there and not, or not only, because of the choreography or mise-en-scene. His work is beautiful, terrifying, "at the limits of the possible" (Barthes, "Romantic Song," 286). His excess of [p. 194 ↓] presence, and my joy and anxiety in the face of it, leave me searching for language up to the task of representing, not only the dance, but how I am remade through it. How was he better, and what was he better at, and how can I tell you? And in the search for the ways to tell you, I lost his body to language. (p. 236)

Performative Writing as Evocative

Seeing performative writing as an evocative act means that what is written down in words is now lifted from the page into a more sensuous awareness. In the sentiment of Norman Denzin (2001, 2003), performative writing enacts as it describes. What is described becomes evoked through detail, sensuality, and verisimilitude into another felt-sensing presence (Bacon, 1979). The readers enter this new presence through the guiding hand of the writer because they have been given enough information and enough inspiration to make a metaphorical leap from the page to a fusion of imaginations: The writer's imagination evokes the reader's, and words are not just words anymore, flat on a page, but are now images woven through meaning. Performative writing is evocative because it is a braiding of poetry and reportage, imagination and actuality, critical analysis and literary pleasure. Pollock states (1998),

Performative writing is evocative. It operates metaphorically to render absence present—to bring the reader into contact with "other worlds," to those aspects and dimensions of our world that are other to the text as such by re-marking them. Performative writing evokes worlds that are other-wise intangible, unlocatable: worlds of memory, pleasure, sensation, imagination, affect, and in-sight. (p. 80)

Performative writing renders absence present by evolving a world of meaning upon which the reader may now enter. Performative writing defies monologism; it is an inherently dialogic endeavor. A collaboration of imaginations between reader and writer in evoking a world that is Other and wise is illustrated in the work of Dwight Conquergood. A scene is evoked from Conquergood's (1988) fieldwork in Thailand: Through his performative writing, he brings the camp to us in a quintessential moment that captures the history of dislocation, struggle, and transnational politics that is metaphorically contained in one woman's song:

A Hmong widow walks to a crossroad in Camp Ban Vinai, surveys the scene, and then settles herself on a bench outside the corner hut. Bracing her back against the split-bamboo wall, she begins to sing. At first softly, as if to herself, [p. 195 ↓] she sings a Hmong Khy txhij (folksong). Aware of a gathering audience, she raises her voice to fill the space around her. She sings a lamentation, carving her personal anguish into a traditional expressive form. With exquisitely timed gestures, she strips and peels with one hand the branch of firewood she holds in the other. Tears stream down her face as she sings about the loss of her husband, her children, her house, her farm, her animals, and her country. She sings of war, and flight, and breaking, and of a time when she was wife and mother in the Laotian village where silver neck-rings were worn. She punctuates each refrain by tossing away a sliver that her strong fingers have torn from the wood she holds across her lap as if it were a child.

The sad beauty of her singing attracts a crowd. She never makes eye contact but acknowledges the crowd's presence in her spontaneously composed verses, subtly at first, and then more confidently. She is both lamenting and entertaining. With nothing left to tear away, she makes the final toss of the last splinter, rises, and begins to sway with the rhythm of her song. People set out food for her. I give her the few ath I have in my pocket. Her face still wet, she breaks into a broad smile. Strange laughter interrupts her otherwise balanced verses. (p. 174)¹

Performative Writing as Embodied

Performative writing as something embodied means the evocations of “Other-wise” worlds are not disembodied creations (Pollock, 1998). Writing has been considered a marriage between the imagination and intellect. In performative writing, we recognize that the *body* writes. Critical ethnography adheres to radical empiricism: the intersection of bodies in motion and space. Meanings and experiences in the field are filtered and colored through sensations of the body—that is, through body knowledge. If we accept that knowledge has infinite origins and forms, we are able to accept knowledge from and of the body. Body sensation as body knowledge is not to be equated solely with the sensational or feelings of arousal, though it certainly includes these elements. Rather, body sensation as body knowledge comprises *impressions* and *interpretive meaning*. Body knowledge is the emotion and cognition of physical pain: blazing heat burning the skin, hunger that dulls the senses, grotesque smells that sicken the stomach. As physical pleasure, it is the night breeze caressing the skin, the delicious taste of a communal feast, the alluring smell of locally made body oils. Because these knowledges of the body are embedded with meanings that filter and guide our experiences in the field, they will obviously inform and influence what we write. We write *from* our body and we write *through* our body.

In writing from our body, we are writing from the memories (and field notes!) of our embodied space and impressions in the field. When we are writing through our bodies we move to the space and the *act* of putting [p. 196 ↓] words down on a page. In writing through our body, the act of writing becomes the enactment of an embodied voice. In performative writing, the reader is not taking in disembodied ideas and images from a cognitive word machine or an omniscient knower. In performative writing, words are inherited by a subject with a voice. To state that there is a subject and a voice is to state that there is a body. There has been a great deal of discussion over the notion of *voice* in writing: “finding your voice,” “honoring your voice,” “listening to your voice,” and so forth. Goodall (2000) states,

Voice is the personal rhetorical imprint of who we are and what we write. Singularly and multiply, voice is the sound of a character speaking. Voice sums the way in which prose communicates a writer's vocal range and tone, her or his sensitivities to the nuances and passions of spoken language, and the essential phenomenological essence of what is being said. Voice is the sound of the ethnographic world being called into being. It is a pattern of heard recognitions, and of differences, that convey to readers the self that is textually constructing other and contexts. (pp. 139–140)

The performance artist and scholar E. Patrick Johnson (2003) enacts embodied writing with a clear presence of voice in his description of a gay nightclub:

Inside, my friends and I squeeze down the staircase and descend into the sea of bodies onto the dance floor. There is barely enough room to breath, let alone move, every inch of the space is filled with bodies—every body imaginable. Clearly, the body is on display: There are drag queens in skintight hot pants and platform shoes. There are “butch” men donning their black leather jackets, lining up along the wall like two by fours holding the structure together. There are “queens” dressed in black chiffon blouses unbuttoned to their navels and tight black jeans, who are constantly pursing their lips while looking over the tops of their retro “cat-eye” shades; there are older men (in this context anyone over 45) sitting on bar stools, dressed conservatively in slacks and button-up shirts sipping their scotch and sodas while looking longingly at the young bodies sauntering across the dance floor. The hip-hop contingent is sprinkled throughout the club in their baggy jeans, ski caps, sneakers, and black shades, some sucking on blow pops while others sip Budweiser's. And there are those like me and my friends who are dressed in designer jeans (Calvin Klein) and tight, spandex muscle shirts, performing middle class (acting bourgeoisie)—as if we actually have two nickels to rub together! (p. 104)²

Performative Writing as Consequential

Performative writing is consequential because it inheres in performance as a contested concept that “crashes and breaks through sedimented meanings [p. 197 ↓] and normative traditions and plunges us back into the vortices of political struggle” (Conquergood, 1998, p. 32). Performative writing is conducive to critical ethnography because it embraces political struggle and is not ashamed of its politics and advocacy (Agger, 2002; Denzin, 2001). Della Pollock (1998) states,

As the effect of social relations and as a mode of cultural, historical action, performative writing throws off the norms of conventional scholarship for an explicit, alternative normativity. It operates by a code of reflexive engagement that makes writing subject to its own critique, that makes writing a visible subject, at once making it vulnerable to displacement by the very text/performance it invokes and shoring up its capacity for political, ethical agency. As performance, as writing that stipulates its own performativity, performative writing enters into the arena of contest to which it appeals with the affective investment of one who has been there and will be there at the end, which has a stake in the outcome of the exchange. The writing/subject puts his/her own status on the line ... in the name of mobilizing *praxis*, breaking the discursive limits of the emperor's stage, and invigorating the dynamics of democratic contest in which the emperor and his new clothes (or lack thereof) are now continually refigured. (p. 96)

The following example of performative writing as a consequential act is taken from my fieldwork in Ghana (Madison, in press). I'm writing performatively about the relationship between globalization and poverty in the global South:

The human body is indeed a wonder. In its beauty it is a miracle. The beautiful body can heal itself in mysteries beyond science. In marvelous precision the beautiful body can inhere remarkable strength, speed, and endurance past its own expectation.... The Other bodies, the loathsome bodies—the dirty body, the disfigured body, the sick body, the body that smells of refuse, the body that oozes, excretes and cannot shelter its waste, the body where matter is grotesquely “out of place” emitting itself in public view—are the bodies that wrenching poverty engenders and breeds in its abominable lack.

For much of the global South, specifically Africa, dirt is a contentious symbol. Blackness, dirt, and disgust are perennially linked. It is within designated locales where we only see dirty people having dirty children with dirty clothes and dirty faces. We see them living in dirty spaces on dirty roads filled with all kinds of dirty things. We know that dirt is to be gotten rid of, but do we remember that when water is inaccessible dirt dwells? Do we remember that dirt braces disease when sanitation systems are not effectual, or existent? Dirt is a stigma and an effect of many of the world's poor. It is both imagined and real. Dirt resides when poverty annuls the time and resources to attend to it, and when global machinations neglect its relief. Dirt and the political economy [p. 198 ↓] are insidious partners. Dirt is a fact of material and political conditions but it is too often cast as a moral flaw ... This village, these people and the 2,800 million people who live on less than \$2 a day and comprise 46% of the world's population are 2,800 million stories of epoch injustices. ... The heat is blazing ... I look at Patience sitting beside me. I ask her to take a photograph with the village women we have been talking with all day before we leave to go back to the city. ...³

Warm-Ups

1. Place four different and ordinary objects on the floor or a table—they can be any kind of objects that you find in the room. Arrange them together. Now, write about them. Describe in great detail their appearance, their arrangement, and their function

2. Write a story describing what you did yesterday from the beginning of the day until you went to sleep. How can you write the yesterday story so that it would be interesting to read and hear?
3. List what you consider the joys or the difficulties (or both) of writing ethnographic accounts.

Notes

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2. Reprinted with permission from the publisher from E. Patrick Johnson, "Strange Fruit: A Performance about Identity Politics." *TDR/The Drama Review*, 47:2 (T178-Summer 2003), pp. 88–116. © 2003 by New York University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
3. Excerpted from author's essay "My Desire Is for the Poor to Speak Well of Me" to be published in D. Pollock (Ed.), *Remembering: Performance and Oral History* (forthcoming). New York: Palgrave/St. Martin's Press.

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Chapter 15 / Deep Play:

Notes on the Balinese Cockfight



The Raid

Early in April of 1958, my wife and I arrived, malarial and diffident, in a Balinese village we intended, as anthropologists, to study. A small place, about five hundred people, and relatively remote, it was its own world. We were intruders, professional ones, and the villagers dealt with us as Balinese seem always to deal with people not part of their life who yet press themselves upon them: as though we were not there. For them, and to a degree for ourselves, we were nonpersons, specters, invisible men.

We moved into an extended family compound (that had been arranged before through the provincial government) belonging to one of the four major factions in village life. But except for our landlord and the village chief, whose cousin and brother-in-law he was, everyone ignored us in a way only a Balinese can do. As we wandered around, uncertain, wistful, eager to please, people seemed to look right through us with a gaze focused several yards behind us on some more actual stone or tree. Almost nobody greeted us; but nobody scowled or said anything unpleasant to us either, which would have been almost as satisfactory.

If we ventured to approach someone (something one is powerfully inhibited from doing in such an atmosphere), he moved, negligently but definitely, away. If, seated or leaning against a wall, we had him trapped, he said nothing at all, or mumbled what for the Balinese is the ultimate nonword—"yes." The indifference, of course, was studied; the villagers were watching every move we made, and they had an enormous amount of quite accurate information about who we were and what we were going to be doing. But they acted as if we simply did not exist, which, in fact, as this behavior was designed to inform us, we did not, or anyway not yet.

This is, as I say, general in Bali. Everywhere else I have been in Indonesia, and more latterly in Morocco, when I have gone into a new village, people have poured out from all sides to take a very close look at me, and, often an all-too-probing feel as well. In Balinese villages, at least those away from the tourist circuit, nothing happens at all. People go on pounding, chatting, making offerings, staring into space, carrying baskets about while one drifts around feeling vaguely disembodied. And the same thing is true on the individual level. When you first meet a Balinese, he seems virtually not to relate to you at all; he is, in the term Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead made famous, "away."¹ Then—in a day, a week, a month (with some people the magic moment never comes)—he decides, for reasons I have never quite been able to fathom, that you *are* real, and then he becomes a warm, gay, sensitive, sympathetic, though, being Balinese, always precisely controlled, person. You have crossed, somehow, some moral or metaphysical shadow line. Though you are not exactly taken as a Balinese (one has to be born to that), you are at least regarded as a human being rather than a cloud or a gust of wind. The whole complexion of your relationship dramatically changes to, in the majority of cases, a gentle, almost affectionate one—a low-keyed, rather playful, rather mannered, rather bemused geniality.

My wife and I were still very much in the gust-of-wind stage, a most frustrating, and even, as you soon begin to doubt whether you are really real after all, unnerving one, when, ten days or so after our arrival, a large cockfight was held in the public square to raise money for a new school.

Now, a few special occasions aside, cockfights are illegal in Bali

¹ G. Bateson and M. Mead, *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* (New York, 1942), p. 68.

under the Republic (as, for not altogether unrelated reasons, they were under the Dutch), largely as a result of the pretensions to puritanism radical nationalism tends to bring with it. The elite, which is not itself so very puritan, worries about the poor, ignorant peasant gambling all his money away, about what foreigners will think, about the waste of time better devoted to building up the country. It sees cockfighting as "primitive," "backward," "unprogressive," and generally unbecoming an ambitious nation. And, as with those other embarrassments—opium smoking, begging, or uncovered breasts—it seeks, rather unsystematically, to put a stop to it.

Of course, like drinking during Prohibition or, today, smoking marihuana, cockfights, being a part of "The Balinese Way of Life," nonetheless go on happening, and with extraordinary frequency. And, as with Prohibition or marihuana, from time to time the police (who, in 1958 at least, were almost all not Balinese but Javanese) feel called upon to make a raid, confiscate the cocks and spurs, fine a few people, and even now and then expose some of them in the tropical sun for a day as object lessons which never, somehow, get learned, even though occasionally, quite occasionally, the object dies.

As a result, the fights are usually held in a secluded corner of a village in semisecrecy, a fact which tends to slow the action a little—not very much, but the Balinese do not care to have it slowed at all. In this case, however, perhaps because they were raising money for a school that the government was unable to give them, perhaps because raids had been few recently, perhaps, as I gathered from subsequent discussion, there was a notion that the necessary bribes had been paid, they thought they could take a chance on the central square and draw a larger and more enthusiastic crowd without attracting the attention of the law.

They were wrong. In the midst of the third match, with hundreds of people, including, still transparent, myself and my wife, fused into a single body around the ring, a superorganism in the literal sense, a truck full of policemen armed with machine guns roared up. Amid great screeching cries of "pulisi! pulisi!" from the crowd, the policemen jumped out, and, springing into the center of the ring, began to swing their guns around like gangsters in a motion picture, though not going so far as actually to fire them. The superorganism came instantly apart as its components scattered in all directions. People raced down the road, disappeared headfirst over walls, scrambled under platforms, folded themselves behind wicker screens, scuttled up coconut trees.

Cocks armed with steel spurs sharp enough to cut off a finger or run a hole through a foot were running wildly around. Everything was dust and panic.

On the established anthropological principle, "When in Rome," my wife and I decided, only slightly less instantaneously than everyone else, that the thing to do was run too. We ran down the main village street, northward, away from where we were living, for we were on that side of the ring. About halfway down another fugitive ducked suddenly into a compound—his own, it turned out—and we, seeing nothing ahead of us but rice fields, open country, and a very high volcano, followed him. As the three of us came tumbling into the courtyard, his wife, who had apparently been through this sort of thing before, whipped out a table, a tablecloth, three chairs, and three cups of tea, and we all, without any explicit communication whatsoever, sat down, commenced to sip tea, and sought to compose ourselves.

A few moments later, one of the policemen marched importantly into the yard, looking for the village chief. (The chief had not only been at the fight, he had arranged it. When the truck drove up he ran to the river, stripped off his sarong, and plunged in so he could say, when at length they found him sitting there pouring water over his head, that he had been away bathing when the whole affair had occurred and was ignorant of it. They did not believe him and fined him three hundred rupiah, which the village raised collectively.) Seeing me and my wife, "White Men," there in the yard, the policeman performed a classic double take. When he found his voice again he asked, approximately, what in the devil did we think we were doing there. Our host of five minutes leaped instantly to our defense, producing an impassioned description of who and what we were, so detailed and so accurate that it was my turn, having barely communicated with a living human being save my landlord and the village chief for more than a week, to be astonished. We had a perfect right to be there, he said, looking the Javanese upstart in the eye. We were American professors; the government had cleared us; we were there to study culture; we were going to write a book to tell Americans about Bali. And we had all been there drinking tea and talking about cultural matters all afternoon and did not know anything about any cockfight. Moreover, we had not seen the village chief all day; he must have gone to town. The policeman retreated in rather total disarray. And, after a decent interval, bewildered but relieved to have survived and stayed out of jail, so did we.

The next morning the village was a completely different world for us. Not only were we no longer invisible, we were suddenly the center of all attention, the object of a great outpouring of warmth, interest, and most especially, amusement. Everyone in the village knew we had fled like everyone else. They asked us about it again and again (I must have told the story, small detail by small detail, fifty times by the end of the day), gently, affectionately, but quite insistently teasing us: "Why didn't you just stand there and tell the police who you were?" "Why didn't you just say you were only watching and not betting?" "Were you really afraid of those little guns?" As always, kinesthetically minded and, even when fleeing for their lives (or, as happened eight years later, surrendering them), the world's most poised people, they gleefully mimicked, also over and over again, our graceless style of running and what they claimed were our panic-stricken facial expressions. But above all, everyone was extremely pleased and even more surprised that we had not simply "pulled out our papers" (they knew about those too) and asserted our Distinguished Visitor status, but had instead demonstrated our solidarity with what were now our covillagers. (What we had actually demonstrated was our cowardice, but there is fellowship in that too.) Even the Brahmana priest, an old, grave, halfway-to-heaven type who because of its associations with the underworld would never be involved, even distantly, in a cockfight, and was difficult to approach even to other Balinese, had us called into his courtyard to ask us about what had happened, chuckling happily at the sheer extraordinariness of it all.

In Bali, to be teased is to be accepted. It was the turning point so far as our relationship to the community was concerned, and we were quite literally "in." The whole village opened up to us, probably more than it ever would have otherwise (I might actually never have gotten to that priest, and our accidental host became one of my best informants), and certainly very much faster. Getting caught, or almost caught, in a vice raid is perhaps not a very generalizable recipe for achieving that mysterious necessity of anthropological field work, rapport, but for me it worked very well. It led to a sudden and unusually complete acceptance into a society extremely difficult for outsiders to penetrate. It gave me the kind of immediate, inside-view grasp of an aspect of "peasant mentality" that anthropologists not fortunate enough to flee headlong with their subjects from armed authorities normally do not get. And, perhaps most important of all, for the other things might have come in other ways, it put me very quickly on to a combination emotional explosion,

status war, and philosophical drama of central significance to the society whose inner nature I desired to understand. By the time I left I had spent about as much time looking into cockfights as into witchcraft, irrigation, caste, or marriage.

Of Cocks and Men

Bali, mainly because it is Bali, is a well-studied place. Its mythology, art, ritual, social organization, patterns of child rearing, forms of law, even styles of trance, have all been microscopically examined for traces of that elusive substance Jane Belo called "The Balinese Temper."² But, aside from a few passing remarks, the cockfight has barely been noticed, although as a popular obsession of consuming power it is at least as important a revelation of what being a Balinese "is really like" as these more celebrated phenomena.³ As much of America surfaces in a ball park, on a golf links, at a race track, or around a poker table, much of Bali surfaces in a cock ring. For it is only apparently cocks that are fighting there. Actually, it is men.

To anyone who has been in Bali any length of time, the deep psychological identification of Balinese men with their cocks is unmistakable. The double entendre here is deliberate. It works in exactly the same way in Balinese as it does in English, even to producing the same tired jokes, strained puns, and uninventive obscenities. Bateson and Mead have even suggested that, in line with the Balinese conception of the body as a set of separately animated parts, cocks are viewed as detachable, self-operating penises, ambulant genitals with a life of their own.⁴

² J. Belo, "The Balinese Temper," in *Traditional Balinese Culture*, ed. J. Belo (New York, 1970) (originally published in 1935), pp. 85–110.

³ The best discussion of cockfighting is again Bateson and Mead's *Balinese Character*, pp. 24–25, 140; but it, too, is general and abbreviated.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26. The cockfight is unusual within Balinese culture in being a single-sex public activity from which the other sex is totally and expressly excluded. Sexual differentiation is culturally extremely played down in Bali and most activities, formal and informal, involve the participation of men and women on equal ground, commonly as linked couples. From religion, to politics, to economics, to kinship, to dress, Bali is a rather "unisex" society, a fact both its customs and its symbolism clearly express. Even in contexts where women do not in fact play much of a role—music, painting, certain agricultural activities—their absence, which is only relative in any case, is more a mere matter of fact than

And while I do not have the kind of unconscious material either to confirm or disconfirm this intriguing notion, the fact that they are masculine symbols par excellence is about as indubitable, and to the Balinese about as evident, as the fact that water runs downhill.

The language of everyday moralism is shot through, on the male side of it, with roosterish imagery. *Sabung*, the word for cock (and one which appears in inscriptions as early as A.D. 922), is used metaphorically to mean "hero," "warrior," "champion," "man of parts," "political candidate," "bachelor," "dandy," "lady-killer," or "tough guy." A pompous man whose behavior presumes above his station is compared to a tailless cock who struts about as though he had a large, spectacular one. A desperate man who makes a last, irrational effort to extricate himself from an impossible situation is likened to a dying cock who makes one final lunge at his tormentor to drag him along to a common destruction. A stingy man, who promises much, gives little, and begrudges that, is compared to a cock which, held by the tail, leaps at another without in fact engaging him. A marriageable young man still shy with the opposite sex or someone in a new job anxious to make a good impression is called "a fighting cock caged for the first time."⁵ Court trials, wars, political contests, inheritance disputes, and street arguments are all compared to cockfights.⁶ Even the very island itself is perceived from its shape as a small, proud cock, poised, neck extended, back taut, tail raised, in eternal challenge to large, feckless, shapeless Java.⁷

But the intimacy of men with their cocks is more than metaphorical. Balinese men, or anyway a large majority of Balinese men, spend an enormous amount of time with their favorites, grooming them, feeding them, discussing them, trying them out against one another, or just gaz-

socially enforced. To this general pattern, the cockfight, entirely of, by, and for men (women—at least *Balinese* women—do not even watch), is the most striking exception.

⁵ C. Hooykaas, *The Lay of the Jaya Prana* (London, 1958), p. 39. The lay has a stanza (no. 17) with the reluctant bridegroom use. Jaya Prana, the subject of a Balinese Uriah myth, responds to the lord who has offered him the loveliest of six hundred servant girls: "Godly King, my Lord and Master / I beg you, give me leave to go / such things are not yet in my mind; / like a fighting cock encaged / indeed I am on my mettle / I am alone / as yet the flame has not been fanned."

⁶ For these, see V. E. Korn, *Het Adatrecht van Bali*, 2d ed. (The Hague, 1932), index under *toh*.

⁷ There is indeed a legend to the effect that the separation of Java and Bali is due to the action of a powerful Javanese religious figure who wished to protect himself against a Balinese culture hero (the ancestor of two Ksatria castes) who was a passionate cockfighting gambler. See C. Hooykaas, *Agama Tirtha* (Amsterdam, 1964), p. 184.

ing at them with a mixture of rapt admiration and dreamy self-absorption. Whenever you see a group of Balinese men squatting idly in the council shed or along the road in their hips down, shoulders forward, knees up fashion, half or more of them will have a rooster in his hands, holding it between his thighs, bouncing it gently up and down to strengthen its legs, ruffling its feathers with abstract sensuality, pushing it out against a neighbor's rooster to rouse its spirit, withdrawing it toward his loins to calm it again. Now and then, to get a feel for another bird, a man will fiddle this way with someone else's cock for a while, but usually by moving around to squat in place behind it, rather than just having it passed across to him as though it were merely an animal.

In the houseyard, the high-walled enclosures where the people live, fighting cocks are kept in wicker cages, moved frequently about so as to maintain the optimum balance of sun and shade. They are fed a special diet, which varies somewhat according to individual theories but which is mostly maize, sifted for impurities with far more care than it is when mere humans are going to eat it, and offered to the animal kernel by kernel. Red pepper is stuffed down their beaks and up their anuses to give them spirit. They are bathed in the same ceremonial preparation of tepid water, medicinal herbs, flowers, and onions in which infants are bathed, and for a prize cock just about as often. Their combs are cropped, their plumage dressed, their spurs trimmed, and their legs massaged, and they are inspected for flaws with the squinted concentration of a diamond merchant. A man who has a passion for cocks, an enthusiast in the literal sense of the term, can spend most of his life with them, and even those, the overwhelming majority, whose passion though intense has not entirely run away with them, can and do spend what seems not only to an outsider, but also to themselves, an inordinate amount of time with them. "I am cock crazy," my landlord, a quite ordinary *afficionado* by Balinese standards, used to moan as he went to move another cage, give another bath, or conduct another feeding. "We're all cock crazy."

The madness has some less visible dimensions, however, because although it is true that cocks are symbolic expressions or magnifications of their owner's self, the narcissistic male ego writ out in Aesopian terms, they are also expressions—and rather more immediate ones—of what the Balinese regard as the direct inversion, aesthetically, morally, and metaphysically, of human status: animality.

The Balinese revulsion against any behavior regarded as animal-like

can hardly be overstressed. Babies are not allowed to crawl for that reason. Incest, though hardly approved, is a much less horrifying crime than bestiality. (The appropriate punishment for the second is death by drowning, for the first being forced to live like an animal.)⁸ Most demons are represented—in sculpture, dance, ritual, myth—in some real or fantastic animal form. The main puberty rite consists in filing the child's teeth so they will not look like animal fangs. Not only defecation but eating is regarded as a disgusting, almost obscene activity, to be conducted hurriedly and privately, because of its association with animality. Even falling down or any form of clumsiness is considered to be bad for these reasons. Aside from cocks and a few domestic animals—oxen, ducks—of no emotional significance, the Balinese are averse to animals and treat their large number of dogs not merely callously but with a phobic cruelty. In identifying with his cock, the Balinese man is identifying not just with his ideal self, or even his penis, but also, and at the same time, with what he most fears, hates, and ambivalence being what it is, is fascinated by—"The Powers of Darkness."

The connection of cocks and cockfighting with such Powers, with the animalistic demons that threaten constantly to invade the small, cleared-off space in which the Balinese have so carefully built their lives and devour its inhabitants, is quite explicit. A cockfight, any cockfight, is in the first instance a blood sacrifice offered, with the appropriate chants and oblations, to the demons in order to pacify their ravenous, cannibal hunger. No temple festival should be conducted until one is made. (If it is omitted, someone will inevitably fall into a trance and command with the voice of an angered spirit that the oversight be immediately corrected.) Collective responses to natural evils—illness, crop failure, volcanic eruptions—almost always involve them. And that famous holiday in Bali, "The Day of Silence" (*Njepi*), when everyone sits silent and immobile all day long in order to avoid contact with a sudden influx of demons chased momentarily out of hell, is preceded the previous day by large-scale cockfights (in this case legal) in almost every village on the island.

In the cockfight, man and beast, good and evil, ego and id, the creative power of aroused masculinity and the destructive power of loosened an-

⁸ An incestuous couple is forced to wear pig yokes over their necks and crawl to a pig trough and eat with their mouths there. On this, see J. Belo, "Customs Pertaining to Twins in Bali," in *Traditional Balinese Culture*, ed. J. Belo, p. 49; on the abhorrence of animality generally, Bateson and Mead, *Balinese Character*, p. 22.

imality fuse in a bloody drama of hatred, cruelty, violence, and death. It is little wonder that when, as is the invariable rule, the owner of the winning cock takes the carcass of the loser—often torn limb from limb by its enraged owner—home to eat, he does so with a mixture of social embarrassment, moral satisfaction, aesthetic disgust, and cannibal joy. Or that a man who has lost an important fight is sometimes driven to wreck his family shrines and curse the gods, an act of metaphysical (and social) suicide. Or that in seeking earthly analogues for heaven and hell the Balinese compare the former to the mood of a man whose cock has just won, the latter to that of a man whose cock has just lost.

The Fight

Cockfights (*tetadjen; sabungan*) are held in a ring about fifty feet square. Usually they begin toward late afternoon and run three or four hours until sunset. About nine or ten separate matches (*sehet*) comprise a program. Each match is precisely like the others in general pattern: there is no main match, no connection between individual matches, no variation in their format, and each is arranged on a completely ad hoc basis. After a fight has ended and the emotional debris is cleaned away—the bets have been paid, the curses cursed, the carcasses possessed—seven, eight, perhaps even a dozen men slip negligently into the ring with a cock and seek to find there a logical opponent for it. This process, which rarely takes less than ten minutes, and often a good deal longer, is conducted in a very subdued, oblique, even dissembling manner. Those not immediately involved give it at best but disguised, sidelong attention; those who, embarrassedly, are, attempt to pretend somehow that the whole thing is not really happening.

A match made, the other hopefuls retire with the same deliberate indifference, and the selected cocks have their spurs (*tadji*) affixed—razor-sharp, pointed steel swords, four or five inches long. This is a delicate job which only a small proportion of men, a half-dozen or so in most villages, know how to do properly. The man who attaches the spurs also provides them, and if the rooster he assists wins, its owner awards him the spur-leg of the victim. The spurs are affixed by winding a long length of string around the foot of the spur and the leg of the

cock. For reasons I shall come to presently, it is done somewhat differently from case to case, and is an obsessively deliberate affair. The lore about spurs is extensive—they are sharpened only at eclipses and the dark of the moon, should be kept out of the sight of women, and so forth. And they are handled, both in use and out, with the same curious combination of fussiness and sensuality the Balinese direct toward ritual objects generally.

The spurs affixed, the two cocks are placed by their handlers (who may or may not be their owners) facing one another in the center of the ring.⁹ A coconut pierced with a small hole is placed in a pail of water, in which it takes about twenty-one seconds to sink, a period known as a *tjeng* and marked at beginning and end by the beating of a slit gong. During these twenty-one seconds the handlers (*pengangkeb*) are not permitted to touch their roosters. If, as sometimes happens, the animals have not fought during this time, they are picked up, fluffed, pulled, prodded, and otherwise insulted, and put back in the center of the ring and the process begins again. Sometimes they refuse to fight at all, or one keeps running away, in which case they are imprisoned together under a wicker cage, which usually gets them engaged.

Most of the time, in any case, the cocks fly almost immediately at one another in a wing-beating, head-thrusting, leg-kicking explosion of animal fury so pure, so absolute, and in its own way so beautiful, as to be almost abstract, a Platonic concept of hate. Within moments one or the other drives home a solid blow with his spur. The handler whose cock has delivered the blow immediately picks it up so that it will not get a return blow, for if he does not the match is likely to end in a mutually mortal tie as the two birds wildly hack each other to pieces. This is particularly true if, as often happens, the spur sticks in its victim's body, for then the aggressor is at the mercy of his wounded foe.

With the birds again in the hands of their handlers, the coconut is now sunk three times after which the cock which has landed the blow

⁹ Except for unimportant, small-bet fights (on the question of fight "importance," see below) spur affixing is usually done by someone other than the owner. Whether the owner handles his own cock or not more or less depends on how skilled he is at it, a consideration whose importance is again relative to the importance of the fight. When spur affixers and cock handlers are someone other than the owner, they are almost always a quite close relative—a brother or cousin—or a very intimate friend of his. They are thus almost extensions of his personality, as the fact that all three will refer to the cock as "mine," say "I" fought So-and-So, and so on, demonstrates. Also, owner-handler-affixer triads tend to be fairly fixed, though individuals may participate in several and often exchange roles within a given one.

must be set down to show that he is firm, a fact he demonstrates by wandering idly around the ring for a coconut sink. The coconut is then sunk twice more and the fight must recommence.

During this interval, slightly over two minutes, the handler of the wounded cock has been working frantically over it, like a trainer patching a mauled boxer between rounds, to get it in shape for a last, desperate try for victory. He blows in its mouth, putting the whole chicken head in his own mouth and sucking and blowing, fluffs it, stuffs its wounds with various sorts of medicines, and generally tries anything he can think of to arouse the last ounce of spirit which may be hidden somewhere within it. By the time he is forced to put it back down he is usually drenched in chicken blood, but, as in prize fighting, a good handler is worth his weight in gold. Some of them can virtually make the dead walk, at least long enough for the second and final round.

In the climactic battle (if there is one; sometimes the wounded cock simply expires in the handler's hands or immediately as it is placed down again), the cock who landed the first blow usually proceeds to finish off his weakened opponent. But this is far from an inevitable outcome, for if a cock can walk, he can fight, and if he can fight, he can kill, and what counts is which cock expires first. If the wounded one can get a stab in and stagger on until the other drops, he is the official winner, even if he himself topples over an instant later.

Surrounding all this melodrama—which the crowd packed tight around the ring follows in near silence, moving their bodies in kinesthetic sympathy with the movement of the animals, cheering their champions on with wordless hand motions, shiftings of the shoulders, turnings of the head, falling back en masse as the cock with the murderous spurs careens toward one side of the ring (it is said that spectators sometimes lose eyes and fingers from being too attentive), surging forward again as they glance off toward another—is a vast body of extraordinarily elaborate and precisely detailed rules.

These rules, together with the developed lore of cocks and cockfighting which accompanies them, are written down in palm-leaf manuscripts (*lontar*; *rontal*) passed on from generation to generation as part of the general legal and cultural tradition of the villages. At a fight, the umpire (*saja komong*; *djuru kembar*)—the man who manages the coconut—is in charge of their application and his authority is absolute. I have never seen an umpire's judgment questioned on any subject, even by the more despondent losers, nor have I ever heard, even in private, a

charge of unfairness directed against one, or, for that matter, complaints about umpires in general. Only exceptionally well trusted, solid, and, given the complexity of the code, knowledgeable citizens perform this job, and in fact men will bring their cocks only to fights presided over by such men. It is also the umpire to whom accusations of cheating, which, though rare in the extreme, occasionally arise, are referred; and it is he who in the not infrequent cases where the cocks expire virtually together decides which (if either, for, though the Balinese do not care for such an outcome, there can be ties) went first. Likened to a judge, a king, a priest, and a policeman, he is all of these, and under his assured direction the animal passion of the fight proceeds within the civic certainty of the law. In the dozens of cockfights I saw in Bali, I never once saw an altercation about rules. Indeed, I never saw an open altercation, other than those between cocks, at all.

This crosswise doubleness of an event which, taken as a fact of nature, is rage untrammelled and, taken as a fact of culture, is form perfected, defines the cockfight as a sociological entity. A cockfight is what, searching for a name for something not vertebrate enough to be called a group and not structureless enough to be called a crowd, Erving Goffman has called a "focused gathering"—a set of persons engrossed in a common flow of activity and relating to one another in terms of that flow.¹⁰ Such gatherings meet and disperse; the participants in them fluctuate; the activity that focuses them is discrete—a particulate process that reoccurs rather than a continuous one that endures. They take their form from the situation that evokes them, the floor on which they are placed, as Goffman puts it; but it is a form, and an articulate one, nonetheless. For the situation, the floor is itself created, in jury deliberations, surgical operations, block meetings, sit-ins, cockfights, by the cultural preoccupations—here, as we shall see, the celebration of status rivalry—which not only specify the focus but, assembling actors and arranging scenery, bring it actually into being.

In classical times (that is to say, prior to the Dutch invasion of 1908), when there were no bureaucrats around to improve popular morality, the staging of a cockfight was an explicitly societal matter. Bringing a cock to an important fight was, for an adult male, a compulsory duty of citizenship; taxation of fights, which were usually held on market day, was a major source of public revenue; patronage of the art was

¹⁰ E. Goffman, *Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction* (Indianapolis, 1961), pp. 9–10.

a stated responsibility of princes; and the cock ring, or *wantilan*, stood in the center of the village near those other monuments of Balinese civility—the council house, the origin temple, the marketplace, the signal tower, and the banyan tree. Today, a few special occasions aside, the newer rectitude makes so open a statement of the connection between the excitements of collective life and those of blood sport impossible, but, less directly expressed, the connection itself remains intimate and intact. To expose it, however, it is necessary to turn to the aspect of cockfighting around which all the others pivot, and through which they exercise their force, an aspect I have thus far studiously ignored. I mean, of course, the gambling.

Odds and Even Money

The Balinese never do anything in a simple way that they can contrive to do in a complicated one, and to this generalization cockfight wagering is no exception.

In the first place, there are two sorts of bets, or *toh*.¹¹ There is the single axial bet in the center between the principals (*toh ketengah*), and there is the cloud of peripheral ones around the ring between members of the audience (*toh kesasi*). The first is typically large; the second typically small. The first is collective, involving coalitions of bettors clustering around the owner; the second is individual, man to man. The first is a matter of deliberate, very quiet, almost furtive arrangement by the coalition members and the umpire huddled like conspirators in the center of the ring; the second is a matter of impulsive shouting, public offers, and public acceptances by the excited throng around its edges. And most curiously, and as we shall see most revealingly, *where the first is always, without exception, even money, the second, equally without ex-*

¹¹ This word, which literally means an indelible stain or mark, as in a birthmark or a vein in a stone, is used as well for a deposit in a court case, for a pawn, for security offered in a loan, for a stand-in for someone else in a legal or ceremonial context, for an earnest advanced in a business deal, for a sign placed in a field to indicate its ownership is in dispute, and for the status of an unfaithful wife from whose lover her husband must gain satisfaction or surrender her to him. See Korn, *Het Adatrecht van Bali*; Th. Pigeaud, *Javaans-Nederlands Handwoordenboek* (Groningen, 1938); H. H. Juynboll, *Oudjavaansche-Nederlandsche Woordenlijst* (Leiden, 1923).

ception, is never such. What is a fair coin in the center is a biased one on the side.

The center bet is the official one, hedged in again with a webwork of rules, and is made between the two cock owners, with the umpire as overseer and public witness.¹² This bet, which, as I say, is always relatively and sometimes very large, is never raised simply by the owner in whose name it is made, but by him together with four or five, sometimes seven or eight, allies—kin, village mates, neighbors, close friends. He may, if he is not especially well-to-do, not even be the major contributor; though, if only to show that he is not involved in any chicanery, he must be a significant one.

Of the fifty-seven matches for which I have exact and reliable data on the center bet, the range is from fifteen ringgits to five hundred, with a mean at eighty-five and with the distribution being rather noticeably trimodal: small fights (15 ringgits either side of 35) accounting for about 45 percent of the total number; medium ones (20 ringgits either side of 70) for about 25 percent; and large (75 ringgits either side of 175) for about 20 percent, with a few very small and very large ones out at the extremes. In a society where the normal daily wage of a manual laborer—a brickmaker, an ordinary farmworker, a market porter—was about three ringgits a day, and considering the fact that fights were held on the average about every two-and-a-half days in the immediate area I studied, this is clearly serious gambling, even if the bets are pooled rather than individual efforts.

The side bets are, however, something else altogether. Rather than the solemn, legalistic pactmaking of the center, wagering takes place rather in the fashion in which the stock exchange used to work when it was out on the curb. There is a fixed and known odds paradigm which runs in a continuous series from ten-to-nine at the short end to two-to-one at the long: 10-9, 9-8, 8-7, 7-6, 6-5, 5-4, 4-3, 3-2, 2-1. The man who wishes to back the *underdog cock* (leaving aside how favorites, *kebut*, and underdogs, *ngai*, are established for the moment) shouts the short-side number indicating the odds he wants *to be given*. That is, if he shouts *gasal*, "five," he wants the underdog at five-to-four (or, for

¹² The center bet must be advanced in cash by both parties prior to the actual fight. The umpire holds the stakes until the decision is rendered and then awards them to the winner, avoiding, among other things, the intense embarrassment both winner and loser would feel if the latter had to pay off personally following his defeat. About 10 percent of the winner's receipts are subtracted for the umpire's share and that of the fight sponsors.

him, four-to-five); if he shouts "four," he wants it at four-to-three (again, he putting up the "three"); if "nine," at nine-to-eight, and so on. A man backing the favorite, and thus considering giving odds if he can get them short enough, indicates the fact by crying out the color-type of that cock—"brown," "speckled," or whatever.¹³

As odds-takers (backers of the underdog) and odds-givers (backers of the favorite) sweep the crowd with their shouts, they begin to focus in on one another as potential betting pairs, often from far across the ring. The taker tries to shout the giver into longer odds, the giver to shout the taker into shorter ones.¹⁴ The taker, who is the wooer in this situation, will signal how large a bet he wishes to make at the odds he is shouting by holding a number of fingers up in front of his face and vigorously waving them. If the giver, the wooed, replies in kind, the bet is made; if he does not, they unlock gazes and the search goes on.

The side betting, which takes place after the center bet has been made and its size announced, consists then in a rising crescendo of

¹³ Actually, the typing of cocks, which is extremely elaborate (I have collected more than twenty classes, certainly not a complete list), is not based on color alone, but on a series of independent, interacting, dimensions, which include—besides color—size, bone thickness, plumage, and temperament. (But *not* pedigree. The Balinese do not breed cocks to any significant extent, nor, so far as I have been able to discover, have they ever done so. The *asil*, or jungle cock, which is the basic fighting strain everywhere the sport is found, is native to southern Asia, and one can buy a good example in the chicken section of almost any Balinese market for anywhere from four or five ringgits up to fifty or more.) The color element is merely the one normally used as the type name, except when the two cocks of different types—as on principle they must be—have the same color, in which case a secondary indication from one of the other dimensions ("large speckled" v. "small speckled," etc.) is added. The types are coordinated with various cosmological ideas which help shape the making of matches, so that, for example, you fight a small, headstrong, speckled brown-on-white cock with flat-lying feathers and thin legs from the east side of the ring on a certain day of the complex Balinese calendar, and a large, cautious, all-black cock with tufted feathers and stubby legs from the north side on another day, and so on. All this is again recorded in palm-leaf manuscripts and endlessly discussed by the Balinese (who do not all have identical systems), and a full-scale componential-cum-symbolic analysis of cock classifications would be extremely valuable both as an adjunct to the description of the cockfight and in itself. But my data on the subject, though extensive and varied, do not seem to be complete and systematic enough to attempt such an analysis here. For Balinese cosmological ideas more generally see Belo, ed., *Traditional Balinese Culture*, and J. L. Swellengrebel, ed., *Bali: Studies in Life, Thought, and Ritual* (The Hague, 1960).

¹⁴ For purposes of ethnographic completeness, it should be noted that it is possible for the man backing the favorite—the odds-giver—to make a bet in which he wins if his cock wins or there is a tie, a slight shortening of the odds (I do not have enough cases to be exact, but ties seem to occur about once every fifteen or twenty matches). He indicates his wish to do this by shouting *sapih* ("tie") rather than the cock-type, but such bets are in fact infrequent.

shouts as backers of the underdog offer their propositions to anyone who will accept them, while those who are backing the favorite but do not like the price being offered, shout equally frenetically the color of the cock to show they too are desperate to bet but want shorter odds.

Almost always odds-calling, which tends to be very consensual in that at any one time almost all callers are calling the same thing, starts off toward the long end of the range—five-to-four or four-to-three—and then moves, also consensually, toward the short end with greater or lesser speed and to a greater or lesser degree. Men crying “five” and finding themselves answered only with cries of “brown” start crying “six,” either drawing the other callers fairly quickly with them or retiring from the scene as their too-generous offers are snapped up. If the change is made and partners are still scarce, the procedure is repeated in a move to “seven,” and so on, only rarely, and in the very largest fights, reaching the ultimate “nine” or “ten” levels. Occasionally, if the cocks are clearly mismatched, there may be no upward movement at all, or even a movement down the scale to four-to-three, three-to-two, very, very rarely two-to-one, a shift which is accompanied by a declining number of bets as a shift upward is accompanied by an increasing number. But the general pattern is for the betting to move a shorter or longer distance up the scale toward the, for sidebets, nonexistent pole of even money, with the overwhelming majority of bets falling in the four-to-three to eight-to-seven range.¹⁵

As the moment for the release of the cocks by the handlers approaches, the screaming, at least in a match where the center bet is large, reaches almost frenzied proportions as the remaining unfulfilled bettors try desperately to find a last-minute partner at a price they can live with. (Where the center bet is small, the opposite tends to occur:

¹⁵ The precise dynamics of the movement of the betting is one of the most intriguing, most complicated, and, given the hectic conditions under which it occurs, most difficult to study, aspects of the fight. Motion picture recording plus multiple observers would probably be necessary to deal with it effectively. Even impressionistically—the only approach open to a lone ethnographer caught in the middle of all this—it is clear that certain men lead both in determining the favorite (that is, making the opening cock-type calls which always initiate the process) and in directing the movement of the odds, these “opinion leaders” being the more accomplished cockfighters-cum-solid-citizens to be discussed below. If these men begin to change their calls, others follow; if they begin to make bets, so do others and—though there are always a large number of frustrated bettors crying for shorter or longer odds to the end—the movement more or less ceases. But a detailed understanding of the whole process awaits what, alas, it is not very likely ever to get: a decision theorist armed with precise observations of individual behavior.

betting dies off, trailing into silence, as odds lengthen and people lose interest.) In a large-bet, well-made match—the kind of match the Balinese regard as “real cockfighting”—the mob scene quality, the sense that sheer chaos is about to break loose, with all those waving, shouting, pushing, clambering men is quite strong, an effect which is only heightened by the intense stillness that falls with instant suddenness, rather as if someone had turned off the current, when the slit gong sounds, the cocks are put down, and the battle begins.

When it ends, anywhere from fifteen seconds to five minutes later, *all bets are immediately paid*. There are absolutely no IOUs, at least to a betting opponent. One may, of course, borrow from a friend before offering or accepting a wager, but to offer or accept it you must have the money already in hand and, if you lose, you must pay it on the spot, before the next match begins. This is an iron rule, and as I have never heard of a disputed umpire’s decision (though doubtless there must sometimes be some), I have also never heard of a welshed bet, perhaps because in a worked-up cockfight crowd the consequences might be, as they are reported to be sometimes for cheaters, drastic and immediate.

It is, in any case, this formal asymmetry between balanced center bets and unbalanced side ones that poses the critical analytical problem for a theory which sees cockfight wagering as the link connecting the fight to the wider world of Balinese culture. It also suggests the way to go about solving it and demonstrating the link.

The first point that needs to be made in this connection is that the higher the center bet, the more likely the match will in actual fact be an even one. Simple considerations of rationality suggest that. If you are betting fifteen ringgits on a cock, you might be willing to go along with even money even if you feel your animal somewhat the less promising. But if you are betting five hundred you are very, very likely to be loathe to do so. Thus, in large-bet fights, which of course involve the better animals, tremendous care is taken to see that the cocks are about as evenly matched as to size, general condition, pugnacity, and so on as is humanly possible. The different ways of adjusting the spurs of the animals are often employed to secure this. If one cock seems stronger, an agreement will be made to position his spur at a slightly less advantageous angle—a kind of handicapping, at which spur affixers are, so it is said, extremely skilled. More care will be taken, too, to employ skillful handlers and to match them exactly as to abilities.

In short, in a large-bet fight the pressure to make the match a genu-

inely fifty-fifty proposition is enormous, and is consciously felt as such. For medium fights the pressure is somewhat less, and for small ones less yet, though there is always an effort to make things at least approximately equal, for even at fifteen ringgits (five days' work) no one wants to make an even money bet in a clearly unfavorable situation. And, again, what statistics I have tend to bear this out. In my fifty-seven matches, the favorite won thirty-three times overall, the underdog twenty-four, a 1.4 : 1 ratio. But if one splits the figures at sixty ringgits center bets, the ratios turn out to be 1.1 : 1 (twelve favorites, eleven underdogs) for those above this line, and 1.6 : 1 (twenty-one and thirteen) for those below it. Or, if you take the extremes, for very large fights, those with center bets over a hundred ringgits the ratio is 1 : 1 (seven and seven); for very small fights, those under forty ringgits, it is 1.9 : 1 (nineteen and ten).¹⁶

Now, from this proposition—that the higher the center bet the more exactly a fifty-fifty proposition the cockfight is—two things more or less immediately follow: (1) the higher the center bet is, the greater the pull on the side betting toward the short-odds end of the wagering spectrum, and vice versa; (2) the higher the center bet is, the greater the volume of side betting, and vice versa.

The logic is similar in both cases. The closer the fight is in fact to even money, the less attractive the long end of the odds will appear and, therefore, the shorter it must be if there are to be takers. That this is the case is apparent from mere inspection, from the Balinese's own analysis of the matter, and from what more systematic observations I was able to collect. Given the difficulty of making precise and complete recordings of side betting, this argument is hard to cast in numerical form, but in all my cases the odds-giver, odds-taker consensual point, a quite pronounced mini-max saddle where the bulk (at a guess, two-thirds to three-quarters in most cases) of the bets are actually made, was three or four points further along the scale toward the shorter end for

¹⁶ Assuming only binomial variability, the departure from a fifty-fifty expectation in the sixty-ringgits-and-below case is 1.38 standard deviations, or (in a one direction test) an eight in one hundred possibility by chance alone; for the below-forty-ringgits case it is 1.65 standard deviations, or about five in one hundred. The fact that these departures though real are not extreme merely indicates, again, that even in the smaller fights the tendency to match cocks at least reasonably evenly persists. It is a matter of relative relaxation of the pressures toward equalization, not their elimination. The tendency for high-bet contests to be coin-flip propositions is, of course, even more striking, and suggests the Balinese know quite well what they are about.

the large-center-bet fights than for the small ones, with medium ones generally in between. In detail, the fit is not, of course, exact, but the general pattern is quite consistent: the power of the center bet to pull the side bets toward its own even-money pattern is directly proportional to its size, because its size is directly proportional to the degree to which the cocks are in fact evenly matched. As for the volume question, total wagering is greater in large-center-bet fights because such fights are considered more "interesting," not only in the sense that they are less predictable, but, more crucially, that more is at stake in them—in terms of money, in terms of the quality of the cocks, and consequently, as we shall see, in terms of social prestige.¹⁷

The paradox of fair coin in the middle, biased coin on the outside is thus a merely apparent one. The two betting systems, though formally incongruent, are not really contradictory to one another, but are part of a single larger system in which the center bet is, so to speak, the "center of gravity," drawing, the larger it is the more so, the outside bets toward the short-odds end of the scale. The center bet thus "makes the game," or perhaps better, defines it, signals what, following a notion of Jeremy Bentham's, I am going to call its "depth."

The Balinese attempt to create an interesting, if you will, "deep," match by making the center bet as large as possible so that the cocks matched will be as equal and as fine as possible, and the outcome, thus, as unpredictable as possible. They do not always succeed. Nearly half the matches are relatively trivial, relatively uninteresting—in my borrowed terminology, "shallow"—affairs. But that fact no more argues against my interpretation than the fact that most painters, poets, and playwrights are mediocre argues against the view that artistic effort is

¹⁷ The reduction in wagering in smaller fights (which, of course, feeds on itself; one of the reasons people find small fights uninteresting is that there is less wagering in them, and contrariwise for large ones) takes place in three mutually reinforcing ways. First, there is a simple withdrawal of interest as people wander off to have a cup of coffee or chat with a friend. Second, the Balinese do not mathematically reduce odds, but bet directly in terms of stated odds as such. Thus, for a nine-to-eight bet, one man wagers nine ringgits, the other eight; for five-to-four, one wagers five, the other four. For any given currency unit, like the ringgit, therefore, 6.3 times as much money is involved in a ten-to-nine bet as in a two-to-one bet, for example, and, as noted, in small fights betting settles toward the longer end. Finally, the bets which are made tend to be one- rather than two-, three-, or in some of the very largest fights, four- or five-finger ones. (The fingers indicate the *multiplies* of the stated bet odds at issue, not absolute figures. Two fingers in a six-to-five situation means a man wants to wager ten ringgits on the underdog against twelve, three in an eight-to-seven situation, twenty-one against twenty-four, and so on.)

directed toward profundity and, with a certain frequency, approximates it. The image of artistic technique is indeed exact: the center bet is a means, a device, for creating "interesting," "deep" matches, *not* the reason, or at least not the main reason, *why* they are interesting, the source of their fascination, the substance of their depth. The question of why such matches are interesting—indeed, for the Balinese, exquisitely absorbing—takes us out of the realm of formal concerns into more broadly sociological and social-psychological ones, and to a less purely economic idea of what "depth" in gaming amounts to.¹⁸

Playing with Fire

Bentham's concept of "deep play" is found in his *The Theory of Legislation*.¹⁹ By it he means play in which the stakes are so high that it is, from his utilitarian standpoint, irrational for men to engage in it at all. If a man whose fortune is a thousand pounds (or ringgits) wagers five

¹⁸ Besides wagering there are other economic aspects of the cockfight, especially its very close connection with the local market system which, though secondary both to its motivation and to its function, are not without importance. Cockfights are open events to which anyone who wishes may come, sometimes from quite distant areas, but well over 90 percent, probably over 95, are very local affairs, and the locality concerned is defined not by the village, nor even by the administrative district, but by the rural market system. Bali has a three-day market week with the familiar "solar-system"-type rotation. Though the markets themselves have never been very highly developed, small morning affairs in a village square, it is the microregion such rotation rather generally marks out—ten or twenty square miles, seven or eight neighboring villages (which in contemporary Bali is usually going to mean anywhere from five to ten or eleven thousand people) from which the core of any cockfight audience, indeed virtually all of it, will come. Most of the fights are in fact organized and sponsored by small combines of petty rural merchants under the general premise, very strongly held by them and indeed by all Balinese, that cockfights are good for trade because "they get money out of the house, they make it circulate." Stalls selling various sorts of things as well as assorted sheer-chance gambling games (see below) are set up around the edge of the area so that this even takes on the quality of a small fair. This connection of cockfighting with markets and market sellers is very old, as, among other things, their conjunction in inscriptions [R. Goris, *Prasasti Bali*, 2 vols. (Bandung, 1954)] indicates. Trade has followed the cock for centuries in rural Bali, and the sport has been one of the main agencies of the island's monetization.

¹⁹ The phrase is found in the Hildreth translation, *International Library of Psychology* (1931), note to p. 106; see L. L. Fuller, *The Morality of Law* (New Haven, 1964), p. 6 ff.

hundred of it on an even bet, the marginal utility of the pound he stands to win is clearly less than the marginal disutility of the one he stands to lose. In genuine deep play, this is the case for both parties. They are both in over their heads. Having come together in search of pleasure they have entered into a relationship which will bring the participants, considered collectively, net pain rather than net pleasure. Bentham's conclusion was, therefore, that deep play was immoral from first principles and, a typical step for him, should be prevented legally.

But more interesting than the ethical problem, at least for our concerns here, is that despite the logical force of Bentham's analysis men do engage in such play, both passionately and often, and even in the face of law's revenge. For Bentham and those who think as he does (nowadays mainly lawyers, economists, and a few psychiatrists), the explanation is, as I have said, that such men are irrational—addicts, fetishists, children, fools, savages, who need only to be protected against themselves. But for the Balinese, though naturally they do not formulate it in so many words, the explanation lies in the fact that in such play, money is less a measure of utility, had or expected, than it is a symbol of moral import, perceived or imposed.

It is, in fact, in shallow games, ones in which smaller amounts of money are involved, that increments and decrements of cash are more nearly synonyms for utility and disutility, in the ordinary, unexpanded sense—for pleasure and pain, happiness and unhappiness. In deep ones, where the amounts of money are great, much more is at stake than material gain: namely, esteem, honor, dignity, respect—in a word, though in Bali a profoundly freighted word, status.²⁰ It is at stake symbolically, for (a few cases of ruined addict gamblers aside) no one's status is actually altered by the outcome of a cockfight; it is only, and that momentarily, affirmed or insulted. But for the Balinese, for whom nothing is more pleasurable than an affront obliquely delivered or more painful than one obliquely received—particularly when mutual acquaintances, undeceived by surfaces, are watching—such appraisive drama is deep indeed.

This, I must stress immediately, is *not* to say that the money does not matter, or that the Balinese is no more concerned about losing five

²⁰ Of course, even in Bentham, utility is not normally confined as a concept to monetary losses and gains, and my argument here might be more carefully put in terms of a denial that for the Balinese, as for any people, utility (pleasure, happiness . . .) is merely identifiable with wealth. But such terminological problems are in any case secondary to the essential point: the cockfight is not roulette.

hundred ringgits than fifteen. Such a conclusion would be absurd. It is because money *does*, in this hardly unmaterialistic society, matter and matter very much that the more of it one risks, the more of a lot of other things, such as one's pride, one's poise, one's dispassion, one's masculinity, one also risks, again only momentarily but again very publicly as well. In deep cockfights an owner and his collaborators, and, as we shall see, to a lesser but still quite real extent also their backers on the outside, put their money where their status is.

It is in large part *because* the marginal disutility of loss is so great at the higher levels of betting that to engage in such betting is to lay one's public self, allusively and metaphorically, through the medium of one's cock, on the line. And though to a Benthamite this might seem merely to increase the irrationality of the enterprise that much further, to the Balinese what it mainly increases is the meaningfulness of it all. And as (to follow Weber rather than Bentham) the imposition of meaning on life is the major end and primary condition of human existence, that access of significance more than compensates for the economic costs involved.²¹ Actually, given the even-money quality of the larger matches, important changes in material fortune among those who regularly participate in them seem virtually nonexistent, because matters more or less even out over the long run. It is, actually, in the smaller, shallow fights, where one finds the handful of more pure, addict-type gamblers involved—those who *are* in it mainly for the money—that “real” changes in social position, largely downward, are affected. Men of this sort, plungers, are highly dispraised by “true cockfighters” as fools who do not understand what the sport is all about, vulgarians who simply miss the point of it all. They are, these addicts, regarded as fair game for the genuine enthusiasts, those who do understand, to take a little money away from—something that is easy enough to do by luring them, through the force of their greed, into irrational bets on mismatched cocks. Most of them do indeed manage to ruin themselves in a

²¹ M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston, 1963). There is nothing specifically Balinese, of course, about deepening significance with money, as Whyte's description of corner boys in a working-class district of Boston demonstrates: “Gambling plays an important role in the lives of Cornerville people. Whatever game the corner boys play, they nearly always bet on the outcome. When there is nothing at stake, the game is not considered a real contest. This does not mean that the financial element is all-important. I have frequently heard men say that the honor of winning was much more important than the money at stake. The corner boys consider playing for money the real test of skill and, unless a man performs well when money is at stake, he is not considered a good competitor.” W. F. Whyte, *Street Corner Society*, 2d ed. (Chicago, 1955), p. 140.

remarkably short time, but there always seems to be one or two of them around, pawning their land and selling their clothes in order to bet, at any particular time.²²

This graduated correlation of “status gambling” with deeper fights and, inversely, “money gambling” with shallower ones is in fact quite general. Bettors themselves form a sociomoral hierarchy in these terms. As noted earlier, at most cockfights there are, around the very edges of the cockfight area, a large number of mindless, sheer-chance-type gambling games (roulette, dice throw, coin-spin, pea-under-the-shell) operated by concessionaires. Only women, children, adolescents, and various other sorts of people who do not (or not yet) fight cocks—the extremely poor, the socially despised, the personally idiosyncratic—play at these games, at, of course, penny ante levels. Cockfighting men would be ashamed to go anywhere near them. Slightly above these people in standing are those who though they do not themselves fight cocks, bet on the smaller matches around the edges. Next, there are those who fight cocks in small, or occasionally medium matches, but have not the status to join in the large ones, though they may bet from time to time on the side in those. And finally, there are those, the really substantial members of the community, the solid citizenry around whom local life revolves, who fight in the larger fights and bet on them around the side. The focusing element in these focused gatherings, these men generally dominate and define the sport as they dominate and define the society. When a Balinese male talks, in that almost venerative way, about “the true cockfighter,” the *bebatoh* (“bettor”) or *djuru kurung* (“cage keeper”), it is this sort of person, not those who bring the mentality of the pea-and-shell game into the quite different, inappropriate context of the cockfight, the driven gambler (*potét*, a word which has the secondary meaning of thief or reprobate), and the wistful hanger-on, that they

²² The extremes to which this madness is conceived on occasion to go—and the fact that it is considered madness—is demonstrated by the Balinese folk tale *I Tuhung Kuning*. A gambler becomes so deranged by his passion that, leaving on a trip, he orders his pregnant wife to take care of the prospective newborn if it is a boy but to feed it as meat to his fighting cocks if it is a girl. The mother gives birth to a girl, but rather than giving the child to the cocks she gives them a large rat and conceals the girl with her own mother. When the husband returns, the cocks, crowing a jingle, inform him of the deception and, furious, he sets out to kill the child. A goddess descends from heaven and takes the girl up to the skies with her. The cocks die from the food given them, the owner’s sanity is restored, the goddess brings the girl back to the father, who reunites him with his wife. The story is given as “Geel Komkommertje” in J. Hooykaas-van Leeuwen Boomkamp, *Sprookjes en Verhalen van Bali* (The Hague, 1956), pp. 19–25.

mean. For such a man, what is really going on in a match is something rather closer to an *affaire d'honneur* (though, with the Balinese talent for practical fantasy, the blood that is spilled is only figuratively human) than to the stupid, mechanical crank of a slot machine.

What makes Balinese cockfighting deep is thus not money in itself, but what, the more of it that is involved the more so, money causes to happen: the migration of the Balinese status hierarchy into the body of the cockfight. Psychologically an Aesopian representation of the ideal/demonic, rather narcissistic, male self, sociologically it is an equally Aesopian representation of the complex fields of tension set up by the controlled, muted, ceremonial, but for all that deeply felt, interaction of those selves in the context of everyday life. The cocks may be surrogates for their owners' personalities, animal mirrors of psychic form, but the cockfight is—or more exactly, deliberately is made to be—a simulation of the social matrix, the involved system of cross-cutting, overlapping, highly corporate groups—villages, kingroups, irrigation societies, temple congregations, “castes”—in which its devotees live.²³ And as prestige, the necessity to affirm it, defend it, celebrate it, justify it, and just plain bask in it (but not, given the strongly ascriptive character of Balinese stratification, to seek it), is perhaps the central driving force in the society, so also—ambulant penises, blood sacrifices, and monetary exchanges aside—is it of the cockfight. This apparent amusement and seeming sport is, to take another phrase from Erving Goffman, “a status bloodbath.”²⁴

The easiest way to make this clear, and at least to some degree to demonstrate it, is to invoke the village whose cockfighting activities I observed the closest—the one in which the raid occurred and from which my statistical data are taken.

Like all Balinese villages, this one—Tihingan, in the Klungkung region of southeast Bali—is intricately organized, a labyrinth of alliances and oppositions. But, unlike many, two sorts of corporate groups, which are also status groups, particularly stand out, and we may concentrate on them, in a part-for-whole way, without undue distortion.

²³ For a fuller description of Balinese rural social structure, see C. Geertz, “Form and Variation in Balinese Village Structure,” *American Anthropologist* 61 (1959): pp. 94–108; “Tihingan, A Balinese Village,” in R. M. Koentjaraningrat, *Villages in Indonesia* (Ithaca, 1967), pp. 210–243; and, though it is a bit off the norm as Balinese villages go, V. E. Korn, *De Dorpsrepubliek tnganan Pagringsingan* (Santpoort, Netherlands, 1933).

²⁴ Goffman, *Encounters*, p. 78.

First, the village is dominated by four large, patrilineal, partly endogamous descent groups which are constantly vying with one another and form the major factions in the village. Sometimes they group two and two, or rather the two larger ones versus the two smaller ones plus all the unaffiliated people; sometimes they operate independently. There are also subfactions within them, subfactions within the subfactions, and so on to rather fine levels of distinction. And second, there is the village itself, almost entirely endogamous, which is opposed to all the other villages round about in its cockfight circuit (which, as explained, is the market region), but which also forms alliances with certain of these neighbors against certain others in various supravillage political and social contexts. The exact situation is thus, as everywhere in Bali, quite distinctive; but the general pattern of a tiered hierarchy of status rivalries between highly corporate but various based groupings (and, thus, between the members of them) is entirely general.

Consider, then, as support of the general thesis that the cockfight, and especially the deep cockfight, is fundamentally a dramatization of status concerns, the following facts, which to avoid extended ethnographic description I shall simply pronounce to be facts—though the concrete evidence, examples, statements, and numbers that could be brought to bear in support of them, is both extensive and unmistakable:

1. A man virtually never bets against a cock owned by a member of his own kingroup. Usually he will feel obliged to bet for it, the more so the closer the kin tie and the deeper the fight. If he is certain in his mind that it will not win, he may just not bet at all, particularly if it is only a second cousin's bird or if the fight is a shallow one. But as a rule he will feel he must support it and, in deep games, nearly always does. Thus the great majority of the people calling "five" or "speckled" so demonstratively are expressing their allegiance to their kinsman, not their evaluation of his bird, their understanding of probability theory, or even their hopes of unearned income.

2. This principle is extended logically. If your kingroup is not involved you will support an allied kingroup against an unallied one in the same way, and so on through the very involved networks of alliances which, as I say, make up this, as any other, Balinese village.

3. So, too, for the village as a whole. If an outsider cock is fighting any cock from your village, you will tend to support the local one. If, what is a rarer circumstance but occurs every now and then, a cock

from outside your cockfight circuit is fighting one inside it, you will also tend to support the "home bird."

4. Cocks which come from any distance are almost always favorites, for the theory is the man would not have dared to bring it if it was not a good cock, the more so the further he has come. His followers are, of course, obliged to support him, and when the more grand-scale legal cockfights are held (on holidays, and so on) the people of the village take what they regard to be the best cocks in the village, regardless of ownership, and go off to support them, although they will almost certainly have to give odds on them and to make large bets to show that they are not a cheapskate village. Actually, such "away games," though infrequent, tend to mend the ruptures between village members that the constantly occurring "home games," where village factions are opposed rather than united, exacerbate.

5. Almost all matches are sociologically relevant. You seldom get two outsider cocks fighting, or two cocks with no particular group backing, or with group backing which is mutually unrelated in any clear way. When you do get them, the game is very shallow, betting very slow, and the whole thing very dull, with no one save the immediate principals and an addict gambler or two at all interested.

6. By the same token, you rarely get two cocks from the same group, even more rarely from the same subfaction, and virtually never from the same sub-subfaction (which would be in most cases one extended family) fighting. Similarly, in outside village fights two members of the village will rarely fight against one another, even though, as bitter rivals, they would do so with enthusiasm on their home grounds.

7. On the individual level, people involved in an institutionalized hostility relationship, called *puik*, in which they do not speak or otherwise have anything to do with each other (the causes of this formal breaking of relations are many: wife-capture, inheritance arguments, political differences) will bet very heavily, sometimes almost maniacally, against one another in what is a frank and direct attack on the very masculinity, the ultimate ground of his status, of the opponent.

8. The center bet coalition is, in all but the shallowest games, *always* made up by structural allies—no "outside money" is involved. What is "outside" depends upon the context, of course, but given it, no outside money is mixed in with the main bet; if the principals cannot raise it, it is not made. The center bet, again especially in deeper games, is thus the most direct and open expression of social opposition, which is one

of the reasons why both it and matchmaking are surrounded by such an air of unease, furtiveness, embarrassment, and so on.

9. The rule about borrowing money—that you may borrow *for* a bet but not *in* one—stems (and the Balinese are quite conscious of this) from similar considerations: you are never at the *economic* mercy of your enemy that way. Gambling debts, which can get quite large on a rather short-term basis, are always to friends, never to enemies, structurally speaking.

10. When two cocks are structurally irrelevant or neutral so far as *you* are concerned (though, as mentioned, they almost never are to each other) you do not even ask a relative or a friend whom he is betting on, because if you know how he is betting and he knows you know, and you go the other way, it will lead to strain. This rule is explicit and rigid; fairly elaborate, even rather artificial precautions are taken to avoid breaking it. At the very least you must pretend not to notice what he is doing, and he what you are doing.

11. There is a special word for betting against the grain, which is also the word for “pardon me” (*mpura*). It is considered a bad thing to do, though if the center bet is small it is sometimes all right as long as you do not do it too often. But the larger the bet and the more frequently you do it, the more the “pardon me” tack will lead to social disruption.

12. In fact, the institutionalized hostility relation, *puik*, is often formally initiated (though its causes always lie elsewhere) by such a “pardon me” bet in a deep fight, putting the symbolic fat in the fire. Similarly, the end of such a relationship and resumption of normal social intercourse is often signaled (but, again, not actually brought about) by one or the other of the enemies supporting the other’s bird.

13. In sticky, cross-loyalty situations, of which in this extraordinarily complex social system there are of course many, where a man is caught between two more or less equally balanced loyalties, he tends to wander off for a cup of coffee or something to avoid having to bet, a form of behavior reminiscent of that of American voters in similar situations.²⁵

14. The people involved in the center bet are, especially in deep fights, virtually always leading members of their group—kinship, village, or whatever. Further, those who bet on the side (including these

²⁵ B. R. Berelson, P. F. Lazarsfeld, and W. N. McPhee, *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign* (Chicago, 1954).

people) are, as I have already remarked, the more established members of the village—the solid citizens. Cockfighting is for those who are involved in the everyday politics of prestige as well, not for youth, women, subordinates, and so forth.

15. So far as money is concerned, the explicitly expressed attitude toward it is that it is a secondary matter. It is not, as I have said, of no importance; Balinese are no happier to lose several weeks' income than anyone else. But they mainly look on the monetary aspects of the cockfight as self-balancing, a matter of just moving money around, circulating it among a fairly well-defined group of serious cockfighters. The really important wins and losses are seen mostly in other terms, and the general attitude toward wagering is not any hope of cleaning up, of making a killing (addict gamblers again excepted), but that of the horseplayer's prayer: "Oh, God, please let me break even." In prestige terms, however, you do not want to break even, but, in a momentary, punctuate sort of way, win utterly. The talk (which goes on all the time) is about fights against such-and-such a cock of So-and-So which your cock demolished, not on how much you won, a fact people, even for large bets, rarely remember for any length of time, though they will remember the day they did in Pan Loh's finest cock for years.

16. You must bet on cocks of your own group aside from mere loyalty considerations, for if you do not people generally will say, "What! Is he too proud for the likes of us? Does he have to go to Java or Den Pasar [the capital town] to bet, he is such an important man?" Thus there is a general pressure to bet not only to show that you are important locally, but that you are not so important that you look down on everyone else as unfit even to be rivals. Similarly, home team people must bet against outside cocks or the outsiders will accuse them—a serious charge—of just collecting entry fees and not really being interested in cockfighting, as well as again being arrogant and insulting.

17. Finally, the Balinese peasants themselves are quite aware of all this and can and, at least to an ethnographer, do state most of it in approximately the same terms as I have. Fighting cocks, almost every Balinese I have ever discussed the subject with has said, is like playing with fire only not getting burned. You activate village and kingroup rivalries and hostilities, but in "play" form, coming dangerously and entrancingly close to the expression of open and direct interpersonal and intergroup aggression (something which, again, almost never happens in the normal course of ordinary life), but not quite, because, after all, it is "only a cockfight."

More observations of this sort could be advanced, but perhaps the general point is, if not made, at least well-delineated, and the whole argument thus far can be usefully summarized in a formal paradigm:

THE MORE A MATCH IS . . .

1. Between near status equals (and/or personal enemies)
2. Between high status individuals

THE DEEPER THE MATCH.

THE DEEPER THE MATCH . . .

1. The closer the identification of cock and man (or, more properly, the deeper the match the more the man will advance his best, most closely-identified-with cock).
2. The finer the cocks involved and the more exactly they will be matched.
3. The greater the emotion that will be involved and the more the general absorption in the match.
4. The higher the individual bets center and outside, the shorter the outside bet odds will tend to be, and the more betting there will be overall.
5. The less an "economic" and the more a "status" view of gaming will be involved, and the "solider" the citizens who will be gaming.²⁶

Inverse arguments hold for the shallower the fight, culminating, in a reversed-signs sense, in the coin-spinning and dice-throwing amusements. For deep fights there are no absolute upper limits, though there are of course practical ones, and there are a great many legendlike tales of great *Duel-in-the-Sun* combats between lords and princes in classical times (for cockfighting has always been as much an elite concern as a popular one), far deeper than anything anyone, even aristocrats, could produce today anywhere in Bali.

Indeed, one of the great culture heroes of Bali is a prince, called after his passion for the sport, "The Cockfighter," who happened to be away at a very deep cockfight with a neighboring prince when the whole of his family—father, brothers, wives, sisters—were assassinated by

²⁶ As this is a formal paradigm, it is intended to display the logical, not the causal, structure of cockfighting. Just which of these considerations leads to which, in what order, and by what mechanisms, is another matter—one I have attempted to shed some light on in the general discussion.

commoner usurpers. Thus spared, he returned to dispatch the upstart, regain the throne, reconstitute the Balinese high tradition, and build its most powerful, glorious, and prosperous state. Along with everything else that the Balinese see in fighting cocks—themselves, their social order, abstract hatred, masculinity, demonic power—they also see the archetype of status virtue, the arrogant, resolute, honor-mad player with real fire, the ksatria prince.²⁷

²⁷ In another of Hooykaas-van Leeuwen Boomkamp's folk tales ("De Gast," *Sprookjes en Verhalen van Bali*, pp. 172–180), a low caste *Sudra*, a generous, pious, and carefree man who is also an accomplished cockfighter, loses, despite his accomplishment, fight after fight until he is not only out of money but down to his last cock. He does not despair, however—"I bet," he says, "upon the Unseen World."

His wife, a good and hard-working woman, knowing how much he enjoys cockfighting, gives him her last "rainy day" money to go and bet. But, filled with misgivings due to his run of ill luck, he leaves his own cock at home and bets merely on the side. He soon loses all but a coin or two and repairs to a food stand for a snack, where he meets a decrepit, odorous, and generally unappetizing old beggar leaning on a staff. The old man asks for food, and the hero spends his last coins to buy him some. The old man then asks to pass the night with the hero, which the hero gladly invites him to do. As there is no food in the house, however, the hero tells his wife to kill the last cock for dinner. When the old man discovers this fact, he tells the hero he has three cocks in his own mountain hut and says the hero may have one of them for fighting. He also asks for the hero's son to accompany him as a servant, and, after the son agrees, this is done.

The old man turns out to be Siva and, thus, to live in a great palace in the sky, though the hero does not know this. In time, the hero decides to visit his son and collect the promised cock. Lifted up into Siva's presence, he is given the choice of three cocks. The first crows: "I have beaten fifteen opponents." The second crows, "I have beaten twenty-five opponents." The third crows, "I have beaten the king." "That one, the third, is my choice," says the hero, and returns with it to earth.

When he arrives at the cockfight, he is asked for an entry fee and replies, "I have no money; I will pay after my cock has won." As he is known never to win, he is let in because the king, who is there fighting, dislikes him and hopes to enslave him when he loses and cannot pay off. In order to insure that this happens, the king matches his finest cock against the hero's. When the cocks are placed down, the hero's flees, and the crowd, led by the arrogant king, hoots in laughter. The hero's cock then flies at the king himself, killing him with a spur stab in the throat. The hero flees. His house is encircled by the king's men. The cock changes into a Garuda, the great mythic bird of Indic legend, and carries the hero and his wife to safety in the heavens.

When the people see this, they make the hero king and his wife queen and they return as such to earth. Later their son, released by Siva, also returns and the hero-king announces his intention to enter a hermitage. ("I will fight no more cockfights. I have bet on the Unseen and won.") He enters the hermitage and his son becomes king.

Feathers, Blood, Crowds, and Money

“Poetry makes nothing happen,” Auden says in his elegy of Yeats, “it survives in the valley of its saying . . . a way of happening, a mouth.” The cockfight too, in this colloquial sense, makes nothing happen. Men go on allegorically humiliating one another and being allegorically humiliated by one another, day after day, glorying quietly in the experience if they have triumphed, crushed only slightly more openly by it if they have not. *But no one’s status really changes.* You cannot ascend the status ladder by winning cockfights; you cannot, as an individual, really ascend it at all. Nor can you descend it that way.²⁸ All you can do is enjoy and savor, or suffer and withstand, the concocted sensation of drastic and momentary movement along an aesthetic semblance of that ladder, a kind of behind-the-mirror status jump which has the look of mobility without its actuality.

Like any art form—for that, finally, is what we are dealing with—the cockfight renders ordinary, everyday experience comprehensible by presenting it in terms of acts and objects which have had their practical consequences removed and been reduced (or, if you prefer, raised) to the level of sheer appearances, where their meaning can be more powerfully articulated and more exactly perceived. The cockfight is “really real” only to the cocks—it does not kill anyone, castrate anyone, reduce anyone to animal status, alter the hierarchical relations among people, or refashion the hierarchy; it does not even redistribute income in any significant way. What it does is what, for other peoples with other temperaments and other conventions, *Lear* and *Crime and Punishment* do; it catches up these themes—death, masculinity, rage, pride, loss, beneficence, chance—and, ordering them into an encompassing structure, presents them in such a way as to throw into relief a particular view of their essential nature. It puts a construction on them, makes them, to

²⁸ Addict gamblers are really less declassed (for their status is, as everyone else’s, inherited) than merely impoverished and personally disgraced. The most prominent addict gambler in my cockfight circuit was actually a very high caste *satria* who sold off most of his considerable lands to support his habit. Though everyone privately regarded him as a fool and worse (some, more charitable, regarded him as sick), he was publicly treated with the elaborate deference and politeness due his rank. On the independence of personal reputation and public status in Bali, see above, Chapter 14.

those historically positioned to appreciate the construction, meaningful—visible, tangible, graspable—“real,” in an ideational sense. An image, fiction, a model, a metaphor, the cockfight is a means of expression; its function is neither to assuage social passions nor to heighten them (though, in its playing-with-fire way it does a bit of both), but, in a medium of feathers, blood, crowds, and money, to display them.

The question of how it is that we perceive qualities in things—paintings, books, melodies, plays—that we do not feel we can assert literally to be there has come, in recent years, into the very center of aesthetic theory.²⁹ Neither the sentiments of the artist, which remain his, nor those of the audience, which remain theirs, can account for the agitation of one painting or the serenity of another. We attribute grandeur, wit, despair, exuberance to strings of sounds; lightness, energy, violence, fluidity to blocks of stone. Novels are said to have strength, buildings eloquence, plays momentum, ballets repose. In this realm of eccentric predicates, to say that the cockfight, in its perfected cases at least, is “disquietful” does not seem at all unnatural, merely, as I have just denied it practical consequence, somewhat puzzling.

The disquietfulness arises, “somehow,” out of a conjunction of three attributes of the fight: its immediate dramatic shape; its metaphoric content; and its social context. A cultural figure against a social ground, the fight is at once a convulsive surge of animal hatred, a mock war of symbolical selves, and a formal simulation of status tensions, and its aesthetic power derives from its capacity to force together these diverse realities. The reason it is disquietful is not that it has material effects (it has some, but they are minor); the reason that it is disquietful is that, joining pride to selfhood, selfhood to cocks, and cocks to destruction, it brings to imaginative realization a dimension of Balinese experience normally well-obscured from view. The transfer of a sense of gravity into what is in itself a rather blank and unvarious spectacle, a commotion of beating wings and throbbing legs, is effected by interpreting it as expressive of something unsettling in the way its authors and audience live, or, even more ominously, what they are.

As a dramatic shape, the fight displays a characteristic that does not seem so remarkable until one realizes that it does not have to be there:

²⁹ For four, somewhat variant, treatments, see S. Langer, *Feeling and Form* (New York, 1953); R. Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects* (New York, 1968); N. Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis, 1968); M. Merleau-Ponty, “The Eye and the Mind,” in his *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, Ill., 1964), pp. 159–190.

a radically atomistical structure.³⁰ Each match is a world unto itself, a particulate burst of form. There is the matchmaking, there is the betting, there is the fight, there is the result—utter triumph and utter defeat—and there is the hurried, embarrassed passing of money. The loser is not consoled. People drift away from him, look around him, leave him to assimilate his momentary descent into nonbeing, reset his face, and return, scarless and intact, to the fray. Nor are winners congratulated, or events rehashed; once a match is ended the crowd's attention turns totally to the next, with no looking back. A shadow of the experience no doubt remains with the principals, perhaps even with some of the witnesses of a deep fight, as it remains with us when we leave the theater after seeing a powerful play well-performed; but it quite soon fades to become at most a schematic memory—a diffuse glow or an abstract shudder—and usually not even that. Any expressive form lives only in its own present—the one it itself creates. But, here, that present is severed into a string of flashes, some more bright than others, but all of them disconnected, aesthetic quanta. Whatever the cockfight says, it says in spurts.

But, as I have argued lengthily elsewhere, the Balinese live in spurts.³¹ Their life, as they arrange it and perceive it, is less a flow, a directional movement out of the past, through the present, toward the future than an on-off pulsation of meaning and vacuity, an arhythmic alternation of short periods when “something” (that is, something significant) is happening, and equally short ones where “nothing” (that is, nothing much) is—between what they themselves call “full” and “empty” times, or, in another idiom, “junctures” and “holes.” In focusing activity down to a burning-glass dot, the cockfight is merely being Balinese in the same way in which everything from the monadic en-

³⁰ British cockfights (the sport was banned there in 1840) indeed seem to have lacked it, and to have generated, therefore, a quite different family of shapes. Most British fights were “mains,” in which a preagreed number of cocks were aligned into two teams and fought serially. Score was kept and wagering took place both on the individual matches and on the main as a whole. There were also “battle Royales,” both in England and on the Continent, in which a large number of cocks were let loose at once with the one left standing at the end the victor. And in Wales, the so-called Welsh main followed an elimination pattern, along the lines of a present-day tennis tournament, winners proceeding to the next round. As a genre, the cock fight has perhaps less compositional flexibility than, say, Latin comedy, but it is not entirely without any. On cockfighting more generally, see A. Rupert, *The Art of Cockfighting* (New York, 1949); G. R. Scott, *History of Cockfighting* (London, 1957); and L. Fitz-Barnard, *Fighting Sports* (London, 1921).

³¹ Above, pp. 391–398.

counters of everyday life, through the clanging pointillism of *gamelan* music, to the visiting-day-of-the-gods temple celebrations are. It is not an imitation of the punctuateness of Balinese social life, nor a depiction of it, nor even an expression of it; it is an example of it, carefully prepared.³²

If one dimension of the cockfight's structure, its lack of temporal directionality, makes it seem a typical segment of the general social life, however, the other, its flat-out, head-to-head (or spur-to-spur) aggressiveness, makes it seem a contradiction, a reversal, even a subversion of it. In the normal course of things, the Balinese are shy to the point of obsessiveness of open conflict. Oblique, cautious, subdued, controlled, masters of indirection and dissimulation—what they call *alus*, “polished,” “smooth”—they rarely face what they can turn away from, rarely resist what they can evade. But here they portray themselves as wild and murderous, with manic explosions of instinctual cruelty. A powerful rendering of life as the Balinese most deeply do not want it (to adapt a phrase Frye has used of Gloucester's blinding) is set in the context of a sample of it as they do in fact have it.³³ And, because the context suggests that the rendering, if less than a straightforward description, is nonetheless more than an idle fancy; it is here that the disquietfulness—the disquietfulness of the *fight*, not (or, anyway, not necessarily) its patrons, who seem in fact rather thoroughly to enjoy it—emerges. The slaughter in the cock ring is not a depiction of how things literally are among men, but, what is almost worse, of how, from a particular angle, they imaginatively are.³⁴

³² For the necessity of distinguishing among “description,” “representation,” “exemplification,” and “expression” (and the irrelevance of “imitation” to all of them) as modes of symbolic reference, see Goodman, *Languages of Art*, pp. 61–110, 45–91, 225–241.

³³ N. Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Bloomington, Ind., 1964), p. 99.

³⁴ There are two other Balinese values and disvalues which, connected with punctuate temporality on the one hand and unbridled aggressiveness on the other, reinforce the sense that the cockfight is at once continuous with ordinary social life and a direct negation of it: what the Balinese call *ramé*, and what they call *paling*. *Ramé* means crowded, noisy, and active, and is a highly sought-after social state: crowded markets, mass festivals, busy streets are all *ramé*, as, of course, is, in the extreme, a cockfight. *Ramé* is what happens in the “full” times (its opposite, *sepi*, “quiet,” is what happens in the “empty” ones). *Paling* is social vertigo, the dizzy, disoriented, lost, turned-around feeling one gets when one's place in the coordinates of social space is not clear, and it is a tremendously disfavored, immensely anxiety-producing state. Balinese regard the exact maintenance of spatial orientation (“not to know where north is” is to be crazy), balance, decorum, status relationships, and so forth, as fundamental to ordered life (*krama*) and *paling*, the sort of whirling con-

The angle, of course, is stratificatory. What, as we have already seen, the cockfight talks most forcibly about is status relationships, and what it says about them is that they are matters of life and death. That prestige is a profoundly serious business is apparent everywhere one looks in Bali—in the village, the family, the economy, the state. A peculiar fusion of Polynesian title ranks and Hindu castes, the hierarchy of pride is the moral backbone of the society. But only in the cockfight are the sentiments upon which that hierarchy rests revealed in their natural colors. Enveloped elsewhere in a haze of etiquette, a thick cloud of euphemism and ceremony, gesture and allusion, they are here expressed in only the thinnest disguise of an animal mask, a mask which in fact demonstrates them far more effectively than it conceals them. Jealousy is as much a part of Bali as poise, envy as grace, brutality as charm; but without the cockfight the Balinese would have a much less certain understanding of them, which is, presumably, why they value it so highly.

Any expressive form works (when it works) by disarranging semantic contexts in such a way that properties conventionally ascribed to certain things are unconventionally ascribed to others, which are then seen actually to possess them. To call the wind a cripple, as Stevens does, to fix tone and manipulate timbre, as Schoenberg does, or, closer to our case, to picture an art critic as a dissolute bear, as Hogarth does, is to cross conceptual wires; the established conjunctions between objects and their qualities are altered, and phenomena—fall weather, melodic shape, or cultural journalism—are clothed in signifiers which normally point to other referents.³⁵ Similarly, to connect—and connect, and connect—the collision of roosters with the divisiveness of status is to invite a transfer

fusion of position the scrambling cocks exemplify as its profoundest enemy and contradiction. On *ramé*, see Bateson and Mead, *Balinese Character*, pp. 3, 64; on *paling*, *ibid.*, p. 11, and Belo, ed., *Traditional Balinese Culture*, p. 90 ff.

³⁵ The Stevens reference is to his "The Motive for Metaphor" ("You like it under the trees in autumn,/Because everything is half dead./The wind moves like a cripple among the leaves/And repeats words without meaning") [Copyright 1947 by Wallace Stevens, reprinted from *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., and Faber and Faber Ltd.]; the Schoenberg reference is to the third of his *Five Orchestral Pieces* (Opus 16), and is borrowed from H. H. Drager, "The Concept of 'Tonal Body,'" in *Reflections on Art*, ed. S. Langer (New York, 1961), p. 174. On Hogarth, and on this whole problem—there called "multiple matrix matching"—see E. H. Gombrich, "The Use of Art for the Study of Symbols," in *Psychology and the Visual Arts*, ed. J. Hogg (Baltimore, 1969), pp. 149–170. The more usual term for this sort of semantic alchemy is "metaphorical transfer," and good technical discussions of it can be found in M. Black, *Models and Metaphors* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1962), p. 25 ff; Goodman, *Language as Art*, p. 44 ff; and W. Percy, "Metaphor as Mistake," *Sewanee Review* 66 (1958): 78–99.

of perceptions from the former to the latter, a transfer which is at once a description and a judgment. (Logically, the transfer could, of course, as well go the other way; but, like most of the rest of us, the Balinese are a great deal more interested in understanding men than they are in understanding cocks.)

What sets the cockfight apart from the ordinary course of life, lifts it from the realm of everyday practical affairs, and surrounds it with an aura of enlarged importance is not, as functionalist sociology would have it, that it reinforces status discriminations (such reinforcement is hardly necessary in a society where every act proclaims them), but that it provides a metasocial commentary upon the whole matter of assorting human beings into fixed hierarchical ranks and then organizing the major part of collective existence around that assortment. Its function, if you want to call it that, is interpretive: it is a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves.

Saying Something of Something

To put the matter this way is to engage in a bit of metaphorical refocusing of one's own, for it shifts the analysis of cultural forms from an endeavor in general parallel to dissecting an organism, diagnosing a symptom, deciphering a code, or ordering a system—the dominant analogies in contemporary anthropology—to one in general parallel with penetrating a literary text. If one takes the cockfight, or any other collectively sustained symbolic structure, as a means of “saying something of something” (to invoke a famous Aristotelian tag), then one is faced with a problem not in social mechanics but social semantics.³⁶ For the anthropologist, whose concern is with formulating sociological principles, not with promoting or appreciating cockfights, the question is, what does one learn about such principles from examining culture as an assemblage of texts?

Such an extension of the notion of a text beyond written material,

³⁶ The tag is from the second book of the *Organon*, *On Interpretation*. For a discussion of it, and for the whole argument for freeing “the notion of text . . . from the notion of scripture or writing” and constructing, thus, a general hermeneutics, see P. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* (New Haven, 1970), p. 20 ff.

and even beyond verbal, is, though metaphorical, not, of course, all that novel. The *interpretatio naturae* tradition of the middle ages, which, culminating in Spinoza, attempted to read nature as Scripture, the Nietzschean effort to treat value systems as glosses on the will to power (or the Marxian one to treat them as glosses on property relations), and the Freudian replacement of the enigmatic text of the manifest dream with the plain one of the latent, all offer precedents, if not equally recommendable ones.³⁷ But the idea remains theoretically undeveloped; and the more profound corollary, so far as anthropology is concerned, that cultural forms can be treated as texts, as imaginative works built out of social materials, has yet to be systematically exploited.³⁸

In the case at hand, to treat the cockfight as a text is to bring out a feature of it (in my opinion, the central feature of it) that treating it as a rite or a pastime, the two most obvious alternatives, would tend to obscure: its use of emotion for cognitive ends. What the cockfight says in a vocabulary of sentiment—the thrill of risk, the despair of loss, the pleasure of triumph. Yet what it says is not merely that risk is exciting, loss depressing, or triumph gratifying, banal tautologies of affect, but that it is of these emotions, thus exemplified, that society is built and individuals are put together. Attending cockfights and participating in them is, for the Balinese, a kind of sentimental education. What he learns there is what his culture's ethos and his private sensibility (or, anyway, certain aspects of them) look like when spelled out externally in a collective text; that the two are near enough alike to be articulated in the symbolics of a single such text; and—the disquieting part—that the text in which this revelation is accomplished consists of a chicken hacking another mindlessly to bits.

Every people, the proverb has it, loves its own form of violence. The cockfight is the Balinese reflection on theirs: on its look, its uses, its force, its fascination. Drawing on almost every level of Balinese experience, it brings together themes—animal savagery, male narcissism, opponent gambling, status rivalry, mass excitement, blood sacrifice—

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Lévi-Strauss' "structuralism" might seem an exception. But it is only an apparent one, for, rather than taking myths, totem rites, marriage rules, or whatever as texts to interpret, Lévi-Strauss takes them as ciphers to solve, which is very much not the same thing. He does not seek to understand symbolic forms in terms of how they function in concrete situations to organize perceptions (meanings, emotions, concepts, attitudes); he seeks to understand them entirely in terms of their internal structure, *independent de tout sujet, de tout objet, et de toute contexte*. See above, Chapter 13.

whose main connection is their involvement with rage and the fear of rage, and, binding them into a set of rules which at once contains them and allows them play, builds a symbolic structure in which, over and over again, the reality of their inner affiliation can be intelligibly felt. If, to quote Northrop Frye again, we go to see *Macbeth* to learn what a man feels like after he has gained a kingdom and lost his soul, Balinese go to cockfights to find out what a man, usually composed, aloof, almost obsessively self-absorbed, a kind of moral autocosm, feels like when, attacked, tormented, challenged, insulted, and driven in result to the extremes of fury, he has totally triumphed or been brought totally low. The whole passage, as it takes us back to Aristotle (though to the *Poetics* rather than the *Hermeneutics*), is worth quotation:

But the poet [as opposed to the historian], Aristotle says, never makes any real statements at all, certainly no particular or specific ones. The poet's job is not to tell you what happened, but what happens: not what did take place, but the kind of thing that always does take place. He gives you the typical, recurring, or what Aristotle calls universal event. You wouldn't go to *Macbeth* to learn about the history of Scotland—you go to it to learn what a man feels like after he's gained a kingdom and lost his soul. When you meet such a character as Micawber in Dickens, you don't feel that there must have been a man Dickens knew who was exactly like this: you feel that there's a bit of Micawber in almost everybody you know, including yourself. Our impressions of human life are picked up one by one, and remain for most of us loose and disorganized. But we constantly find things in literature that suddenly coordinate and bring into focus a great many such impressions, and this is part of what Aristotle means by the typical or universal human event.³⁹

It is this kind of bringing of assorted experiences of everyday life to focus that the cockfight, set aside from that life as "only a game" and reconnected to it as "more than a game," accomplishes, and so creates what, better than typical or universal, could be called a paradigmatic human event—that is, one that tells us less what happens than the kind of thing that would happen if, as is not the case, life were art and could be as freely shaped by styles of feeling as *Macbeth* and *David Copperfield* are.

Enacted and re-enacted, so far without end, the cockfight enables the Balinese, as, read and reread, *Macbeth* enables us, to see a dimension of his own subjectivity. As he watches fight after fight, with the active watching of an owner and a bettor (for cockfighting has no more inter-

³⁹ Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, pp. 63–64.

est as a pure spectator sport than does croquet or dog racing), he grows familiar with it and what it has to say to him, much as the attentive listener to string quartets or the absorbed viewer of still life grows slowly more familiar with them in a way which opens his subjectivity to himself.⁴⁰

Yet, because—in another of those paradoxes, along with painted feelings and unsequenced acts, which haunt aesthetics—that subjectivity does not properly exist until it is thus organized, art forms generate and regenerate the very subjectivity they pretend only to display. Quartets, still lifes, and cockfights are not merely reflections of a pre-existing sensibility analogically represented; they are positive agents in the creation and maintenance of such a sensibility. If we see ourselves as a pack of Micawbers, it is from reading too much Dickens (if we see ourselves as unillusioned realists, it is from reading too little); and similarly for Balinese, cocks, and cockfights. It is in such a way, coloring experience with the light they cast it in, rather than through whatever material effects they may have, that the arts play their role, as arts, in social life.⁴¹

In the cockfight, then, the Balinese forms and discovers his temperament and his society's temper at the same time. Or, more exactly, he forms and discovers a particular facet of them. Not only are there a great many other cultural texts providing commentaries on status hier-

⁴⁰ The use of the, to Europeans, "natural" visual idiom for perception—"see," "watches," and so forth—is more than usually misleading here, for the fact that, as mentioned earlier, Balinese follow the progress of the fight as much (perhaps, as fighting cocks are actually rather hard to see except as blurs of motion, more) with their bodies as with their eyes, moving their limbs, heads, and trunks in gestural mimicry of the cocks' maneuvers, means that much of the individual's experience of the fight is kinesthetic rather than visual. If ever there was an example of Kenneth Burke's definition of a symbolic act as "the dancing of an attitude" [*The Philosophy of Literary Form*, rev. ed. (New York, 1957), p. 9] the cockfight is it. On the enormous role of kinesthetic perception in Balinese life, Bateson and Mead, *Balinese Character*, pp. 84–88; on the active nature of aesthetic perception in general, Goodman, *Language of Art*, pp. 241–244.

⁴¹ All this coupling of the occidental great with the oriental lowly will doubtless disturb certain sorts of aestheticians as the earlier efforts of anthropologists to speak of Christianity and totemism in the same breath disturbed certain sorts of theologians. But as ontological questions are (or should be) bracketed in the sociology of religion, judgmental ones are (or should be) bracketed in the sociology of art. In any case, the attempt to deprovincialize the concept of art is but part of the general anthropological conspiracy to deprovincialize all important social concepts—marriage, religion, law, rationality—and though this is a threat to aesthetic theories which regard certain works of art as beyond the reach of sociological analysis, it is no threat to the conviction, for which Robert Graves claims to have been reprimanded at his Cambridge tripos, that some poems are better than others.

archy and self-regard in Bali, but there are a great many other critical sectors of Balinese life besides the stratificatory and the agonistic that receive such commentary. The ceremony consecrating a Brahmana priest, a matter of breath control, postural immobility, and vacant concentration upon the depths of being, displays a radically different, but to the Balinese equally real, property of social hierarchy—its reach toward the numinous transcendent. Set not in the matrix of the kinetic emotionality of animals, but in that of the static passionlessness of divine mentality, it expresses tranquillity not disquiet. The mass festivals at the village temples, which mobilize the whole local population in elaborate hostings of visiting gods—songs, dances, compliments, gifts—assert the spiritual unity of village mates against their status inequality and project a mood of amity and trust.⁴² The cockfight is not the master key to Balinese life, any more than bullfighting is to Spanish. What it says about that life is not unqualified nor even unchallenged by what other equally eloquent cultural statements say about it. But there is nothing more surprising in this than in the fact that Racine and Molière were contemporaries, or that the same people who arrange chrysanthemums cast swords.⁴³

The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong. There are enormous difficulties in such an enterprise, methodological pitfalls to make a Freudian quake,

⁴² For the consecration ceremony, see V. E. Korn, "The Consecration of the Priest," in Swellengrebel, ed., *Bali: Studies*, pp. 131–154; for (somewhat exaggerated) village communion, R. Goris, "The Religious Character of the Balinese Village," *ibid.*, pp. 79–100.

⁴³ That what the cockfight has to say about Bali is not altogether without perception and the disquiet it expresses about the general pattern of Balinese life is not wholly without reason is attested by the fact that in two weeks of December 1965, during the upheavals following the unsuccessful coup in Djakarta, between forty and eighty thousand Balinese (in a population of about two million) were killed, largely by one another—the worst outburst in the country. [J. Hughes, *Indonesian Upheaval* (New York, 1967), pp. 173–183. Hughes' figures are, of course, rather casual estimates, but they are not the most extreme.] This is not to say, of course, that the killings were caused by the cockfight, could have been predicted on the basis of it, or were some sort of enlarged version of it with real people in the place of the cocks—all of which is nonsense. It is merely to say that if one looks at Bali not just through the medium of its dances, its shadow-plays, its sculpture, and its girls, but—as the Balinese themselves do—also through the medium of its cockfight, the fact that the massacre occurred seems, if no less appalling, less like a contradiction to the laws of nature. As more than one real Gloucester has discovered, sometimes people actually get life precisely as they most deeply do not want it.

and some moral perplexities as well. Nor is it the only way that symbolic forms can be sociologically handled. Functionalism lives, and so does psychologism. But to regard such forms as "saying something of something," and saying it to somebody, is at least to open up the possibility of an analysis which attends to their substance rather than to reductive formulas professing to account for them.

As in more familiar exercises in close reading, one can start anywhere in a culture's repertoire of forms and end up anywhere else. One can stay, as I have here, within a single, more or less bounded form, and circle steadily within it. One can move between forms in search of broader unities or informing contrasts. One can even compare forms from different cultures to define their character in reciprocal relief. But whatever the level at which one operates, and however intricately, the guiding principle is the same: societies, like lives, contain their own interpretations. One has only to learn how to gain access to them.

Performance Studies

Interventions and Radical Research

According to Michel de Certeau, “what the map cuts up, the story cuts across” (de Certeau 1984, 129). This pithy phrase evokes a postcolonial world crisscrossed by transnational narratives, diaspora affiliations, and, especially, the movement and multiple migrations of people, sometimes voluntary, but often economically propelled and politically coerced. In order to keep pace with such a world, we now think of “place” as a heavily trafficked intersection, a port of call and exchange, instead of a circumscribed territory. A boundary is more like a membrane than a wall. In current cultural theory, “location” is imagined as an itinerary instead of a fixed point. Our understanding of “local context” expands to encompass the historical, dynamic, often traumatic, movements of people, ideas, images, commodities, and capital. It is no longer easy to sort out the local from the global: transnational circulations of images get reworked on the ground and redeployed for local, tactical struggles. And global flows simultaneously are encumbered and energized by these local makeovers. We now are keenly aware that the “local” is a leaky, contingent construction, and that global forces are taken up, struggled over, and refracted for site-specific purposes. The best of the new cultural theory distinguishes itself from apolitical celebrations of mobility, flow, and easy border crossings by carefully tracking the transitive circuits of power and the political economic pressure points that monitor the migrations of people, channel the circulations of meanings, and stratify access to resources (see Gilroy 1994; Appadurai 1996; Lavie and Swedenburg 1996; Clifford 1997; di Leonardo 1998; Joseph 1999; Ong 1999). We now ask: For whom is the border a friction-free zone of entitled access, a frontier of possibility? Who travels confidently across borders, and who gets questioned, detained, interrogated, and strip-searched at the border (see Taylor 1999)?

But de Certeau’s aphorism, “what the map cuts up, the story cuts

across,” also points to transgressive travel between two different domains of knowledge: one official, objective, and abstract—“the map”; the other one practical, embodied, and popular—“the story.” This promiscuous traffic between different ways of knowing carries the most radical promise of performance studies research. Performance studies struggles to open the space between analysis and action, and to pull the pin on the binary opposition between theory and practice. This embrace of different ways of knowing is radical because it cuts to the root of how knowledge is organized in the academy.

The dominant way of knowing in the academy is that of empirical observation and critical analysis from a distanced perspective: “knowing that,” and “knowing about.” This is a view from above the object of inquiry: knowledge that is anchored in paradigm and secured in print. This propositional knowledge is shadowed by another way of knowing that is grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection: “knowing how,” and “knowing who.” This is a view from ground level, in the thick of things. This is knowledge that is anchored in practice and circulated within a performance community, but is ephemeral. Donna Haraway locates this homely and vulnerable “view from a body” in contrast to the abstract and authoritative “view from above,” universal knowledge that pretends to transcend location (Haraway 1991, 196).

Since the enlightenment project of modernity, the first way of knowing has been preeminent. Marching under the banner of science and reason, it has disqualified and repressed other ways of knowing that are rooted in embodied experience, orality, and local contingencies. Between objective knowledge that is consolidated in texts, and local know-how that circulates on the ground within a community of memory and practice, there is no contest. It is the choice between science and “old wives’ tales” (note how the disqualified knowledge is gendered as feminine).

Michel Foucault coined the term “subjugated knowledges” to include all the local, regional, vernacular, naïve knowledges at the bottom of the hierarchy—the low Other of science (Foucault 1980, 81–84). These are the nonserious ways of knowing that dominant culture neglects, excludes, represses, or simply fails to recognize. Subjugated knowledges have been erased because they are illegible; they exist, by and large, as active bodies of meaning, outside of books, eluding the forces of inscription that would make them legible, and thereby legitimate (see de Certeau 1998; Scott 1998).

What gets squeezed out by this epistemic violence is the whole realm of complex, finely nuanced meaning that is embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured, improvised, coexperienced, covert—and all the more deeply

meaningful because of its refusal to be spelled out. Dominant epistemologies that link knowing with seeing are not attuned to meanings that are masked, camouflaged, indirect, embedded, or hidden in context. The visual/verbal bias of Western regimes of knowledge blinds researchers to meanings that are expressed forcefully through intonation, silence, body tension, arched eyebrows, blank stares, and other protective arts of disguise and secrecy—what de Certeau called “the elocutionary experience of a fugitive communication” (de Certeau 2000, 133; see Conquergood 2000). Subordinate people do not have the privilege of explicitness, the luxury of transparency, the presumptive norm of clear and direct communication, free and open debate on a level playing field that the privileged classes take for granted.

In his critique of the limitations of literacy, Kenneth Burke argued that print-based scholarship has built-in blind spots and a conditioned deafness:

The [written] record is usually but a fragment of the expression (as the written word omits all telltale record of gesture and tonality; and not only may our “literacy” keep us from missing the omissions, it may blunt us to the appreciation of tone and gesture, so that even when we witness the full expression, we note only those aspects of it that can be written down). (Burke 1969, 185)

In even stronger terms, Raymond Williams challenged the class-based arrogance of scriptocentrism, pointing to the “error” and “delusion” of “highly educated” people who are “so driven in on their reading” that “they fail to notice that there are other forms of skilled, intelligent, creative activity” such as “theatre” and “active politics.” This error “resembles that of the narrow reformer who supposes that farm labourers and village craftsmen were once uneducated, merely because they could not read.” He argued that “the contempt” for performance and practical activity, “which is always latent in the highly literate, is a mark of the observer’s limits, not those of the activities themselves” (Williams 1983, 309). Williams critiqued scholars for limiting their sources to written materials; I agree with Burke that scholarship is so skewed toward texts that even when researchers do attend to extralinguistic human action and embodied events they construe them as texts to be read. According to de Certeau, this scriptocentrism is a hallmark of Western imperialism. Posted above the gates of modernity, this sign: “Here only what is written is understood.’ Such is the internal law of that which has constituted itself as ‘Western’ [and ‘white’]” (de Certeau 1984, 161).

Only middle-class academics could blithely assume that all the world is a text because reading and writing are central to their everyday lives and occupational security. For many people throughout the world, however, particularly subaltern groups, texts are often inaccessible, or threatening, charged with the regulatory powers of the state. More often than not, subordinate people experience texts and the bureaucracy of literacy as instruments of control and displacement, e.g., green cards, passports, arrest warrants, deportation orders—what de Certeau calls “intextuation”: “Every power, including the power of law, is written first of all on the backs of its subjects” (1984:140). Among the most oppressed people in the United States today are the “undocumented” immigrants, the so-called “illegal aliens,” known in the vernacular as the people “sin papeles,” the people without papers, *indocumentado/as*. They are illegal because they are not legible, they trouble “the writing machine of the law” (de Certeau 1984, 141).

The hegemony of textualism needs to be exposed and undermined. Transcription is not a transparent or politically innocent model for conceptualizing or engaging the world. The root metaphor of the text underpins the supremacy of Western knowledge systems by erasing the vast realm of human knowledge and meaningful action that is unlettered, “a history of the tacit and the habitual” (Jackson 2000:29). In their multivolume historical ethnography of colonialism/evangelism in South Africa, John and Jean Comaroff pay careful attention to the way Tswana people argued with their white interlocutors “both verbally and nonverbally” (Comaroff 1997, 47; see also Comaroff 1991). They excavate spaces of agency and struggle from everyday performance practices—clothing, gardening, healing, trading, worshipping, architecture, and homemaking—to reveal an impressive repertoire of conscious, creative, critical, contrapuntal responses to the imperialist project that exceeded the verbal. The Comaroffs intervene in an academically fashionable textual fundamentalism and fetish of the (verbal) archive where “text—a sad proxy for life—becomes all” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 26). “In this day and age,” they ask, “do we still have to remind ourselves that many of the players on any historical stage cannot speak at all? Or, under greater or lesser duress, opt not to do so?” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997, 48; see also Scott 1990).

There are many ethnographic examples of how nonelite people recognize the opacity of the text and critique its dense occlusions and implications in historical processes of political economic privilege and systematic exclusion. In Belize, for example, Garifuna people, an African-descended minority group, use the word *gapencillitin*, which

means “people with pencil,” to refer to middle- and upper-class members of the professional-managerial class, elites who approach life from an intellectual perspective. They use the word *mapencillitin*, literally “people without pencil,” to refer to rural and working-class people, “real folks” who approach life from a practitioner’s point of view.¹ What is interesting about the Garifuna example is that class stratification, related to differential knowledges, is articulated in terms of access to literacy. The pencil draws the line between the haves and the have-nots. For Garifuna people, the pencil is not a neutral instrument; it functions metonymically as the operative technology of a complex political economy of knowledge, power, and the exclusions upon which privilege is based.

In his study of the oppositional politics of black musical performance, Paul Gilroy argues that critical scholars need to move beyond this “idea and ideology of the text and of textuality as a mode of communicative practice which provides a model for all other forms of cognitive exchange and social interaction” (Gilroy 1994, 77). Oppressed people everywhere must watch their backs, cover their tracks, suck up their feelings, and veil their meanings. The state of emergency under which many people live demands that we pay attention to messages that are coded and encrypted; to indirect, nonverbal, and extralinguistic modes of communication where subversive meanings and utopian yearnings can be sheltered and shielded from surveillance.

Gilroy’s point is illustrated vividly by Frederick Douglass in a remarkable passage from his life narrative in which he discussed the improvisatory performance politics expressed in the singing of enslaved people. It is worth quoting at length:²

But, on allowance day, those who visited the great house farm were peculiarly excited and noisy. While on their way, they would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild notes. These were not always merry because they were wild. On the contrary, they were mostly of a plaintive cast, and told a tale of grief and sorrow. In the most boisterous outbursts of rapturous sentiment, there was ever a tinge of deep melancholy [. . .]. I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress truly spiritual-minded men and women with the soul-crushing and death-dealing character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes [. . .]. Every tone was a testimony against slavery [. . .]. The hearing of those wild notes always [. . .] filled my heart with ineffable sadness [. . .]. To those songs I trace my first glimmering conceptions of the dehumanizing character

of slavery [. . .]. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds. (Douglass 1969, 97–99)

Enslaved people were forbidden by law in 19th-century America to acquire literacy. No wonder, then, that Douglass, a former enslaved person, still acknowledged the deeply felt insights and revelatory power that come through the embodied experience of listening to communal singing, the tones, cadence, vocal nuances, all the sensuous specificities of performance that overflow verbal content: “they were tones loud, long, and deep” (Douglass 1969, 99).

In order to know the deep meaning of slavery, Douglass recommended an experiential, participatory epistemology as superior to the armchair “reading of whole volumes.” Douglass advised meeting enslaved people on the ground of their experience by exposing oneself to their expressive performances. In this way, Douglass anticipated and extended Johannes Fabian’s call for a turn “from informative to performative ethnography” (Fabian 1990, 3), an ethnography of the ears and heart that reimagines participant-observation as copperformative witnessing:

If any one wishes to be impressed with a sense of the soul-killing power of slavery, let him go to Colonel Lloyd’s plantation, and, on allowance day, place himself in the deep pine woods, and there let him, in silence, thoughtfully analyze the sounds that shall pass through the chambers of his soul, and if he is not thus impressed, it will only be because “there is no flesh in his obdurate heart.” (Douglass 1969, 99)

Instead of reading textual accounts of slavery, Douglass recommended a riskier hermeneutics of experience, relocation, copresence, humility, and vulnerability: *listening to and being touched* by the protest performances of enslaved people. He understood that knowledge is *located*, not transcendent (“let him go” and “place himself in the deep pine woods, and there [. . .]”); that it must be *engaged*, not abstracted (“let him [. . .] analyze the sounds that shall pass through the chambers of his soul”); and that it is forged from *solidarity with*, not separation from, the people (“quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds”). In this way, Douglass’s epistemology prefigured Antonio Gramsci’s call for engaged knowledge: “The intellectual’s error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned [. . .] that is, without feeling the elementary passions of

the people” (Douglass 1971, 418). Proximity, not objectivity, becomes an epistemological point of departure and return.

Douglass recommended placing oneself quietly, respectfully, humbly, in the space of others so that one could be surrounded and “impressed” by the expressive meanings of their music. It is subtle but significant that he instructed the outsider to listen “in silence.” I interpret this admonition as an acknowledgment and subversion of the soundscapes of power within which the ruling classes typically are listened to while the subordinate classes listen in silence. Anyone who had the liberty to travel freely would be, of course, on the privileged side of domination and silencing that these songs evoked and contested. In effect, Douglass encouraged a participatory understanding of these performances, but one that muffled white privilege. Further, because overseers often commanded enslaved people to sing in the fields as a way of auditing their labor, and plantation rulers even appropriated after-work performances for their own amusement, Douglass was keenly sensitive to *how* one approached and entered subjugated spaces of performance.

The *mise-en-scène* of feeling-understanding-knowing for Douglass is radically different from the interpretive scene set forth by Clifford Geertz in what is now a foundational and frequently cited quotation for the world-as-text model in ethnography and cultural studies: “The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong” (Geertz 1973, 452). Whereas Douglass featured cultural performances that register and radiate dynamic “structures of feeling” and pull us into alternative ways of knowing that exceed cognitive control (Williams 1977), Geertz figures culture as a stiff, awkward reading room. The ethnocentrism of this textualist metaphor is thrown into stark relief when applied to the countercultures of enslaved and other dispossessed people. Forcibly excluded from acquiring literacy, enslaved people nonetheless created a culture of resistance. Instead of an “ensemble of texts,” however, a repertoire of performance practices became the backbone of this counterculture where politics was “played, danced, and acted, as well as sung and sung about, because words [. . .] will never be enough to communicate its unsayable claims to truth” (Gilroy 1994, 37).

In addition to the ethnocentrism of the culture-as-text metaphor, Geertz’s theory needs to be critiqued for its particular fieldwork-as-reading model: “Doing ethnography is like trying to read [. . .] a manuscript” (10). Instead of listening, absorbing, and standing in solidarity with the protest performances of the people, as Douglass recommended, the ethnographer, in Geertz’s scene, stands above and behind the peo-

ple and, uninvited, peers over their shoulders to read their texts, like an overseer or a spy. There is more than a hint of the improper in this scene: the asymmetrical power relations secure both the anthropologist's privilege to intrude and the people's silent acquiescence (although one can imagine what they would say about the anthropologist's manners and motives when they are outside his reading gaze). The strain and tension of this scene are not mediated by talk or interaction; both the researcher and the researched face the page as silent readers instead of turning to face one another and, perhaps, open a conversation.

Geertz's now classic depiction of the turn toward texts in ethnography and cultural studies needs to be juxtaposed with Zora Neale Hurston's much earlier and more complex rendering of a researcher reading the texts of subordinate others:

The theory behind our tactics: "The white man is always trying to know into somebody else's business. All right, I'll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle. He can read my writing but he sho' can't read my mind. I'll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize it and go away. Then I'll say my say and sing my song." (Hurston 1990, 3)

Hurston foregrounds the terrain of struggle, the field of power relations on which texts are written, exchanged, and read. Whereas Geertz does not problematize the ethnographer's will-to-know or access to the texts of others, Hurston is sensitive to the reluctance of the subordinate classes "to reveal that which the soul lives by" (Hurston, 2) because they understand from experience the ocular politics that links the powers to see, to search, and to seize. Aware of the white man's drive to objectify, control, and grasp as a way of knowing, subordinate people cunningly set a text, a decoy, outside the door to lure him away from "homeplace" where subjugated but empowering truths and survival secrets are sheltered (hooks 1990). In Hurston's brilliant example, vulnerable people actually redeploy the written text as a tactic of evasion and camouflage, performatively turning and tripping the textual fetish against the white person's will-to-know. "So driven in on his reading," as Williams would say, he is blinded by the texts he compulsively seizes: "knowing so little about us, he doesn't know what he is missing" (Hurston [1935] 1990, 2). Once provided with something that he can "handle," "seize," in a word, *apprehend*, he will go away and then space can be cleared for performed truths that remain beyond his reach: "then I'll say my say and sing my song." By mimicking the reifying textualism of dominant knowledge regimes,

subordinate people can deflect its invasive power. This mimicry of textualism is a complex example of “mimetic excess” in which the susceptibility of dominant images, forms, and technologies of power to subversive doublings holds the potential for undermining the power of that which is mimed (Taussig 1993, 254–55).

Note that in Hurston’s account, subordinate people read and write, as well as perform. With her beautiful example of how a text can perform subversive work, she disrupts any simplistic dichotomy that would align texts with domination and performance with liberation. In Hurston’s example, the white man researcher is a fool not because he values literacy, but because he valorized it to the exclusion of other media, other modes of knowing. I want to be very clear about this point: textocentrism—not texts—is the problem.

From her ethnographic fieldwork in the coal camps and “hollers” of West Virginia, Kathleen Stewart documents an especially vivid example of text-performance entanglements: how official signs and local performances play off and with each other in surprising and delightful ways. After a dog bit a neighbor’s child, there was much talk and worry throughout the camp about liability and lawsuits:

Finally Lacy Forest announced that he had heard that “by law” if you had a NO TRESPASSING sign on your porch you couldn’t be sued. So everyone went to the store in Beckley to get the official kind of sign. Neighbors brought back multiple copies and put them up for those too old or sick or poor to get out and get their own. Then everyone called everyone else to explain that the sign did not mean them. In the end, every porch and fence (except for those of the isolated shameless who don’t care) had a bright NO TRESPASSING, KEEP OFF sign, and people visited together, sitting underneath the NO TRESPASSING signs, looking out. (Stewart 1996, 141; see also Conquergood 1997)³

Through the power of reframing, social performances reclaim, short-circuit, and resignify the citational force of the signed imperatives. Moreover, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s concept of “orature” complicates any easy separation between speech and writing, performance and print, and reminds us how these channels of communication constantly overlap, penetrate, and mutually produce one another (Thiong’o 1998).

The performance studies project makes its most radical intervention, I believe, by embracing *both* written scholarship *and* creative work, papers and performances. We challenge the hegemony of the text best

by reconfiguring texts and performances in horizontal, metonymic tension, not by replacing one hierarchy with another, the romance of performance for the authority of the text. The “liminal-norm” that Jon McKenzie identifies as the calling card of performance studies (McKenzie 2001, 41) manifests itself most powerfully in the struggle to live betwixt and between theory and theatricality, paradigms and practices, critical reflection and creative accomplishment. Performance studies brings this rare hybridity into the academy, a commingling of analytical and artistic ways of knowing that unsettles the institutional organization of knowledge and disciplines. The constitutive liminality of performance studies lies in its capacity to bridge segregated and differently valued knowledges, drawing together legitimated as well as subjugated modes of inquiry.

There is an emergent genre of performance studies scholarship that epitomizes this text-performance hybridity. A number of performance studies–allied scholars create performances as a supplement to, not substitute for, their written research. These performance pieces stand alongside and in metonymic tension with published research. The creative works are developed for multiple professional reasons: they deepen experiential and participatory engagement with materials both for the researcher and her audience; they provide a dynamic and rhetorically compelling alternative to conference papers; they offer a more accessible and engaging format for sharing research and reaching communities outside academia; they are a strategy for staging interventions. To borrow Amanda Kemp’s apt phrase, they use “performance both as a way of knowing and as a way of showing” (Kemp 1998, 116). To add another layer to the enfolding convolutions of text and performance, several of these performance pieces have now been written up and published in scholarly journals and books (see Conquergood 1988; Becker, McCall, and Morris 1989; McCall and Becker 1990; Paget 1990; Pollock 1990; Jackson 1993, 1998; Allen and Garner 1995; Laughlin 1995; Wellin 1996; Jones 1997; Kemp 1998).

Performance studies is uniquely suited for the challenge of braiding together disparate and stratified ways of knowing. We can think through performance along three crisscrossing lines of activity and analysis. We can think of performance (1) as a work of *imagination*, as an object of study; (2) as a pragmatics of *inquiry* (both as model and method), as an optic and operator of research; (3) as a tactics of *intervention*, an alternative space of struggle. Speaking from my home department at Northwestern, we often refer to the three *a*’s of performance studies: artistry, analysis, activism. Or to change the alliteration, a commitment to the

three *c*'s of performance studies: creativity, critique, citizenship (civic struggles for social justice). We struggle to forge a unique and unifying mission around the triangulations of these three pivot points:

1. *Accomplishment*—the making of art and remaking of culture; creativity; embodiment; artistic process and form; knowledge that comes from doing, participatory understanding, practical consciousness, performing as a way of knowing.
2. *Analysis*—the interpretation of art and culture; critical reflection; thinking about, through, and with performance; performance as a lens that illuminates the constructed creative, contingent, collaborative dimensions of human communication; knowledge that comes from contemplation and comparison; concentrated attention and contextualization as a way of knowing.
3. *Articulation*—activism, outreach, connection to community; applications and interventions; action research; projects that reach outside the academy and are rooted in an ethic of reciprocity and exchange; knowledge that is tested by practice within a community; social commitment, collaboration, and contribution/intervention as a way of knowing; praxis.

Notwithstanding the many calls for embracing theory and practice, universities typically institutionalize a hierarchical division of labor between scholars/researchers and artists/practitioners. For example, the creative artists in the Department of Fine Arts are separated from the “serious” scholars in the Department of Art History. Even when scholars and practitioners are housed within the same department, there often is internal differentiation and tracking, e.g., the literary theorists and critics are marked off from those who teach creative and expository writing. This configuration mirrors an entrenched social hierarchy of value based on the fundamental division between intellectual labor and manual labor. In the academy, the position of the artist/practitioner is comparable to people in the larger society who work with their hands, who make things, and who are valued less than the scholars/theorists who work with their minds and are comparable to the more privileged professional-managerial class. Indeed, sometimes one of the reasons for forming schools of fine and performing arts is to protect artists/practitioners from tenure and promotion committees dominated by the more institutionally powerful scholar/researchers who do not know how to

appraise a record of artistic accomplishment as commensurate with traditional criteria of scholarly research and publication. The segregation of faculty and students who make art and perform from those who think about and study art and performance is based on a false dichotomy that represses the critical-intellectual component of any artistic work, and the imaginative-creative dimension of scholarship that makes a difference. A spurious, counterproductive, and mutually denigrating opposition is put into play that pits so-called “mere technique, studio skills, know-how” against so-called “arid knowledge, abstract theory, sterile scholarship.” This unfortunate schism is based on gross reductionism and ignorance of “how the other half lives.” Students are cheated and disciplines diminished by this academic apartheid.

A performance studies agenda should collapse this divide and revitalize the connections between artistic accomplishment, analysis, and articulations with communities; between practical knowledge (knowing how), propositional knowledge (knowing that), and political savvy (knowing who, when, and where). This epistemological connection between creativity, critique, and civic engagement is mutually replenishing, and pedagogically powerful. Very bright, talented students are attracted to programs that combine intellectual rigor with artistic excellence that is critically engaged, where they do not have to banish their artistic spirit in order to become a critical thinker, or repress their intellectual self or political passion to explore their artistic side. Particularly at the PhD level, original scholarship in culture and the arts is enhanced, complemented, and complicated in deeply meaningful ways by the participatory understanding and community involvement of the researcher. This experiential and engaged model of inquiry is coextensive with the participant-observation methods of ethnographic research.

The ongoing challenge of performance studies is to refuse and supercede this deeply entrenched division of labor, apartheid of knowledges, that plays out inside the academy as the difference between thinking and doing, interpreting and making, conceptualizing and creating. The division of labor between theory and practice, abstraction and embodiment, is an arbitrary and rigged choice, and, like all binarisms, it is booby-trapped. It's a Faustian bargain. If we go the one-way street of abstraction, then we cut ourselves off from the nourishing ground of participatory experience. If we go the one-way street of practice, then we drive ourselves into an isolated cul-de-sac, a practitioner's workshop or artist's colony. Our radical move is to turn, and return, insistently, to the crossroads.

NOTES

A shorter version of this paper was presented at the “Cultural Intersections” conference at Northwestern University, 9 October 1999. “Cultural Intersections” was the inaugural conference for Northwestern’s Doctoral Studies in Culture: Performance, Theatre, Media, a new interdisciplinary PhD program.

1. I thank my Belizean colleague, Dr. Barbara Flores, for sharing this Garifuna material with me. I had the privilege of working with Dr. Flores when she was a graduate student at Northwestern.

2. An earlier version of the Frederick Douglass–Zora Neale Hurston discussion appeared in 1998 (Conquergood 1998).

3. Stewart’s experimental ethnography is remarkably performance-sensitive and performance-saturated. Her text is replete with voices, sometimes explicitly quoted, but often evoked through literary techniques of indirect and double-voiced discourse so that the reader is simultaneously aware of the ethnographer’s voice and the voices from the field, their interaction and gaps. The students in my critical ethnography seminar adapted and performed passages from the ethnography as a way of testing Stewart’s stylistic innovations and textual evocations of performance.

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From Ritual to Theatre

The Human Seriousness of Play

Victor Turner



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Brooks McNamara
Richard Schechner

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Introduction

The essays in this book chart my personal voyage of discovery from traditional anthropological studies of ritual performance to a lively interest in modern theatre, particularly experimental theatre. In a way, though, the trip was also a "return of the repressed," for my mother, Violet Witter, had been a founding member and actress in the Scottish National Theater, located in Glasgow, which aimed, in the 1920s, at being the equivalent of, if not the answer to, the great Dublin Abbey Theater. Alas, Scots Celts, tainted by Norman and Calvinist forebears, could not emulate the heady nationalist eloquence or stark political metacommentary of an Ireland struggling to be free, an Ireland rich in bards and playwrights. The National Theater soon folded. But my mother remained a woman of the theatre to the end, and, Ruth Draper-like, would give solo performances, drawing her repertoire from such (then) rebel voices as Ibsen, Shaw, Strindberg, O'Casey, Olive Schreiner, and Robert Burns ("A Man's a Man for a That"). She was also something of a feminist and included in her stock of roles a selection entitled "Great Women from Great Plays," which ranged from Euripides, through Shakespeare and Webster, Congreve and Wycherly, to such an odd bunch of "moderns" as James Barrie, Fiona McLeod (actually the critic William Sharp in literary Celtic

"Drag"), Clemence Dane (Queen Elizabeth in "Will Shakespeare"), and Shaw once again ("Great Catherine" and "Candida"). The recurrent theme was female charisma, the sort of willed or innate queenliness that cowed would-be dominant males. My father, though, was an electrical (in American terms, "electronic") engineer, an inventive businessman who had worked intensively with John Logan Baird, a pioneer in the development of television. He had little interest or insight into theatre, though he adored the novels of H. G. Wells (particularly his science fiction), whom he had once met. Inevitably, in those C. P. Snow days of the "two cultures," that even more than Kipling's "East and West," could "never meet," they divorced, and stranded me, a fervent Scots nationalist, though only eleven years old, with retired maternal grandparents in the deep south of England, Bourne-mouth. Although this seaside haunt had been graced intermittently by Verlaine and Rimbaud, Walter Scott, Tolstoy, Robert Louis Stevenson, James Elroy Flecker, and other authors of less note, its nature, not its culture, moved me, its seascapes and headlands, its proximity to the New Forest, its aromatic pine trees. Separated effectively from both my parents (my mother moved around Southern England, teaching Desarte principles and elocution to young ladies in sundry "Free Schools," while my father, still in Scotland, "went broke" in the "Thirties" slump), I slithered between arts and sciences, sports and classics. I won a prize for a poem on "Salamis" at age twelve, which excited the derision of my schoolmates for many years and forced me to win attention as a soccer player and cricketer of some violence—I shamefully acquired the proud title of "Tank"—to erase the stigma of sensibility.

No wonder, then, that in time I became an anthropologist, a member of a discipline poised uneasily between those who promote the "science of culture," on the model of the nineteenth century natural sciences, and those who show how "we" (Westerners) may share in the humanity of others (non-Westerners). The former speak in terms of monoinstitutional materialism, the latter of mutual communication. Both approaches are probably necessary. We should try to find out how and why different sets of human beings in time and space are similar and different in their cultural manifestations; we should also explore why and how all men and women, if they work at it, can understand one another. At first I was taught by British "structural-functionalists," descendants not only of the British empiricist philosophers, Locke and Hume, but of the French positivists, Comte and Durkheim. Armchair Marxists have accused those of us who lived close to the "people" in the 1950s in African, Malaysian, and Oceanian villages, often for several years, of "using" structural functionalism to provide the "scientific" objectification of an unquestioned ideology (colonialism in prewar anthropology, neoinperialism now). These dour modern "Round-heads"—an infra-red band on the world's spectrum of Moral Ma-

juries—have become so obsessed with power that they fail to sense the many-leveled complexity (hence irony and forgiveness) of human lives experienced at first hand.

My training for fieldwork roused the scientist in me—the paternal heritage. My field experience revitalized the maternal gift of theatre. I compromised by inventing a unit of description and analysis which I called "social drama." In the field my family and I lived in no "ivory tower"; we spent nearly three years in African villages (Ndenbu, Lamba, Kosa, Gisu), mostly in grass huts. Something like "drama" was constantly emerging, even erupting, from the otherwise fairly even surfaces of social life. For the scientist in me, such social dramas revealed the "taxonomic" relations among actors (their kinship ties, structural positions, social class, political status, and so forth), and their contemporary bonds and oppositions of interest and friendship, their personal network ties, and informal relationships. For the artist in me, the drama revealed individual character, personal style, rhetorical skill, moral and aesthetic differences, and choices proffered and made. Most importantly, it made me aware of the power of symbols in human communication. This power inheres not only in the shared lexicons and grammars of spoken and written languages, but also in the artful or poetic individual crafting of speech through persuasive tropes: inclusions, metaphors, oxymora, "wise words" (a Western Apache speech-mode), and many more. Nor is communication through symbols limited to words. Each culture, each person within it, uses the entire sensory repertoire to convey messages: manual gesticulations, facial expressions, bodily postures, rapid, heavy, or light breathing, tears, at the individual level; stylized gestures, dance patterns, prescribed silences, synchronized movements such as marching, the moves and "plays" of games, sports, and rituals, at the cultural level. Claude Lévi-Strauss was one of the first to call our attention to the diverse "sensory codes" through which information may be transmitted, and how they may be combined and mutually "translated."

Perhaps if I had not had early exposure to theatre—my first clear memory of a performance was Sir Frank Benson's version of *The Tempest* when I was five years old—I would not have been alerted to the "theatrical" potential of social life, especially in such coherent communities as African villages. But no one could fail to note the analogy, indeed the homology, between those sequences of supposedly "spontaneous" events which made fully evident the tensions existing in those villages, and the characteristic "processual form" of Western drama, from Aristotle onwards, or Western epic and saga, albeit on a limited or miniature scale. No one could fail to recognize, moreover, when "dramatic time" has replaced routinized social living. Behavior took on the character known to neurobiologists as "ergotropic." In their terms it exhibited "arousal,

heightened activity, and emotional response." No doubt, had I possessed the technical means of measurement, I would have been able to discover in the "actors," such "augmented sympathetic discharges" as "increased heart rate, blood pressure, sweat secretion, pupillary dilation, and the inhibition of gastro-intestinal motor and secretory function." (Barbara Lex, "Neurobiology of Ritual Trance," in *The Spectrum of Ritual*, 1979: 136).

In other words, during social dramas, a group's emotional climate is full of thunder and lightning and choppy air currents! What has happened is that a public breach has occurred in the normal working of society, ranging from some grave transgression of the code of manners to an act of violence, a beating, even a homicide. Such a breach may result from real feeling, a crime passionnel perhaps, or from cool calculation—a political act designed to challenge the extant power structure. Again, the breach may take the form of unhappy chance: a quarrel round the beer pots, an unwise or overheard word, an unpremeditated quarrel. Nevertheless, once antagonisms are out in the open, members of a group inevitably take sides.

Or else they seek to bring about a reconciliation among the contestants. Thus *breach* slides into *crisis*, and the critics of crisis seek to restore peace. Such critics are usually those with a strong interest in maintaining the *status quo ante*, the elders, lawmakers, administrators, judges, priests, and law enforcers of the relevant community. All or some of these attempt to apply *redressive machinery*—to "patch up" quarrels, "mend" broken social ties, "seal up punctures" in the "social fabric," by the juridical means of courts and the judicial process or the ritual means provided by religious institutions: divination into the hidden causes of social conflict (witchcraft, ancestral wrath, the gods' displeasure), prophylactic sacrifice, therapeutic ritual (involving the exorcism of malefic spirits and the propitiation of "good" ones), and finding the apt occasion for the performance of a major ritual celebrating the values, common interests, and moral order of the widest recognized cultural and moral community, transcending the divisions of the local group. The social drama concludes—if ever it may be said to have a "last act"—either in the reconciliation of the contending parties or their agreement to differ—which may involve a dissident minority in seceding from the original community and seeking a new habitat (the Exodus theme, but also exemplified on a smaller scale by the splitting of Central African villages).

In large-scale modern societies, social dramas may escalate from the local level to national revolutions, or from the very beginning may take the form of war between nations. In all cases, from the familial and village level to international conflict, social dramas reveal "subtaneous" levels of the social structure, for every "social system," from tribe to nation, to fields of international relations, is composed of many "groups," "social categories," statuses and roles, arranged in hierarchies and divided into

segments. In small-scale societies there are oppositions among clans, sub-clans, lineages, families, age-sets, religious and political associations, and many more. In our own industrial societies, we are familiar with oppositions between classes, sub-classes, ethnic groups, sects and cults, regions, political parties, and associates based on gender, division of labor, and relative age. Other societies are internally divided by caste and traditional craft. Social dramas have a habit of activating these "classificatory" oppositions and many more: *factions* (which may cut across traditional caste, class, or lineage divisions in pursuit of immediate, contemporary interests), *religious "revitalization" movements* which may mobilize former "tribal" enemies in joint opposition to foreign, colonizing overlords with superior military technology, *international alliances* and *coalitions* of ideologically disparate groups who see themselves as having a common enemy (often equally heterogeneous in national, religious, class, ideological, economic make-up), and common immediate interests—and turning them into *conflicts*.

Social life, then, even its apparently quietest moments, is characteristically "pregnant" with social dramas. It is as though each of us has a "peace" face and a "war" face, that we are programmed for co-operation, but prepared for conflict. The primordial and perennial agonistic mode is the social drama. But as our species has moved through time and become more dexterous in the use and manipulation of symbols, as our technological mastery of nature and our powers of self-destruction have grown exponentially in the past few thousand years, in similar measure we have become somewhat more adept in devising cultural modes of confronting, understanding, assigning meaning to, and sometimes coping with crisis—the second stage of the ineradicable social drama that besets us at all times, all places, and all levels of sociocultural organization. The third stage, modes of redress, which always contained at least the germ of self-reflexivity, a public way of assessing our social behavior, has moved out of the domains of law and religion into those of the various arts. The growing complexity of the social and economic division of labor, giving specialization and professionalization their opportunity to escape from embedment in the total ongoing social process, has also provided complex sociocultural systems with effective instruments for scrutinizing themselves. By means of such genres as theatre, including puppetry and shadow theatre, dance drama, and professional story-telling, performances are presented which probe a community's weaknesses, call its leaders to account, desacralize its most cherished values and beliefs, portray its characteristic conflicts and suggest remedies for them, and generally take stock of its current situation in the known "world."

Thus the roots of theatre are in social drama, and social drama accords well with Aristotle's abstraction of dramatic form from the works of the

Greek playwrights. But theatre in complex, urbanized societies on the scale of "civilizations" has become a specialized domain, where it has become legitimate to experiment with modes of presentation, many of which depart radically (and, indeed, consciously) from Aristotle's model. But these sophisticated departures are themselves implicit in the fact that theatre owes its specific genesis to the third phase of social drama, a phase which is essentially an attempt to ascribe meaning to "social dramatic" events by the process which Richard Schechner has recently described as "restoring the past." Theatre is, indeed, a hypertrophy, an exaggeration, of jural and ritual processes; it is not a simple replication of the "natural" total processual pattern of the social drama. There is, therefore, in theatre something of the investigative, judgmental, and even punitive character of law-in-action, and something of the sacred, mythic, numinous, even "supernatural" character of religious action—sometimes to the point of sacrifice. Grotowski hit off this aspect well with his terms, "holy actor" and "secular sacrament."

The positivist and functionalist schools of anthropology in whose concepts and methods I was first instructed could give me only limited insight into the dynamics of social dramas. I could count the people involved, state their social status-roles, describe their behavior, collect biographical information about them from others, and place them structurally in the social system of the community manifested by the social drama. But this way of treating "social facts as things," as the French sociologist Durkheim admonished investigators to do, gave little understanding of the motives and characters of the actors in these purpose-saturated, emotional, and "meaningful" events. I gradually gravitated, with temporary pauses to study symbolic processes, theories of symbolic interaction, the views of sociological phenomenologists, and those of French structuralists and "deconstructionists," towards the basic stance delineated by the great German social thinker, whose photographs¹ remind one of a grizzled old peasant, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911). This stance depends upon the concept of experience (in German, *Erllebnis*, literally "what has been lived through"). Kant had argued that the data of experience are "formless." Dilthey disagreed. He conceded that any distinguishable "manifold," whether a natural formation or organism, or a cultural institution, or a mental event, contains certain formal relationships which can be analyzed. Dilthey called these the "formal categories": unity and multiplicity, likeness and difference, whole and part, degree, and similar elementary concepts. As H. A. Hodges, writing on Dilthey (1953:68-9) summarized: "All the forms of discursive thought, as analyzed in formal logic, and all the fundamental concepts of mathematics, can be reduced to these formal categories. They are a network within which all thought about any subject-matter must be enclosed. They are applicable to all possible objects of

thought, but they express the peculiar nature of none of them (my emphasis); and, as without them nothing can be understood, so nothing can be understood without them alone" (my emphasis).

Dilthey goes on to argue that experience, in its formal aspect, is richer than can be accounted for by general formal categories. It is not that the experiencing subject *imposes* such categories as space, substance, causal interaction, and so forth on the physical world, or duration, creative freedom, value, significance, and the like on the "world of mind." Rather, the data of experience are "instinct with form," and thought's work is to draw out "the structural system" implicit in every distinguishable *Erllebnis* or unit of experience, whether this be a love affair or a historical cause célèbre such as the Dreyfus Affair—or a social drama.

Structures of experience, for Dilthey, are not the bloodless "cognitive structures," static and "synchronic," so beloved of the "thought-structuralists" who have dominated French anthropology for so long. Cognition is, of course, an important aspect, facet, or "dimension" of any structure of experience. Thought clarifies and generalizes lived experience, but experience is charged with emotion and volition, sources respectively of value-judgments and precepts. Behind Dilthey's world-picture is the basic fact of the total human being (Lawrence's "man alive") at grips with his environment, perceiving, thinking, feeling, desiring. As he says, "life embraces life." As Hodges continues: "All the intellectual and linguistic structures which philosophers study, and from whose complexities and obscurities the problems of philosophy arise are incidents in this interaction between man and his world" (*op. cit.*, p. 349).

For me, the anthropology of performance is an essential part of the anthropology of experience. In a sense, every type of cultural performance, including ritual, ceremony, carnival, theatre, and poetry, is explanation and explication of life itself, as Dilthey often argued. Through the performance process itself, what is normally sealed up, inaccessible to everyday observation and reasoning, in the depth of sociocultural life, is drawn forth — Dilthey uses the term *Ausdruck*, "an expression," from *ausdrücken*, literally, "to press or squeeze out." "Meaning" is squeezed out of an event which has either been directly experienced by the dramatist or poet, or cries out for penetrative, imaginative understanding (*Verstehen*). An experience is itself a process which "presses out" to an "expression" which completes it. Here the etymology of "performance" may give us a helpful clue, for it has nothing to do with "form," but derives from Old French *parfournir*, "to complete" or "carry out thoroughly." A performance, then, is the proper finale of an experience. Dilthey's presentation of the five "moments" of *Erllebnis* have a processual structure, being genetically connected. Each *Erllebnis* or distinctive experience has (1) a perceptual core — pleasure or pain may be felt more intensely than in routinized, repetitive

behaviors; (2) images of past experiences are evoked with "unusual clarity of outline, strength of sense, and energy of projection" (cited in R.A. Makrel, 1975:141). (3) But past events remain inert unless the feelings originally bound up with them can be fully revived; (4) "meaning" is generated by "feelingly" thinking about the interconnections between past and present events. Here Dilthey distinguishes between "meaning" (*Bedeutung*) and value (*Wert*). Value belongs essentially to an experience in a conscious present. Value inheres in the affective enjoyment of the present. Values are not inwardly connected with one another in a systematic way. As Dilthey put it: "From the standpoint of value, life appears as an infinite assortment of positive and negative existence-values. It is like a chaos of harmonies and discords. Each of these is a tone-structure which fills a present; but they have no musical relation to one another." But it is in bringing past and present into "musical relation" that the process of discovering and establishing "meaning" consists. But it is not enough to possess a meaning for oneself; (5) an experience is never truly completed until it is "expressed," that is, until it is communicated in terms intelligible to others, linguistic or otherwise. Culture itself is the ensemble of such expressions—the experience of individuals made available to society and accessible to the sympathetic penetration of other "minds." For this reason Dilthey thought of culture as "objectified mind" (*objektiver Geist*). According to Dilthey, "our knowledge of what is given in experience is extended through the interpretation of the objectifications of life and this interpretation, in turn, is only made possible by plumbing the depths of subjective experience" (*Dilthey: Selected Writings*, 1976:195-6). Thus, we can know our own subjective depths as much by scrutinizing the meaningful objectifications "expressed" by other minds, as by introspection. In complementary fashion, self-scrutiny may give us clues to the penetration of objectifications of life generated from the experience of others. There is a kind of "hermeneutic circle" involved here, or rather, "spiral," for each turn transcends its predecessor.

Expressions, for Dilthey, may be of several classes. There are "ideas," which can be transmitted precisely, since they have a high degree of generality. But they tell us nothing about the particular person's consciousness in which they first appeared. "Our understanding here is precise, but it is not deep," says Dilthey (*op. cit.*, G.S., VII, 205-6). "It tells us what idea someone has, but not how he comes to have it" (*ibid.*). A second class of expression is that of human "acts." Every act, Dilthey argues, is the execution of a purpose, a volition, and, since the relation between act and purpose is regular and intimate, the purpose can be read in the act. The act was done not to express the purpose, but to fulfill it; nevertheless to an outside observer, it does in fact express what it fulfills (Hodges, *op. cit.*, p. 130). This applies not only to the acts of an agent's private life,

but also to the public acts of legislators, and the behavior of masses of people in public situations. In describing and analyzing social dramas in Africa and elsewhere, for instance, I have become very much aware of the relationship between acts and purposes and goals, though I would go further than Dilthey and see many acts as expressing and fulfilling *unconscious purposes and goals*.

This unconscious formative component is even more important where the third class of expressions—works of art—is concerned. Dilthey must have been aware of its importance when he wrote (*Gesammelte Schriften*, henceforth cited as "G.S.," Vol. VII, 1927:206): "I set before myself the sum of Goethe's artistic, literary, and scientific publications, and the rest of his writings. . . . Here the problem can be solved of understanding the inner reality, in a certain sense better than Goethe understood himself." Works of art are vastly unlike many expressions of political experience, which lie under the power of selfish or partisan interests, and hence suppress, distort, or counterfeit the products of authentic experience. Artists have no motive for deceit or concealment, but strive to find the perfect expressive form for their experience. As Wilfred Owen wrote: "The true poets must be truthful." In some way they have an innocent prehension of that strange liminal space—in all of us, but more speakingly so in artists—where, as Dilthey writes, "life discloses itself at a depth inaccessible to observation, reflection, and theory" (Vol. VII, 1927:207). Once "expressed," however, as works of art, readers, viewers, and hearers can reflect upon them since they are trustworthy messages from our species' depths, humanized life disclosing itself, so to speak.

Recapitulating, then, we have traced a path from the third phase of social drama to theatrical performance, which is then connected with the "fifth moment" of a Diltheyan *Erebnis*, or as structured unit of experience. It is in this moment that the poet, artist, or dramatist "freely unfolds images beyond the bounds of reality" (Dilthey, G.S., VI, 1924:137). The artist tries to penetrate the very essence of the *Erebnis*. In so doing he allows free access to the depths where "life grasps life."

In the past five years, I have been directly introduced by Richard Schechner to the workings of the experimental theatre which flourished in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but appears regrettably to be merely sputtering today. Several of the essays in this book relate to Schechner's theories and practice as a producer. Schechner's theatre was alive to the social dramas of our time, and sought "by freely unfolding images beyond the bounds of reality" to lay hold of the nature of its predicament. Indeed, the entire process which he set in train after deciding upon a dramatic theme was almost a transformation into overt, public terms of Dilthey's inner movement from *Erebnis* as direct experience to its mean-

ingful, aesthetic outcome as a work of art. "Direct experience" was usually some problem in Schechner's own life or in that of the Performance Group, of which he was director. He then set about finding a "text" or "script" which would give him a mirror, serve as a reflexive device, for scrutinizing his problem. "Direct experience" was also involved in the casting process, whose complexities I have no room to discuss here. Next began the "Workshop" process, which often lasted for over a year, and which I once likened to the forest camp where novices are initiated in African circumcison rituals, dedicated to the imparting of esoteric knowledge, training in useful, practical techniques, subjecting the neophytes to ordeals, confronting them with masked, numinous figures representing remote tribal ancestors and deities, portraying origin myths, and, in effect, dissolving their former social personalities in order to "regrow" them, to use a widely known African expression, as self-disciplined, mature persons. As is customary in "postmodern" (i.e., post-World War II) theatre, the text is sometimes composed—or playwrights' texts are decomposed, then recomposed—during rehearsals. Texts are not privileged. Theatrical space, performers, director, media used (amplification and distortion of speech, television screens, films, slides, tapes, music, flip-synch) performing, fireworks, and many more), sustained separation of role and performer by many devices, all such units and devices are flexibly combined and recombined as reflections of a common will arising from rare moments of communion among the human components of the theateric ensemble.

These multiple and indeterminate means and codes are tentative and experimental responses to the *experience* of members of the postmodern theatre subculture as members of the new biosphere-noosphere (in Teilhardian terms) created by the qualitative leap in global communications and transportation, the computerization of myriad "bits" of information, the tectonic spread of multinational corporations headed by invisible oligarchies who eschew direct political recognition, and above all the Damocles-sword of nuclear destruction which objectively threatens all and subjectively halts humanistic, "modern" progressivism in mid-stride. Schechner makes this point in a recent article, "The End of Humanism" in *Performing Arts Journal*, 10/11. However, in this article, he equates "experience" with "ordinary happenings along a linear plane," "narrative" (p. 11) and "the meaningful" (p. 13) and consigns it to the now surpassed "modern," essentially Renaissance view of human action. But the term cannot be circumscribed so narrowly in space and time. "Experience" is a word which has survived, in many cognate forms, in many languages derived from Proto-Indo-European. By analogy with geology, archaeology, and depth psychology, it may be possible to regard the etymology of key terms in major languages as a many-leveled system whose strata are composed of successively deposited layers of historical "experience." Etymology is, after

all, a mode of "restoring the past," a form of linguistic "self-reflexivity." The many-leveled or "laminated" geological crust of the earth is still "alive" (think of the Mt. St. Helens eruption); even more so is the human "mind" or "psyche," with its conscious, pre-conscious, and unconscious levels, each subdivided into layers or bands laid down by repeated dramatic or "traumatic experiences." Neurobiologists of the central nervous system recognize surviving "archaic" structures in the brain, forebrain, and autonomic systems, which continue to interact with the neocortex. Similarly, a modern word's past "senses" have influenced its present penumbra of meaning.

Scholars, such as Julius Pokorny (*Indogermanischer Etymologischer Wörterbuch*, 1959), trace "experience" right back to hypothetical Indo-European base or root **per-*, "to attempt, venture, risk," whence the Greek *peira*, "experience," the source of our word "empirical." It is also the verbal root from which derives the Germanic **feraz*, giving rise to Old English *far*, "danger, sudden calamity," whence Modern English "fear." Already, then we see "cognitive" directions taken by **per-*, through the Greek route, and affective ones, through the Germanic—which would have interested Dilthey, one may be sure! But more directly "experience" derives, *via* Middle English and Old French, from the Latin *experientia*, denoting "trial, proof, experiment," itself generated from *experiri*, the present participle of *experiri*, "to try, test," from *ex-*, "out" + base *per* as in *peritius*, "experiential," "having learned by trying." The suffixed extended form of **per-* is **peritilo*, whence the Latin *periculum*, *periculum*, "trial, danger, peril." Once more, we find experience linked with risk, straining towards "drama," crisis, rather than bland cognitive learning! The suffixed form of I. E. **per-*, **per-ya*, emerges in the Greek *peira*, as mentioned, but what failed to be mentioned is that the English "pirate" comes from that Greek word, *via perates*, an "attacker," from *peiran*, "to attempt, attack." Going further back, etymologists, such as Walter Skeat and Pokorny, hold that the verbal root **per-* is part of a phonetically similar group, whose central concept is perhaps the base of prepositions and preverbs with the core meaning of "forward," "through." Thus the Greek verb *perao*, means "I pass through." If cultural institutions and symbolic modes are to be seen, in Diltheyan terms, as the crystallized secretions of once living human experience, individual and collective, we may perhaps see the word "experience" itself as an experienced traveler through time! Or we may metaphorize it as "tree," whose tap-root is the idea of "perilous passage," even "rites of passage." From **per-*, too, derive our words "fare" and "ferry"—by Grimm's Law describing the regular changes undergone by Indo-European stop consonants (in this case, *p* to *f*) represented in Germanic. Finally, "experiment," like "experience," is derived from Latin *experiri*, "to try or test." If we put these various senses together we have a "laminated" semantic system focused on "experience," which portrays it

as a journey, a test (of self, of suppositions about others), a ritual passage, an exposure to peril or risk, a source of fear. By means of experience, we "fare" "fearfully" through "perils" taking "experimental" steps. It all sounds rather like Dilthey's description of *erleben*, "living through" a sequence of events—it may be a ritual, a pilgrimage, a social drama, a friend's death, a protracted labor, and other *Erfahrungen*. Such an experience is incomplete, though, unless one of its "moments" is "performance," an act of creative retrospection in which "meaning" is ascribed to the events and parts of experience—even if the meaning is that "there is no meaning." Thus experience is both "living through" and "thinking back." It is also "willing or wishing forward," i.e., establishing goals and models for future experience in which, hopefully, the errors and perils of past experience will be avoided or eliminated.

"Experimental" theatre is nothing less than "performed," in other words, "restored" experience, that moment in the experimental process—that often prolonged and internally segmented "moment"—in which meaning emerges through "reliving" the original experience (often a social drama subjectively perceived), and is given an appropriate aesthetic form. This form then becomes a piece of communicable wisdom, assisting others (through *Verstehen*, understanding) to understand better not only themselves but also the times and cultural conditions which compose their general "experience" of reality. Both Richard Schechner and I, approaching the issue from different directions, envision theatre as an important means for the intercultural transmission of painfully achieved modalities of experience. Perfect transcultural understanding may never be achieved, but if we enact one another's social dramas, rituals, and theatrical performances in full awareness of the salient characteristics of their original sociocultural settings, the very length and intensity of what Schechner calls "the training-rehearsal-preparation process" must draw the actors into "other ways of seeing" and apprehending the "reality" our symbolic formations are forever striving to encompass and express.

I began this introduction on an autobiographical note and end it with an appeal for global cultural understanding. In Charlottesville, Virginia, where I now teach at the university, the phrase "Mr. Jefferson would have approved of that," is the final seal of approval for any action. I imagine correlatively that "Professor Dilthey would have approved" of attempts being made by a handful of anthropologists and theatre scholars and practitioners to generate an anthropology and theatre of experience which seek to "understand other people and their expressions on the basis of experience and self-understanding and the constant interaction between them" (*Dilthey: Selected Writings*, 1976:218). Here the "other people" include those of every culture and every land for whom we have rich enough records to draw on for performative purposes. The ethnographies, literatures, ritual, and theatrical traditions of the world now lie open to us as the basis for a

new transcultural communicative synthesis through performance. For the first time we may be moving towards a sharing of cultural experiences, the manifold "forms of objectivated mind" restored through performance to something like their pristine affectual contouring. This may be a humble step for mankind away from the destruction that surely awaits our species if we continue to cultivate deliberate mutual misunderstanding in the interests of power and profit. We can learn from experience—from the enactment and performance of the culturally transmitted experiences of others—peoples of the Heath as well as of the Book.

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LIMINAL TO LIMINOID, IN PLAY, FLOW, AND RITUAL: AN ESSAY IN COMPARATIVE SYMBOLOGY

by Victor Turner

First I will describe what I mean by "comparative symbology" and how, in a broad way, it differs from such disciplines as "semiotics" (or "semiology") and "symbolic anthropology," which are also concerned with the study of such terms as symbols, signs, signals, significations, icons, signifiers, signifieds, sign-vehicles, and so on. Here, I want to discuss some of the types of sociocultural processes and settings in which new symbols, verbal and non-verbal, tend to be generated. This will lead me into a comparison of "liminal" and "liminoid" phenomena, terms which I will consider shortly.

According to Josiah Webster's lexicographical progeny, the people who produced the second College edition of Webster's New World Dictionary, "symbology" is "the study or interpretation of symbols"; it is also "representation or expression by means of symbols." The term "comparative" merely means that this branch of study involves comparison as a method, as does, for example, comparative linguistics. Comparative symbology is narrower than "semiotics" or "semiology" (to use Saussure's and Roland Barthes's terms), and wider than "symbolic anthropology" in range and scope of data and problems. "Semiotics" is "a general theory of signs and symbols, especially, the analysis of the nature and relationship of signs in language, usually including three branches, syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics."

1) *Syntactics*: The formal relationships of signs and symbols to one another apart from their users or external reference; the organization and relationship of groups, phrases, clauses, sentences, and sentence structure.

2) *Semantics*: The relationship of signs and symbols to the things to which they refer, that is, their referential meaning.

3) *Pragmatics*: The relations of signs and symbols with their users.

In my own analyses of ritual symbols, "syntactics" is roughly similar to what I call "positional meaning"; "semantics" is similar to "exegetical meaning"; and "pragmatics" is similar to "operational meaning." Semiology seems to have rather wider aspirations than semiotics, since it is defined as "the science of signs in general" whereas semiotics restricts itself to signs in language, though Roland Barthes is now taking the position that "lin-

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guistics is not a part of the general science of signs . . . it is semiology which is a part of linguistics" (Barthes 1967:11).

Comparative symbology is not directly concerned with the *technical* aspects of linguistics, and has much to do with many kinds of nonverbal symbols in ritual and art, though admittedly all cultural languages have important linguistic components, relays, or "signifieds." Nevertheless, it is involved in the relationships between symbols and the concepts, feelings, values, notions, etc., associated with them by users, interpreters, or exegetes: in short it has *semantic* dimensions, it pertains to meaning in language and context. Its data are mainly drawn from *cultural genres* or *subsystems* of expressive culture. These include both oral and literate genres, and one may reckon among them *activities* combining verbal and nonverbal symbolic actions, such as ritual and drama, as well as *narrative* genres, such as myth, epic, ballad, the novel and ideological systems. They would also include nonverbal forms, such as miming, sculpture, painting, music, ballet, and architecture—and many more.

But comparative symbology does more than merely investigate cultural genres in abstraction from human social activity. It would become semiology if it did, whose corpus of data "must eliminate diachronic elements to the utmost" and coincide with a "state of the system, a cross-section of history" (Barthes, p. 98). When considering ritual data collected during my field-work among the Ndembu people of northwestern Zambia, I wrote that

I could not analyse [these] ritual symbols without studying them in a time series in relation to other "events" [regarding the symbol, too, as an "event" rather than a "thing"], for symbols are essentially involved in social process [and, I would now add, in psychological processes, too]. I came to see performances of ritual as distinct phases in the social processes whereby groups became adjusted to internal changes [whether brought about by personal or factional dissensions and conflicts of norms or by technical or organizational innovations], and adapted to their external environment [social and cultural, as well as physical and biotic]. From this standpoint the ritual symbol becomes a factor in social action, a positive force in an activity field. Symbols, too, are crucially involved in situations of societal change—the symbol becomes associated with human interests, purposes, ends and means, aspirations and ideals, individual and collective, whether these are explicitly formulated or have to be inferred from the observed behavior. For these reasons, the structure and properties of a ritual symbol become those of a dynamic entity, at least within its appropriate context of action. (Turner 1967:20)

We shall take a closer look at some of these "properties" later. But I want to stress here that because *from the very outset* I formulate symbols as social and cultural dynamic systems, shedding and gathering meaning over time and altering in form, I cannot regard them merely as "terms" in atemporal logical or protological cognitive systems. Undoubtedly, in the specialized genres of complex societies such as philosophical, theological, and formal logical systems, symbols, and the signs derived from their decomposition, do acquire this "algebraic" or logical quality, and can be treated effectively in relations of "binary opposition," as "mediators," and

the rest, denatured by the primacy of specialist cognitive activity. But “les symboles sauvages,” as they appear not only in traditional, “tribal” cultures but also in the “cultural refreshment” genres (poetry, drama, and painting) of post-industrial society, have the character of dynamic semantic systems. They gain and lose meanings—and meaning in a social context always has emotional and volitional dimensions—as they “travel through” a *single* rite or work of art, let alone through centuries of performance, and they are aimed at producing effects on the psychological states and behavior of those exposed to them or obliged to use them for their communication with other human beings. I have always tried to link my work in processual analysis (for example, studies of the ongoing process of village politics in *Schism and Continuity*, 1957) with my work in the analysis of ritual performances.

This is perhaps why I have often focused on the study of *individual* symbols, on their semantic fields and processual fate as they move through the scenario of a specific ritual performance and reappear in other kinds of ritual, or even transfer from one genre to another, for example, from ritual to a myth-cycle, to an epic, to a fairy tale, to citation as a maxim in a case at law. Such a focus leaves the semantic future of each symbol, as it were, open-ended. In contrast, formal analysis of a total set of symbols assumed *a priori* to be a system or a *gestalt*, treated as closed, atemporal, and synchronic, a “corpus,” or finite collection of materials, tends to emphasize a given symbol’s formal properties and relations and to select from its wealth of meaning only that specific designation which makes it an appropriate term in some binary opposition, itself a relational building block of a bounded cognitive system. Binariness and arbitrariness tend to go together, and both are in the atemporal world of “signifiers.” Such a treatment, while often seductively elegant, a *frisson* for our cognitive faculties, removes the total set of symbols from the complex, continuously changing social life, murky or glinting with desire and feeling, which is its distinctive milieu and context, and imparts to it a dualistic *rigor mortis*. Symbols, both as sensorily perceptible vehicles (*signifiants*) and as sets of “meanings” (*signifiés*), are essentially involved in multiple variability. Living, conscious, emotional, and volitional creatures employ them not only to give order to the universe they inhabit, but creatively to make use also of disorder, *both* by overcoming or reducing it in particular cases and by its means questioning former axiomatic principles that have become a fetter on the understanding and manipulation of contemporary things. For example, Rabelais’s disorderly, scatological heaps of symbolic forms standing for the disorderly deeds and attributes of Gargantua and Pantagruel challenged the neatness of scholastic theological and philosophical systems—the result, paradoxically, was to blast away logically watertight obscurantism. When symbols are rigidified into logical operators and subordinated to implicit syntax-like rules, by some of our modern investigators, those of us who take them too seriously become blind to the creative or innovative potential of symbols as

factors in human action. Symbols may "instigate" such action and in situationally varying combinations channel its direction by saturating goals and means with affect and desire. Comparative symbology does attempt to preserve this ludic capacity, to catch symbols in their movement, so to speak, and to "play" with their possibilities of form and meaning. It does this by contextualizing symbols in the concrete, historical fields of their use by "men alive" as they act, react, transact, and interact socially. Even when the symbolic is the *inverse* of the pragmatic reality, it remains intimately in touch with it, affects and is affected by it, provides the positive figure with its negative ground, thereby delimiting each, and winning for "cosmos" a new territory.

Narrower in scope than semiotics, comparative symbology is wider than symbolic anthropology, for it proposes to take into account not only "ethnographic" materials, but also the symbolic genres of the so-called "advanced" civilizations, the complex, large-scale industrial societies. Undoubtedly, this broader perspective forces it to come to terms with the methods, theories, and findings of specialists and experts in many disciplines which most anthropologists know all too little about, such as history, literature, musicology, art history, theology, the history of religions, philosophy, and so on. Nevertheless, in making these attempts to study symbolic action in complex cultures, anthropologists, who now study symbols mainly in "tribal" or simple agrarian myth, ritual, and art, would be doing no more than returning to an honorable tradition of their predecessors. Durkheim and the *Année Sociologique* school, Kroeber, Redfield, and their successors, and Professor Singer, have examined cultural sub-systems in "*oikoumenes*" (literally "inhabited worlds," used by Kroeber to indicate civilizational complexes, such as Christendom, Islam, Indic and Chinese civilization, and the like) and Great Traditions.

In my own case, I was pressed towards the study of symbolic genres in *large-scale* societies by some implications of the work of Arnold van Gennep (which drew principally on the data of small-scale societies) in his *Rites de Passage*, first published in French in 1909. Although van Gennep himself seems to have intended that his term "rite of passage" should be used both for rituals accompanying the change in social status of an individual or a cohort of individuals, and for those associated with seasonal changes for an entire society, his book concentrates on the former type; and the term has come to be used almost exclusively in connection with these "life-crisis" rituals. I have tried to revert to van Gennep's earlier usage in regarding almost *all* types of rites as having the processual form of "*passage*." What does this term mean?

Van Gennep distinguishes three phases in a rite of passage: *separation*, *transition*, and *incorporation*. The first phase is *separation*, the phase which clearly demarcates sacred space and time from profane or secular space and

time (it is more than just a matter of entering a temple—there must be in addition a rite which changes the quality of *time* also, or constructs a cultural realm which is defined as “out of time,” that is, beyond or outside the time which measures secular processes and routines). It includes symbolic behavior—especially symbols of reversal or inversion of secular things, relationships, and processes—which represents the detachment of the ritual subjects (novices, candidates, neophytes, or “initiands”) from their previous social statuses. In the case of members of a society, it involves collectively moving from all that is socially and culturally involved in an agricultural season, or from a period of peace as against one of war, from plague to community health, from a previous sociocultural state or condition, to a new state or condition, a new turn of the seasonal wheel. During the intervening phase of *transition*, called by van Gennep “margin” or “limen” (meaning “threshold” in Latin), the ritual subjects pass through a period and area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo which has few (though sometimes these are most crucial) of the attributes of either the preceding or subsequent profane social statuses or cultural states. We will look at this liminal phase much more closely later. The third phase, called by van Gennep “re-aggregation” or “incorporation,” includes symbolic phenomena and actions which represent the return of the subjects to their new, relatively stable, well-defined position in the total society. For those undergoing life-cycle ritual this usually represents an enhanced status, a stage further along life’s culturally prefabricated road. For those taking part in a calendrical or seasonal ritual, no change in status may be involved, but they have been ritually prepared for a whole series of changes in the nature of the cultural and ecological activities to be undertaken and of the relationships they will then have with others—all these holding good for a specific quadrant of the annual productive cycle. Many passage rites are irreversible (for the individual subjects) one-shot-only affairs, while calendrical rites are repeated every year by everyone; though, of course, one may attend the passage rites of one’s kin or friends innumerable times, until one knows their form better than the initiands themselves—like the old ladies who “never miss a wedding” as compared with the nervous couple at their first marriage. I have argued that initiatory passage rites tend to “put people down” while some seasonal rites tend to “set people up”; that is, initiations humble people before permanently elevating them, while some seasonal rites (whose residues are carnivals and festivals) elevate those of low status transiently before returning them to their permanent humbleness. Van Gennep argued that the three phases of his schema varied in length and degree of elaboration in different kinds of passage: for example, “rites of separation are prominent in funeral ceremonies, rites of incorporation at marriages. *Transition* rites may play an important part, for instance, in pregnancy, betrothal, and initiation.” The situation is further complicated by regional and ethnic differences which cut across typological ones.

Nevertheless, it is rare to find no trace of the three-part schema in "tribal" rituals.

The passage from one social status to another is often accompanied by a parallel passage in space, a geographical movement from one place to another. This may take the form of a mere opening of doors or the literal crossing of a threshold which separates two distinct areas, one associated with the subject's pre-ritual or preliminal status, and the other with his post-ritual or postliminal status. (The draft inductee's "two steps forward" may serve as a modern instance of a ritualized move into liminality.) On the other hand, the spatial passage may involve a long, exacting pilgrimage and the crossing of many national frontiers before the subject reaches his goal, the sacred shrine, where paraliturgical action may replicate in microcosm the three-part schema at the shrine itself. Sometimes this spatial symbolism may be the precursor of a real and permanent change of residence or geographical sphere of action. For example, a Nyakusa or Ndembu girl, after her puberty rites, leaves her natal village to dwell in her husband's; in certain hunting societies young boys live with their mothers until the time of their initiation rites into adulthood, after which they begin to live with the other hunters of the tribe. Perhaps something of this thinking persists in our own society, when, in large bureaucratic organizations on the national scale, such as the federal government, a major industrial corporation, or the university system, etc., promotion in status and salary usually involves movement in space from one city to another. This process is described by William Watson in *Closed Systems and Open Minds* as "spiralism." The "liminoid" phase between leaving one post and taking up another would repay study in terms of comparative symbology, both in regard to the subject (his dreams, fantasies, favorite reading and entertainment) and to those whom he is leaving and joining (their myths about him, treatment of him, and so on). But there will be more of this and of the distinction between "liminal" and "liminoid" later.

According to van Gennep, an extended liminal phase in the initiation rites of tribal societies is frequently marked by the physical separation of the ritual subjects from the rest of society. Thus in certain Australian, Melanesian, and African tribes, a boy undergoing initiation must spend a long period of time living in the bush, cut off from the normal social interactions within the village and household. Ritual symbols of this phase, though some represent inversion of normal reality, characteristically fall into two types: those of effacement and those of ambiguity or paradox. Hence, in many societies the liminal initiands are often considered to be dark, invisible, like a planet in eclipse or the moon between phases; they are stripped of names and clothing, smeared with the common earth, rendered indistinguishable from animals. They are also associated with life and death, male and female, food and excrement, simultaneously, since they are at once dying from or dead to their former status and life, and being born and

growing into new ones. Sharp symbolic inversion of social attributes may characterize separation; blurring and merging of distinctions may characterize liminality.

Thus, the ritual subjects in these rites undergo a "leveling" process, in which signs of their preliminal status are destroyed and signs of their liminal non-status are applied. I have mentioned certain indicators of their liminality (absence of clothing and names): other signs include not eating or not eating specified foods, disregard of personal appearance, the wearing of uniform clothing, sometimes irrespective of sex. In mid-transition the initiands are pushed as far toward uniformity, structural invisibility, and anonymity as possible.

By way of compensation, the initiands acquire a special kind of freedom, a "sacred power" of the meek, weak, and humble. As van Gennep elaborates:

During the entire novitiate, the usual economic and legal ties are modified, sometimes broken altogether. The novices are outside society, and society has no power over them, especially since they are actually [in terms of indigenous beliefs] sacred and holy, and therefore untouchable and dangerous, just as gods would be. Thus, although taboos, as negative rites, erect a barrier between the novices and society, the society is helpless against the novices' undertakings. That is the explanation—the simplest in the world—for a fact that has been noted among a great many peoples and that has remained incomprehensible to observers. During the novitiate, the young people can steal and pillage at will or feed and adorn themselves at the expense of the community. (1960:114)

If only students in our culture were granted similar immunities concordant with their intellectually liminal situation!

The novices are, in fact, temporarily undefined, beyond the normative social structure. This weakens them, since they have no rights over others. But it also liberates them from structural obligations. It places them too in a close connection with asocial powers of life and death. Hence the frequent comparison of novices on the one hand with ghosts, gods, or ancestors, and on the other with animals or birds. They are dead to the social world, but alive to the asocial world. Many societies make a dichotomy, explicit or implicit, between sacred and profane, cosmos and chaos, order and disorder. In liminality, profane social relations may be discontinued, former rights and obligations are suspended, the social order may seem to have been turned upside down. By way of compensation, cosmological systems (as objects of serious study) may become of central importance for the novices. They are confronted by the elders, in rite, myth, song, instruction in a secret language, and various non-verbal symbolic genres (such as dancing, painting, clay-molding, wood-carving, masking, and the like), with symbolic patterns and structures which amount to teachings about the structure of the cosmos and their culture as a part and product of it, insofar as these are defined and comprehended, whether implicitly or explicitly. Liminality is a complex series of episodes in sacred space-time, and may also include subversive and ludic events. The factors of culture are

isolated, insofar as it is possible to do this with multivocal symbols (that is, with the aid of symbol-vehicles—sensorily perceptible forms) that are each susceptible not of a single but of many meanings. Then they may be recombined in numerous, often grotesque ways, grotesque because they are arrayed in terms of possible rather than experienced combinations—thus a monster disguise may combine human, animal, and vegetable features in an “unnatural” way, while the same features may be differently, but equally “unnaturally” combined in a painting or described in a tale. In other words, in liminality people “play” with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them. Novelty emerges from unprecedented combinations of familiar elements. In the 1972 American Anthropological Association Meetings in Toronto, Brian Sutton-Smith borrowed a term which I have applied to liminality (and other social phenomena and events), “anti-structure” (meaning dissolution of normative social structure, with its role-sets, statuses, jural rights and duties, and so on). He related it to a series of experimental studies he has been making of children’s (and some adult) games both in tribal and industrial societies. Much of what he says, *mutatis mutandis*, can be transferred to the study of liminality in tribal ritual. He writes:

The normative structure represents the working equilibrium, the anti-structure represents the latent system of potential alternatives from which novelty will arise when contingencies in the normative system require it. We might more correctly call this second system the *proto-structural* system [he says] because it is the precursor of innovative normative forms. It is the source of new culture. (Sutton-Smith 1972:18-19)

Sutton-Smith, who recently has been examining the continuum *order-disorder* in games (such as the children’s ring-a-ring-a-roses), goes on to say that

we may be disorderly in games [and, I would add, in the liminality of rituals, as well as in such “liminoid” phenomena as charivaris, fiestas, Halloween masking and mumming, etc.] either because we have an overdose of order, and want to let off steam [the “conservative” view of ritual disorder, such as ritual reversals, Saturnalia, and the like], or because we have something to *learn* through being disorderly. (1972:17)

What interests me most about Sutton-Smith’s formulations is that he sees liminal and liminoid situations as the settings in which new symbols, models, and paradigms arise—as the seedbeds of cultural creativity in fact. These new symbols and constructions then feed back into the “central” economic and politico-legal domains and arenas, supplying them with goals, aspirations, incentives, structural models, and *raisons d’être*.

Some have argued that liminality, more specifically “liminal” phenomena such as myth and ritual in tribal society, is best characterized by the establishment of “implicit syntax-like rules” or by “internal structures of logical relations of opposition and mediation between the discrete symbolic elements” of the myth or ritual. Claude Lévi-Strauss would perhaps take this view. But to my mind it is the analysis of culture into factors and their free

or "ludic" recombination in any and every possible pattern, however weird, that is of the essence of liminality, liminality *par excellence*. This may be seen if one studies liminal phases of major rituals cross-culturally and cross-temporally. When implicit rules begin to appear which limit the possible combination of factors to certain conventional patterns, designs, or figurations, then, I think, we are seeing the intrusion of normative social structure into what is potentially and in principle a free and experimental region of culture, a region where not only new elements but also new combinatorial rules may be introduced—far more readily than in the case of language. This capacity for variation and experiment becomes more clearly dominant in societies in which *leisure* is sharply demarcated from *work*, and especially in all societies which have been shaped by the Industrial Revolution. Various Lévi-Straussian models, such as the one dealing with metaphorical and oppositional logical relations and the transformation to humanity, from nature to culture, and the geometric model which utilizes two sets of oppositions in the construction of a "culinary triangle," raw/cooked:raw/rotten, seem to me to be applicable mainly to tribal or early agrarian societies where work and life tend to be governed by seasonal and ecological rhythms. The models apply in situations where the rules underlying the generation of cultural patterns tend to seek out the binary "Yin-Yang," forms suggested by simple "natural" oppositions, such as hot/cold, wet/dry, cultivated/wild, male/female, summer/winter, plenty/scarcity, and the like. The main social and cultural structures tend to become modeled on these cosmological principles, which determine even the layout of cities and villages, the design of houses, and the shape and spatial placement of different types of cultivated land. It is not surprising that liminality itself cannot escape the grip of these strong structuring principles. Only certain types of *children's* games and play are allowed some degree of freedom because these are defined as structurally "irrelevant," not "mattering." When children are initiated into the early grades of adulthood, however, variabilities and liabilities of social behavior are drastically curtailed and controlled. Law, morality, ritual, even much of economic life, fall under the structuring influence of cosmological principles. The cosmos becomes a complex weave of "correspondences" based on analogy, metaphor, and metonymy. For example, the Dogon of West Africa, according to Marcel Griaule, Genevieve Calame-Griaule, and Germaine Dieterlen, establish a correspondence between the different categories of minerals and the organs of the body. The various soils are conceived of as the organs of "the interior of the stomach," rocks are regarded as the "bones" of the skeleton, and various hues of red clay are likened to "the blood" (see my discussion of Dogon cosmology, 1974:156-165). Similarly, in medieval China, different ways of painting trees and clouds are related to different cosmological principles.

Thus the symbols found in *rites de passage* in these societies, though subject to permutations and transformations of their relationships, are only

involved in these *within* relatively stable, cyclical, and repetitive systems. It is to these kinds of systems that the term "liminality" properly belongs. When used of processes, phenomena, and persons in large-scale complex societies, its use must in the main be metaphorical. That is, the word "liminality," used *primarily* of a phase in the processual structure of a *rite de passage*, is applied to other aspects of culture—here in societies of far greater scale and complexity. This brings me to a watershed division in comparative symbology. Failure to distinguish between symbolic systems and genres belonging to cultures which have developed before and after the Industrial Revolution can lead to much confusion both in theoretical treatment and in operational methodology.

Let me try to spell this out. Despite immense diversities within each camp, there still remains a fundamental distinction at the level of expressive culture between all societies before and all societies subsequent to the Industrial Revolution, including the industrializing Third World societies, which, though dominantly agrarian, nevertheless represent the granaries or playgrounds of metropolitan industrial societies.

Key concepts here are *work*, *play*, and *leisure*. Placing a different explanatory stress on each or any combination of these can influence how we think about symbolic manipulation sets, symbolic genres, in the types of societies we will consider. Each of these concepts is multivocal or multivalent, each has many designations. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "work" means:

(1) expenditure of energy, striving, application of effort to some purpose [this fits fairly well with Webster's primary sense: "physical or mental effort exerted to do or to make something; purposeful activity; labor; toil"]; (2) task to be undertaken, materials to be used in task; (3) thing done, achievement, thing made, book or piece of literary or musical composition [note this application of "work" to the genres of the leisure domain], *meritorious act* as opposed to faith or grace; (4) doings or experiences of *specified* kind, e.g., sharp, bloody, thirsty, wild, dry, etc., *work* [work often has this focused, singular capacity]; (5) *employment*, especially the opportunity of earning money by labour, laborious occupation; (6) ordinary, practical (as in *workaday*), etc. [where it has resonances with secular, profane, pragmatic, and so on].

Now in "tribal," "preliterate," "simpler," "small-scale" societies, the types studied by anthropologists, ritual, and to some extent, myth, are regarded as "work" precisely in this sense, what the Tikopia call "the *work* of the Gods." Ancient Hindu society also posits a "divine work." In the third chapter of the *Bhagavadgita* (v.14-15) we find a connection made between sacrifice and work: "From food do all contingent beings derive, and food derives from rain; rain derives from sacrifice and sacrifice from *work*. From Brahman work arises." Nikhilananda (1952:110) comments that "work" (action) here refers to the sacrifice prescribed in the Vedas, which prescribes for "householders" sacrifice or work. The Ndembu call that which a ritual specialist does *kuzata*, "work," and the same general term is applied to what a hunter, a cultivator, a headman, and, today, a manual laborer,

do. Even in fairly complex agrarian societies associated with "city-state" or "feudal" polities, well within the scope of historical documentation, we find terms like *liturgy* which in pre-Christian Greece early became established as "public service to the gods." *Liturgy* is derived from the Greek *leos* or *laos*, "the people," and *ergon*, "work" (cognate with Old English *weorc*, German *werk*, from the Indo-European base, *werǵ-*, "to do, act." The Greek *organon*, "tool, instrument" derives from the same base—originally *worganon*). The work of men is thus the work of the Gods, a conclusion which would have delighted Durkheim, though it could be construed as implying a fundamental distinction between gods and men, since men cooperated in ritual the better to enter into reciprocal, exchange relations with the gods or with God—it was not simply that "the voice of the congregation was the voice of God." A difference was construed between creator and created. Whatever may have been the empirical case, what we are seeing here is a universe of work, an *ergon-* or *organic* universe, in which the main distinction is between sacred and profane *work*, not between work and leisure. For example, Samuel Beal comments in his *Travels of Fah-Hian and Sung-Yun, Buddhist Pilgrims from China to India (400 A.D. and 518 A.D.)* (1964:5) on Chi Fah-Hian's use of the term *Shaman*, as follows: "The Chinese word Shaman represents phonetically the Sanscrit 'Sramana,' or the Pali 'Samana.' The Chinese word is defined to mean 'diligent and laborious' The Sanscrit root is 'sram,' to be fatigued." (He was referring to the people of Shen-Shen, in the desert of Makhai, part of the Gobi desert region.) It is, furthermore, a universe of work in which whole communities participate, as of obligation, not optation. The *whole* community goes through the *entire* ritual round, whether in terms of total or representative participation. Thus, some rites, such as those of sowing, first fruits, or harvest, may involve everyone, man, woman, and child, others may be focused on specific groups, categories, associations, etc., such as men *or* women, old *or* young, one clan *or* another, one association or secret society *or* another. Yet the whole ritual round adds up to the total participation of the whole community. Sooner or later, no one is exempt from ritual duty, just as no one is exempt from economic, legal, or political duty. Communal participation, obligation, the passage of the whole society through crises, collective and individual, directly or by proxy, are the hallmarks of "the work of the gods" and sacred human work. Without it profane human work would be, for the community, impossible to conceive, though, no doubt, as history has cruelly demonstrated to those conquered by industrial societies, possible to live, or, at least, exist through.

Yet it can be argued that this "work" is not work, as we in industrial societies know it, but has in both its dimensions, sacred and profane, an element of "play." Insofar as the community and its individual members regard themselves as the masters or "owners" of ritual and liturgy, or as representatives of the ancestors and gods who ultimately "own" them, they

have authority to introduce, under certain culturally determined conditions, elements of novelty from time to time into the socially inherited deposit of ritual customs. Liminality, the seclusion period, is a phase peculiarly conducive to such "ludic" invention. Perhaps it would be better to regard the distinction between "work" and "play," or better between "work" and "leisure" (which includes but exceeds play *sui generis*), as itself an artifact of the Industrial Revolution, and to see such symbolic-expressive genres as ritual and myth as being at once "work" and "play" or at least as cultural activities in which work and play are intricately intercalated. Yet it often happens that the historically *later* can throw light on the *earlier*, especially when there is a demonstrable sociogenetic connection between them. For there are undoubtedly "ludic" aspects in "tribal," etc., culture, especially in the liminal periods of protracted initiation or calendrically based rituals. Such would include joking relationships, sacred games, such as the ball games of the ancient Maya and modern Cherokee, riddles, mock-ordeals, holy fooling and clowning, Trickster tales told in liminal times and places (in or out of ritual contexts), and a host of other types.

The point is, though, that these "play" or "ludic" aspects of tribal and agrarian ritual and myth are, as Durkheim says, "de la vie sérieuse," that is, they are intrinsically connected with the "work" of the collectivity in performing symbolic actions and manipulating symbolic objects so as to promote and increase fertility of men, crops, and animals, domestic and wild, to cure illness, to avert plague, to obtain success in raiding, to turn boys into men and girls into women, to make chiefs out of commoners, to transform ordinary people into shamans and shamanins, to "cool" those "hot" from the warpath, to ensure the proper succession of seasons and the hunting and agricultural responses of human beings to them, and so forth. Thus the play is in earnest, and has to be within bounds. For example, in the Ndembu Twin Ritual, *Wubwang'u*, described in *The Ritual Process*, in one episode women and men abuse one another verbally in a highly sexual and jocose way. Much personal inventiveness goes into the invective, though much is also stylized. Nevertheless, this ludic behavior is pressed into the service of the ultimate aim of the ritual—to produce healthy offspring, but not *too many* healthy offspring at once. Abundance is good, but reckless abundance is a foolish joke. "Enough's enough, but this is ridiculous!" Hence cross-sexual joking both maintains reasonable fertility and restrains unreasonable fecundity. Joking is fun, but it is also a social sanction. Even joking must observe the "golden mean," which is an ethical feature of "cyclical, repetitive societies," not as yet unbalanced by innovative ideas and technical changes.

Technical innovations are the products of ideas, the products of what I will call the "liminoid" (the "-oid" here, as in *asteroid*, *starlike*, *ovoid*, *egg-shaped*, etc., derives from Greek *-eidos*, a form, shape, and means "like, resembling"; "liminoid" *resembles* without being identical with "liminal")

and what Marx assigned to a domain he called "the *superstructural*"—I would prefer to talk about the "anti-," "meta-," or "*protostructural*." "Superstructural," for Marx, has the connotation of a distorted mirroring of the "structural," which is, in his terms, the constellation of productive relations, both in cohesion and conflict. On the contrary, I would see the "liminoid" as an independent and critical source—like Marx's own liminoid "works." Here we will observe how "liminoid" actions of industrial leisure genres can repossess the character of "work" though originating in a "free-time" arbitrarily separated by managerial fiat from the time of "labor"—and how the liminoid can be an independent domain of creative activity, not simply a distorted mirror-image, mask, or cloak for structural activity in the "centers" or "mainstreams" of "productive social labor." This is to identify liminoid productions with apologia for the political status quo. "Anti-structure," in fact, can generate and store a plurality of alternative models for living, from utopias to programs, which are capable of influencing the behavior of those in mainstream social and political roles (whether authoritative or dependent, in control or rebelling against it) in the direction of radical change. As scientists we are interested in demarcating a domain, not in taking sides with one or other of the groups or categories which operate within it. Experimental and theoretical science itself is "liminoid"—it takes place in "neutral spaces" or privileged areas (laboratories and studies) set aside from the mainstream of productive events. Universities, institutes, colleges, etc., are "liminoid" settings for all kinds of freewheeling, experimental cognitive behavior as well as forms of symbolic action, resembling some found in tribal society ("rushing" and "pledging" ceremonies, for example!).

But let us look more closely at this notion of the "liminoid," and try to distinguish it from the "liminal." To do this properly, we have to examine the notion of "play." Etymology does not tell us too much about its meaning. We learn that the word "play" is derived from OE *plegan*, "to exercise oneself, move briskly," and that the Middle Dutch *pleyen*, "to dance," is a cognate term. Walter Skeat, in his *Concise Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (p. 355) suggests that the Anglo-Saxon *plega*, "a game, sport," is also (commonly) "a fight, a battle." He considers, too, that the Anglo-Saxon terms are borrowed from the Latin *plaga*, "a stroke." Even if the idea of a "danced-out or ritualized fight" gets into subsequent denotations of "play," this multi-vocal concept has its own historical destiny.

For *Webster's Dictionary*, *play* is:

- (1) action, motion, or activity, esp. when free, rapid, or light (e.g., the *play* of muscles) [here, as so often, "play" is conceived of as "light" as against the "heaviness" of "work," "free" as against work's "necessary" or "obligatory" character, "rapid" as against the careful, reflected-upon style of work routines];
- (2) freedom or scope for motion or action;
- (3) activity engaged in for amusement or recreation [here, again, we are verging on the notion of activities disengaged from necessity or obligation];
- (4) fun, joking (to do a thing in *play*) [emphasizing the *non-serious* character of certain types of modern play];
- (5) (a)

the playing of a game, (b) the way or technique of playing a game [here reintroducing the notion that play might be work, might be serious within its non-serious dimension, and raising the problem of what are the conditions under which "fun" becomes "technique" and rule-governed]; (6) (a) a maneuver, move, or act in a game (e.g., the "wishbone" or "T" offensive formation in American football or a specific brilliant move by a team or individual), (b) a turn at playing (e.g., "there's one play left in the game"); (7) the act of gambling [and here we may think of the "gambling" character of divination in tribal and even in feudal society, and, of course, the very word "gamble" is derived from OE *gamenian*, "to play" akin to the German dialect term *gammeln*, "to sport, make merry"]; (8) a dramatic composition or performance; drama, "the play's the thing" [clearly this term preserves something of the earlier sense of "fight, battle" as well as those of "recreation," "technique," and "turns (i.e., acts, scenes, etc.) at playing"]; (9) sexual activity, dalliance.

Here again we can see a shift from the meaning of sex as procreative "work," (a persistent meaning in tribal and feudal societies) to the division of sexual activity into "play" or "foreplay," and the "serious" business or "work" of begetting progeny. Post-industrial birth control techniques make this division practically realizable, and themselves exemplify the division between work and play brought about by modern systems of production and thought, both "objectively," in the domain of culture, and "subjectively" in the individual conscience and consciousness. The distinction between "subjective" and "objective" is itself an artifact of the sundering of work and play. For "work" is held to be the realm of the rational adaptation of means to ends, of "objectivity," while "play" is thought of as divorced from this essentially "objective" realm, and, insofar as it is its inverse, being "subjective," free from external constraints, where any and every combination of variables can be "played" with. Indeed, Jean Piaget, who has done most to study the developmental psychology of play, regards it as "a kind of free assimilation, without accommodation to spatial conditions or to the significance of the objects" (1962:86).

In the liminal phases and states of tribal and agrarian cultures—in ritual, myth, and legal processes—work and play are hardly distinguishable in many cases. Thus, in Vedic India, according to Alain Danielou (1964:144), the "gods [*sura* and *deva*, who are objects of serious sacrificial ritual] play. The rise, duration and destruction of the world is their game." Ritual is both earnest and playful. As Milton Singer has pointed out (1972:160), the "Krishna dance" in an urban *bhajana* program (group hymn singing) is called *lila*, "sports," in which the participants "play" at being the "Gopis" or milkmaids who "sport" in a variety of ways with Krishna, Vishnu incarnate, reliving the myth. But the *Gopi's* erotic love-play with Krishna has mystical implications, like the *Song of Solomon*—it is at once serious and playful, God's "sport" with the human soul.

Now let us consider the clear division between *work* and *leisure* which modern industry has produced, and how this has affected all symbolic genres, from ritual to games and literature. Joffre Dumazedier, of the Centre d'Etudes Sociologiques (Paris), is not the only authority who holds

that leisure “has certain traits that are characteristic only of the civilization born from the industrial revolution” (1968; see also 1962). But he puts the case very pithily and I am beholden to his argument. Dumazedier dismisses the view that leisure has existed in all societies at all times. In archaic and tribal societies, he maintains, “work and play alike formed part of the ritual by which men sought communion with the ancestral spirits. Religious festivals embodied both work and play” (1968:248). Yet religious specialists such as shamans and medicine-men did not constitute a “leisure-class” in Veblen’s sense, since they performed religious or magical functions for the whole community (and, as we have seen, shamanism is a “diligent and laborious” profession). Similarly, in the agricultural societies of recorded history,

the working year followed a timetable written in the very passage of the days and seasons: in good weather work was hard, in bad weather it slackened off. Work of this kind had a natural rhythm to it, punctuated by rests, songs, games, and ceremonies; it was synonymous with the daily round, and in some regions began at sunrise, to finish only at sunset . . . the cycle of the year was also marked by a whole series of sabbaths and feast days. The sabbath belonged to religion; feast days, however, were often occasions for a great investment of energy (not to mention food) and constituted the obverse or opposite of everyday life [often characterized by symbolic inversion and status reversal]. But the ceremonial [or ritual] aspect of these celebrations could not be disregarded; they stemmed from religion [defined as sacred *work*], not leisure [as we think of it today]. . . . They were imposed by religious requirements . . . [and] the major European civilizations knew more than 150 workless days a year. (1968:249)

Sebastian de Grazia has recently argued (1962) that the origins of leisure can be traced to the way of life enjoyed by certain aristocratic classes in the course of Western civilization. Dumazedier disagrees, pointing out that the idle state of Greek philosophers and sixteenth century gentry cannot be defined *in relation to* work, but rather *replaces work altogether*. Work is done by slaves, peasants, or servants. True leisure exists only when it complements or rewards work. This is not to say that many of the refinements of human culture did not come from this aristocratic idleness. Dumazedier thinks that it is significant that the Greek word for having nothing to do (*schole*) also meant “school.” “The courtiers of Europe, after the end of the Middle Ages, both invented and extolled the ideal of the humanist and the gentleman” (1968:249).

“Leisure,” then, presupposes “work”: it is a non-work, even an anti-work phase in the life of a person who also works. If we were to indulge in terminological neophily, we might call it *anergic* as against *ergic*! Leisure arises, says Dumazedier, under two conditions. First, society ceases to govern its activities by means of common ritual obligations: some activities, including work and leisure, become, at least in theory, *subject to individual choice*. Secondly, the work by which a person earns his or her living is “set apart from his other activities: its limits are no longer *natural* [my italics] but

arbitrary—indeed, it is organized in so definite a fashion that it can easily be separated, both in theory and in practice, from his free time” (1968:249). It is only in the social life of industrial and postindustrial civilizations that we find these necessary conditions. Other social theorists, both radical and conservative, have pointed out that leisure is the product of industrialized, rationalized, bureaucratized, large-scale socioeconomic systems with arbitrary rather than natural delimitation of “work” from “free time” or “time out.” Work is now organized by industry so as to be separated from “free time,” which includes, in addition to leisure, attendance to such personal needs as eating, sleeping, and caring for one’s health and appearance, as well as familial, social, civic, political, and religious obligations (which would have fallen within the domain of the work-play continuum in tribal society). Leisure is predominantly an urban phenomenon, so that when the concept of leisure begins to penetrate rural societies, it is because agricultural labor is tending towards an industrial, “rationalized” mode of organization, and because rural life is becoming permeated by the urban values of industrialization. This holds good for the “Third World” today as well as for the rural hinterlands of long-established industrial societies.

Leisure-time is associated with two types of freedom, “freedom-from” and “freedom-to,” to advert to Isaiah Berlin’s famous distinction. 1) It represents *freedom from* a whole heap of institutional obligations prescribed by the basic forms of social, particularly technological and bureaucratic, organization. 2) For each individual, it means *freedom from* the forced, chronologically regulated rhythms of factory and office and a chance to recuperate and enjoy natural, biological rhythms again.

Leisure is also 1) *freedom to* enter, even to generate new symbolic worlds of entertainment, sports, games, diversions of all kinds. It is, furthermore, 2) *freedom to* transcend social structural limitations, freedom to *play*—with ideas, with fantasies, with words (from Rabelais to Joyce and Samuel Beckett), with paint (from the Impressionists to Action Painting and Art Nouveau), and with social relationships—in friendship, sensitivity training, psychodramas, and in other ways. Here far more than in tribal or agrarian rites and ceremonies, the ludic and the experimental are stressed. In complex, organic-solidary societies, there are obviously many more options; games of skill, strength, and chance can serve as models for future behavior or models of past work experience—now viewed as release from work’s necessities and as something one chooses to do. Sports such as football, games such as chess, recreations such as mountaineering can be hard and exacting and governed by rules and routines even more stringent than those of the work situation, but, since they are optional, they are part of an individual’s freedom, of his growing self-mastery, even self-transcendence. Hence they are imbued more thoroughly with pleasure than those many types of industrial work in which men are alienated from the fruits and results of their labor. Leisure is potentially capable of releasing creative

powers, individual or communal, either to criticize or buttress the dominant social structural values.

It is certain that no one is committed to a true leisure activity by material need or by moral or legal obligations, as is the case with the activities of getting an education, earning a living, or participating in civic or religious ceremonies. Even when there is effort, as in competitive sport, that effort—and the discipline of training—is chosen voluntarily, in the expectation of an enjoyment that is disinterested, is unmotivated by gain, and has no utilitarian or ideological purpose.

But if this is ideally the spirit of leisure, the cultural reality of leisure is obviously influenced by the domain of work from which it has been split by the wedge of industrial organization. Work and leisure interact, each individual participates in both realms, and the modes of work organization affect the styles of leisure pursuits. Let us consider the case of those mainly Northern European and North American societies whose preliminary industrialization was accompanied and infused with the spirit of what Max Weber has called "the Protestant Ethic." This ethical milieu, or set of values and beliefs, which Weber thought was an auspicious condition for the growth of modern, rational capitalism, in my view produced effects in the *leisure* domain quite as far-reaching as in that of work. As everyone now knows, Weber argued that John Calvin and other Protestant reformers taught that salvation is a pure gift from God and cannot be earned or merited by a being so thoroughly depraved in his nature since the Fall of Adam as man. In its extreme form, Predestination, this meant that no one could be certain of being saved, or indeed of being damned. This threatened seriously to undermine individual morale, and a get-out clause evolved at the level of popular culture, though it could not be made theologically watertight. This was that he who is in God's grace and (invisibly) among the elect by God's foreordaining does actually manifest in his behavior systematic self-control and obedience to the will of God. By these outward signs it may be known to others and he can reassure himself that he is among the elect, and will not suffer eternal damnation with the reprobate. But the Calvinist is never finally certain that he will be saved and thus dedicates himself to an incessant examination of the conditions of his inward soul and outward life for evident indications of the work of salvific grace. In a sense, what was in cultural history previously the social "work of the Gods," the calendrical, liturgical round, or, rather, its penances and ordeals, not its festive rewards, became "internalized" as the systematic, non-ludic "work" of the individual's conscience.

Calvinist emphasis was also on the notion of one's calling in life, one's vocation. As against the Catholic notion of "vocation" as the call to a religious life, by vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty, the Calvinist held that it was precisely a person's worldly occupation that must be regarded as the sphere in which he was to serve God through his dedication to his

work. Work and leisure were made separate spheres, and "work" became sacred *de facto*, as the arena in which one's salvation might be objectively demonstrated. Thus, the man of property was to act as a steward of worldly goods, like Joseph in Egypt. He was to use them not for sinful luxury, but to better the moral condition of himself, his family, and his employees. "Betterment" implied self-discipline, self-examination, hard work, dedication to one's duty and calling, and an insistence that those under one's authority should do the same. Wherever the Calvinist aspiration to theocracy became influential, as in Geneva or in the transient dominance of English Puritanism, legislation was introduced to force men to better their spiritual state through thrift and hard work. For example, English Puritanism affected not only religious worship by its attack on "ritualism," but also reduced "ceremonial" ("secular" ritual) to a minimum in many other fields of activity, including drama, which it stigmatized as "mummery." The Act making stage performances illegal cut twenty-odd years from the performance of Jonson's plays. Among the targets of such legislation were, significantly, genres of leisure entertainment which had developed in aristocratic or mercantilist circles in the proto-industrializing period, such as theatrical productions, masques, pageants, musical performances, and, of course, the popular genres of carnivals, festivals, charivaris, ballad singing, and miracle plays. These represented the "ludic" face of the work-play continuum that had formerly caught up the whole of society into a single process moving through sacred and profane, solemn and festive, phases in the seasonal round. The Calvinists wanted "no more cakes and ale"—or other festival foods that belonged to the work and play of the gods. They wanted ascetic dedication to the mainline economic enterprise, the sanctification of what was formerly mostly profane, or, at least, *subordinated to* and ancillary to the sacred cosmological paradigms. Weber argues that when the religious motivations of Calvinism were lost after a few generations of worldly success, the focus on self-examination, self-discipline, and hard work in one's calling even when secularized continued to promote the ascetic dedication to systematic profits, reinvestment of earnings, and thrift, which were the hallmarks of nascent capitalism.

Something of this systematic, vocational character of the Protestant ethic came to tinge even the entertainment genres of industrial leisure. To coin a term, even leisure became "ergic," "of the nature of work," rather than "ludic," "of the nature of play." Thus we have a *serious* division of *labor* in the *entertainment* business: acting, dancing, singing, art, writing, composing, and so on, become professionalized "vocations." Educational institutions prepare actors, dancers, singers, painters, and authors for their "careers." At a higher level, there grew up in the late eighteenth and especially in the nineteenth centuries the notion of "art" itself, in its various modalities, as a quasi-religious vocation, with its own asceticism and total dedication, from William Blake, through Kierkegaard, Baudelaire, Ler-

montov, and Rimbaud, to Cézanne, Proust, Rilke, and Joyce, not to mention Beethoven, Mahler, Sibelius, and so forth.

Another aspect of this influence of the Protestant ethic on leisure is in the realm of play itself. As Edward Norbeck has recently said:

America's forefathers believed strongly in the set of values known as the Protestant ethic. Devotion to work was a Christian virtue; and play, the enemy of work, was reluctantly and charily permitted only to children. Even now, these values are far from extinct in our nation, and the old admonition that play is the devil's handiwork continues to live in secular thought. Although play has now become almost respectable, it is still something in which we "indulge" (as in sexual acts), a form of moral laxness. (1971)

Organized sport ("pedagogic" play) better fits the Puritan tradition than unorganized children's play ("pediarchic" play) or mere dalliance, which is time wasted.

Nevertheless, modern industrial or post-industrial societies have shed many of these anti-leisure attitudes. Technological development, political and industrial organization by workers, action by liberal employers, revolutions in many parts of the world, have had the cumulative effect of bringing more leisure into the "free-time" of industrial cultures. In this leisure symbolic genres, both of the entertainment and instructive sorts, have proliferated. In my book *The Ritual Process*, I have spoken of some of these as "liminal" phenomena. In view of what I have just said, is liminality an adequate label for this set of symbolic activities and forms? Clearly, there are some respects in which these "anergic" genres share characteristics with the "ludergic" rituals and myths (if we contrast the Hindu and Judaic ritual style) of archaic, tribal, and early agrarian cultures. Leisure can be conceived of as a betwixt-and-between, a neither-this-nor-that domain between two spells of work or between occupational and familial and civic activity. Leisure is etymologically derived from Old French *leisir*, which itself derives from Latin *licere*, "to be permitted." Interestingly enough, it ultimately comes from the Indo-European base **leik-*, "to offer for sale, bargain," referring to the "liminal" sphere of the market, with its implications of choice, variation, contract—a sphere that has connections, in archaic and tribal religions, with Trickster deities such as Elegba, Eshu, and Hermes. Exchange is more "liminal" than production. Just as when tribesmen make masks, disguise themselves as monsters, heap up disparate ritual symbols, invert or parody profane reality in myths and folk-tales, so do the genres of industrial leisure, the theater, poetry, novel, ballet, film, sport, rock music, classical music, art, pop art, and so on, *play* with the factors of culture, sometimes assembling them in random, grotesque, improbable, surprising, shocking, usually experimental combinations. But they do this in a much more complicated way than in the liminality of tribal initiations. They multiply specialized genres of artistic and popular entertainments, mass culture, pop culture, folk culture, high culture, counter-culture, underground culture, etc., as against the relatively limited symbolic genres of "tribal" society, and within each they allow lavish scope to

authors, poets, dramatists, painters, sculptors, composers, musicians, actors, comedians, folksingers, rock musicians, "makers" generally, to generate not only weird forms, but also, and not infrequently, models, direct and parabolic or aesopian, that are highly critical of the status quo as a whole or in part. Of course, given *diversity* as a *principle*, many artists, in many genres, also buttress, reinforce, and justify the prevailing social and cultural mores and political orders. Those that do so, do so in ways that tend more closely than the *critical* productions to parallel tribal myths and rituals—they are "liminal" or "pseudo-" or "post-" "liminal," rather than "liminoid." Satire is a conservative genre because it is *pseudo-liminal*. Satire exposes, attacks, or derides what it considers to be vices, follies, stupidities, or abuses, but its criteria of judgment are usually the normative structural frame of values. Hence satirical works, like those of Swift, Castlereagh, or Evelyn Waugh, often have a "ritual of reversal" form, indicating that disorder is no permanent substitution for order. A mirror inverts but also reflects an object. It does not break it down into constituents in order to remold it, far less does it annihilate and replace that object. But art and literature often do. The *liminal* phases of tribal society invert but do not usually subvert the status quo, the structural form, of society; reversal underlines that chaos is the alternative to cosmos, so they had better stick to cosmos, that is, the traditional order of culture—though they can for a brief while have a heck of a good time being chaotic, in some saturnalian or lupercalian revelry, some charivari, or institutionalized orgy. But supposedly "entertainment" genres of industrial society are often *subversive*, lampooning, burlesquing, or subtly putting down the central values of the basic, work-sphere society, or at least of selected sectors of that society. Some of these genres, such as the "legitimate" or "classical" theater, are historically continuous with ritual, and possess something of the sacred seriousness, even the "*rites de passage*" structure of their antecedents. Nevertheless, crucial differences separate the structure, function, style, scope, and symbology of the liminal in "tribal and agrarian ritual and myth" from what we may perhaps call the "liminoid," or leisure genres, of symbolic forms and action in complex, industrial societies.

The term *limen* itself, the Latin for "threshold," selected by van Gennep to apply to "transition between," appears to be negative in connotation, since it is no longer the positive past condition nor yet the positive articulated future condition. It seems, too, to be passive since it is dependent on the articulated, positive conditions it mediates. Yet on probing, one finds in liminality both positive and active qualities, especially where that "threshold" is protracted and becomes a "tunnel," when the "liminal" becomes the "cunicular"; this is particularly the case in initiation rituals, with their long periods of seclusion and training of novices rich in the deployment of symbolic forms and esoteric teachings. "Meaning" in culture tends to be *generated* at the interfaces between established cultural sub-systems, though

meanings are then institutionalized and consolidated at the centers of such systems. Liminality is a temporal interface whose properties partially invert those of the already consolidated order which constitutes any specific cultural "cosmos." It may be useful heuristically to consider in relation to liminality in ritual/myth Durkheim's overall characterization of "mechanical solidarity," which he regarded as that type of cohesion plus cooperative, collective action directed towards the achievement of group goals which best applies to small, nonliterate societies with a simple division of labor and very little tolerance of individuality. He based this type of solidarity on a *homogeneity* of values and behavior, strong social constraint, and loyalty to tradition and kinship. The rules for togetherness are known and shared. Now what frequently typifies the liminality of initiation ritual in societies with mechanical solidarity is precisely the opposite of this: ordeals, myths, maskings, mumming, the presentation of sacred icons to novices, secret languages, food and behavioral taboos, create a weird domain in the seclusion camp in which ordinary regularities of kinship, the residential setting, tribal law and custom are set aside. The bizarre becomes the normal, and through the loosening of connections between elements customarily bound together in certain combinations, their scrambling and recombining in monstrous, fantastic, and unnatural shapes, the novices are induced to think (and think hard) about cultural experiences they had hitherto taken for granted. The novices are taught that they did not know what they thought they knew. Beneath the surface structure of custom was a deep structure, whose rules they had to learn, through paradox and shock. In some ways social constraints become stronger, even unnaturally and irrationally stronger, as when the novices are compelled by their elders to undertake what in their minds are unnecessary tasks by arbitrary fiat, and are punished severely if they fail to obey promptly—and, what is worse, even if they succeed. But in other ways, as in the case cited earlier from van Gennep's *Rites de Passage*, the novices also are conceded unprecedented freedoms: they make raids and swoops on villages and gardens, seize women, vituperate older people. Innumerable are the forms of topsy-turvydom, parody, abrogation of the normative system, exaggeration of rule into caricature or satirizing of rule. The novices are at once put outside and inside the circle of the previously known. But one thing must be kept in mind: *all* these acts and symbols are of *obligation*. Even the *breaking* of rules *has* to be done during initiation. This is one of the distinctive ways in which the liminal is marked off from the liminoid. In the 1972 American Anthropological Association Meetings in Toronto, several examples were cited—among them, carnival in St. Vincent in the West Indies, and the La Have Islands, Nova Scotia (Abrahams and Bauman, 1972)—from modern societies on the fringe of industrial civilizations which bore some resemblance to liminal inversions in tribal societies. But what was striking to me was how even in these "outback" regions *optionality* dominated the whole

process. For example, when the masked mummers of La Have, usually older boys and young married men, known as "belsnicklers," emerge on Christmas Eve to entertain, tease, and fool adults, and to frighten children, they knock at house doors and windows, asking to be "allowed" entrance. Some householders actually refuse to let them in. Now I cannot imagine a situation in which Ndembu, Luvale, Chokwe, or Luchazi masked dancers (peoples I have known and observed), who emerge after the performance of a certain ritual, marking the end of one half of the seclusion period and the beginning of another, to dance in villages and threaten women and children, would be refused entry. Nor do they ask permission to enter; they storm in! Belsnicklers have to "ask for" treats from householders. *Makishi* (maskers) among Ndembu, Chokwe, etc., demand food and gifts as of right. Optation pervades the liminoid phenomenon, obligation the liminal. One is all play and choice, an entertainment, the other is a matter of deep seriousness, even dread, it is demanding, compulsory (though, indeed, fear provokes nervous laughter from the women, who, if they are touched by the *makishi*, are believed to contract leprosy, become sterile, or go mad!). Again, in St. Vincent, only *certain types* of personalities are attracted to the Carnival as performers, those whom Roger Abrahams describes as "the rude and sporty segment of the community," who are "rude and sporty" whenever they have an opportunity to be so, all the year round—hence they can most aptly personify "disorder" versus "order" at the Carnival. Here, again, optation is evidently dominant—for people do not *have to* act invertedly, as in tribal rituals; some people, but not *all* people, *choose* to act invertedly at Carnival. And Carnival is unlike a tribal ritual in that it can be attended *or* avoided, performed or merely watched, at *will*. It is a genre of leisure enjoyment, not an obligatory ritual, it is play-separated-from-work not play-and-work ludergy as a binary system of man's "serious" communal endeavor. Abrahams, in his joint paper with Bauman, makes a further valid point which firmly places Vincentian carnivals in the modern-leisure-genre category. He stresses that it is overwhelmingly the "bad, unruly (*macho*-type) men" who choose to perform carnival inversions indicative of disorder in the universe and society, people who are disorderly by temperament and choice in many extra-carnival situations. To the contrary, in tribal ritual, even the normally orderly, meek, and "law-abiding" people would be *obliged* to be disorderly in key rituals, regardless of their temperament and character. The sphere of the optional is in such societies much reduced. Even in liminality, where the bizarre behavior so often remarked upon by anthropologists occurs, the *sacra*, masks, etc., emerge to view under the guise at least of "collective representations." If there ever were individual creators and artists, they have been subdued by the general "liminal" emphasis on anonymity and normative *communitas*, just as the novices and their novice-masters have been. But in the liminoid genres of industrial art, literature, and even science (more truly homologous with tribal liminal thinking than modern art is), great public stress is laid on

the individual innovator, the unique person who dares and opts to create. In this lack of stress on individuality, tribal liminality may be seen not as the inverse of tribal normativeness, but as its projection into ritual situations. However, this has to be modified when one looks at actual initiation rituals "on the ground." I found that, among the Ndembu, despite the novices' being stripped of names, profane rank, and clothes, each emerged as a distinct individual; and there was an element of competitive personal distinctiveness in the fact that the best four novices in the terms of performance during seclusion (in hunting, endurance of ordeal, smartness in answering riddles, cooperativeness, etc.) were given titles in the rites marking their re-aggregation to profane society. For me, this indicated that in liminality is secreted the seed of the liminoid, waiting only for major changes in the sociocultural context to set it agrowing into the branched "candelabra" of manifold liminoid cultural genres. If one *has to*, like Jack Horner, pull out a dialectical plum from each and every type of social formation, I would counsel that those who propose to study one of the world's fast disappearing "tribal" societies should look at the liminal phases of their rituals in order most precisely to locate the incipient contradiction between communal-anonymous and private-distinctive modes of conceiving principles of sociocultural growth.

I have used the term "anti-structure," mainly with reference to tribal and agrarian societies, to describe both liminality and what I have called "communitas." I meant by it not a structural reversal, a mirror-imaging of "profane" workaday socioeconomic structure, or a fantasy-rejection of structural "necessities," but the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of social roles, and being acutely conscious of membership in some corporate group such as a family, lineage, clan, tribe, or nation, or of affiliation with some pervasive social category such as a class, caste, sex- or age-division. Sociocultural systems drive so steadily towards consistency that human individuals only get off these normative hooks in rare situations in small-scale societies, and not very frequently in large-scale ones. Nevertheless, the exigencies of structuration itself, the process of containing new growth in orderly patterns or schemata, has an Achilles heel. This is the fact that when persons, groups, sets of ideas, etc., move from one level or style of organization or regulation of the interdependence of their parts or elements to another level, there has to be an interfacial region or, to change the metaphor, an interval, however brief, of "*margin*" or "*limen*," when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun. There is an instant of pure potentiality when everything trembles in the balance, like the moment when the trembling quarterback with all the "options" sees the very solid future moving menacingly towards him! In tribal societies, due to the general overriding homogeneity of

values, behavior, and social structural rules, this instant can be fairly easily contained or dominated by social structure, held in check from innovative excess, "hedged about," as anthropologists delight to say, by "taboos," "checks and balances," and so on. Thus, the tribal liminal, however exotic in appearance, can never be much more than a subversive flicker. It is put into the service of normativeness almost as soon as it appears. Yet I see it as a kind of institutional capsule or pocket which contains the germ of future social developments, of societal change, in a way that the central tendencies of a social system can never quite succeed in being, the spheres where law and custom, and the modes of social control ancillary to these, prevail. Innovation can take place in such spheres, but most frequently it occurs in interfaces and limina, then becomes *legitimated* in central sectors. For me, such relatively "late" social processes, historically speaking, as "revolution," "insurrection," and even "romanticism" in art, characterized by freedom in form and spirit, by emphasis on feeling and originality, represent an inversion of the relation between the normative and the liminal in "tribal" and other essentially conservative societies. For in these modern processes movements, the seeds of cultural transformation, discontent with the way things culturally are, and social criticism (always implicit in the preindustrially liminal), have become situationally central, no longer a matter of the interface between "fixed structures" but a matter of the holistically developmental. Thus revolutions, whether successful or not, become the *limina*, with all their initiatory overtones, between major distinctive structural forms or orderings of society. It may be that this is to use "liminal" in a metaphorical sense, not in the "primary" or "literal" sense advocated by van Gennep, but this usage may help us to think about global human society, to which all specific historical social formations may well be converging. Revolutions, whether violent or non-violent, may be the totalizing liminal phases for which the limina of tribal *rites de passage* were merely foreshadowings or premonitions.

This may possibly be the point where we should feed in the other major variable of the "anti-structural," *communitas*. (I will discuss the merits and demerits of talking about "anti-structure," "metastructure," and "protostructure" later.) There is in tribal societies probably a closer relationship between *communitas* and liminality than between *communitas* and normative structure, though the modality of human interrelatedness which is *communitas* can "play" across structural systems in a way too difficult for us at present to predict its motions. This is the experiential basis, I believe, of the Christian notion of "actual grace." Thus, in the workshop, village, office, lecture-room, theater, almost anywhere, people can be subverted from their duties and rights into an atmosphere of *communitas*. What then is *communitas*? Has it any reality base, or is it a persistent fantasy of mankind, a sort of collective return to the womb? I have described (Turner 1969) this way by which persons see, understand, and act towards one

another as essentially "an unmediated relationship between historical, idiosyncratic, concrete individuals." This is *not* the same as Georges Gurvitch's notion of "communion" which he describes as "when minds open out as widely as possible and the least accessible depths of the 'I' are integrated in this fusion (which presupposes states of collective ecstasy)" (Gurvitch 1941). For me *communitas* preserves individual distinctiveness—it is neither regression to infancy, nor is it emotional, nor is it "merging" in fantasy. In people's social structural relationships they are by various abstract processes generalized and segmentalized into roles, statuses, classes, cultural sexes, conventional age-divisions, ethnic affiliations, and so on. In different types of social situations they have been conditioned to play specific social roles. It does not matter how well or badly, as long as they "make like" they are obedient to the norm-sets that control different compartments of the complex model known as the "social structure." So far this has been almost the entire subject matter of the social sciences: people playing roles and maintaining or achieving status. Admittedly this does cover a very great deal of what human beings are up to and what quantitatively takes up a great deal of their available time, both in work and leisure. And, to some extent, the authentic human essence gets involved here, for every role-definition takes into account some basic human attribute or capacity, and willy-nilly, human beings *play* their roles in human ways. But *full* human capacity is locked out of these somewhat narrow, stuffy rooms. Even though when we say a person plays his role well, we often mean that he plays it with flexibility and imagination, Martin Buber's notions of *I-and-Thou* relationship and the *Essential We* formed by people moving towards a freely chosen common goal are intuitive perceptions of a non-transactional order or quality of human relationship, in the sense that people do not necessarily initiate action towards one another in the expectation of a reaction that satisfies their interests. Anthropologists, inadvertently, have escaped many of these "hang-ups," for they deal with "man alive," in his altruistic as well as egoistic strivings, in the micro-processes of social life. Some sociologists, on the other hand, find security in ethnocentric questionnaires, which, by the nature of the case, distance observer from informant, and render inauthentic their subsequently guarded interaction. In tribal societies and other pre-industrial social formations, liminality provides a propitious setting for the development of these direct, immediate, and total confrontations of human identities. In industrial societies, it is within leisure, sometimes aided by the projections of art, that this way of experiencing one's fellows can be portrayed, grasped, and sometimes realized. Liminality is, of course, an ambiguous state, for social structure, while it inhibits full social satisfaction, gives a measure of finiteness and security; liminality may be for many the acme of insecurity, the breakthrough of chaos into cosmos, of disorder into order, rather than the milieu of creative interhuman or transhuman satisfactions and achievements.

Liminality may be the scene of disease, despair, death, suicide, the breakdown without compensatory replacement of normative, well defined social ties and bonds. It may be *anomie*, alienation, *angst*, the three fatal "alpha" sisters of many modern myths. In tribal and similar societies it may be the interstitial domain of domestic witchcraft, the hostile dead, and the vengeful spirits of strangers; in the leisure genres of complex societies, it may be represented by the "extreme situations" beloved of existentialist writers: torture, murder, war, the verge of suicide, hospital tragedies, the point of execution, etc. Liminality is both more creative and more destructive than the structural norm. In either case it raises basic problems for social structural man, invites him to speculation and criticism. But where it is socially positive it presents, directly or by implication, a model of human society as a homogeneous, unstructured *communitas*, whose boundaries are ideally coterminous with those of the human species. When even two people believe that they experience unity, all people are felt to be one by those two, even if only for a flash. Feeling generalizes more readily than thought, it would seem! The great difficulty is to keep this intuition alive—regular drugging will not do it, repeated sexual union will not do it, constant immersion in great literature will not do it: initiation seclusion must sooner or later come to an end. We thus encounter the paradox that the *experience* of *communitas* becomes the *memory* of *communitas*, with the result that *communitas* itself in striving to replicate itself historically develops a social structure, in which initially free and innovative relationships between individuals are converted into norm-governed relationships between social *personae*. I am aware that I am stating another paradox: that the more spontaneously "equal" people become, the more distinctively "themselves" they become; the more the *same* they become socially, the less they find themselves to be individually. Yet when this *communitas* or *comitas* is institutionalized, the new-found idiosyncratic is legislated into yet another set of universalistic roles and statuses, whose incumbents must subordinate individuality to a rule.

I argued in *The Ritual Process* that the spontaneity and immediacy of *communitas*—as opposed to the jural-political character of (social) structure—can seldom be sustained for long. *Communitas* itself soon develops a (protective social) structure, in which free relationships between individuals become converted into norm-governed relationships between social *personae*. The so-called "normal" may be more of a game, played in masks (*personae*), with a script, than certain ways of behaving "without a mask," that are culturally defined as "abnormal," "aberrant," "eccentric," or "way-out." Yet *communitas* does not represent the erasure of structural norms from the consciousness of those participating in it; rather its own style, in a given community, might be said to depend upon the way in which it symbolizes the abrogation, negation, or inversion of the normative structure in which its participants are quotidianly involved. Indeed, its own readiness to convert into normative structure indicates its vulnerability to the structural environment.

Looking at the historical fate of *communitas*, I identified three distinct and not necessarily sequential forms of it, which I called *spontaneous*, *ideological*, and *normative*. Each has certain relationships with liminal and liminoid phenomena.

1) *Spontaneous communitas* is "a direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities," a deep rather than intense style of personal interaction. "It has something 'magical' about it. Subjectively there is in it a feeling of endless power." Is there any of us who has not known this moment when compatible people—friends, congeners—obtain a flash of lucid mutual understanding on the existential level, when they feel that all problems (not just their problems), whether emotional or cognitive, could be resolved, if only the group which is felt (in the first person) as "essentially us" could sustain its inter-subjective illumination. This illumination may succumb to the dry light of next day's disjunction, the application of singular and personal reason to the "glory" of communal understanding. But when the mood, style, or "fit" of *spontaneous communitas* is upon us, we place a high value on personal honesty, openness, and lack of pretensions or pretentiousness. We feel that it is important to relate directly to another person as he presents himself in the here-and-now, to understand him in a sympathetic (not an empathetic—which implies some withholding, some non-giving of the self) way, free from the culturally defined encumbrances of his role, status, reputation, class, caste, sex, or other structural niche. Individuals who interact with one another in the mode of *spontaneous communitas* become totally absorbed into a single, *synchronized, fluid* event. Their "gut-" understanding of synchronicity in these situations opens them to the understanding of such cultural forms—derived typically today from the literate transmission of world culture, directly or in translation—as eucharistic union and the I-Ching. The latter stresses the mutual mystical participation (to cite Lévy-Bruhl) of all contemporary events, if one only had a mechanism to lay hold of the "meaning" underlying their "coincidence."

2) What I have called "*ideological communitas*" is a set of theoretical concepts which attempt to describe the interactions of *spontaneous communitas*. Here the retrospective look, "memory," has already distanced the individual subject from the communal or dyadic experience. Here the experiencer has already come to look to language and culture to mediate the former immediacies, an instance of what Mihali Csikszentmihalyi has recently called a "flow-break," that is, an interruption of that experience of merging action and awareness (and centering of attention) which characterizes the supreme "pay-off" in ritual, art, sport, games, and even gambling. "Flow" may induce *communitas*, and *communitas* "flow," but some "flows" are solitary and some modes of *communitas* separate awareness from action—especially in religious *communitas*. Here it is not teamwork in flow that is quintessential, but "*being*" together, with being the operative

word, not doing. Csikszentmihalyi has already begun to ransack the inherited cultural past for models or for cultural elements drawn from the debris of past models from which he can construct a new model which will, however falteringly, replicate in words his concrete experience of spontaneous *communitas*. Some of these sets of theoretical concepts can be expanded and concretized into a "utopian" model of society, in which all human activities would be carried out on the level of spontaneous *communitas*. I hasten to add that not all or even the majority of "utopian" models are those of "ideological *communitas*." Utopia means "no place" in Greek: the manufacture of utopias is an untrammelled "ludic" activity of the leisure of the modern world, and such manufacture, like industrial manufacture, tends to posit ideal politico-administrative *structures* as prime desiderata—including highly hierarchical ones—rather than what the world or a land or island would look like if everyone sought to live in *communitas* with his and her neighbor. There are many hierarchical utopias, conservative utopias, fascistic utopias. Nevertheless, the *communitas* "utopia" is found in variant forms as a central ingredient, connected with the notion of "salvation," in many of the world's literate, "historical" religions. "Thy Kingdom" (which being *caritas*, *agape*, "love," is an anti-kingdom, a *communitas*) "come."

3) *Normative communitas*, finally, is, once more, a "perduring social system," a subculture or group which attempts to foster and maintain relationships of spontaneous *communitas* on a more or less permanent basis. To do this it has to denature itself, for spontaneous *communitas* is more a matter of "grace" than "law," to use theological language. Its spirit "bloweth where it listeth"—it cannot be legislated for or normated, since it is the *exception*, not the *law*, the miracle not the regularity, primordial freedom not *anangke*, the causal chain of necessity. But, nevertheless, there is something about the origin of a group based even on normative *communitas* which distinguishes it from groups which arise on the foundation of some "natural" or technical "necessity," real or imagined, such as a system of productive relations or a group of putatively biologically connected persons, a family, kindred, or lineage. Something of "freedom," liberation," or "love" (to use terms common in theological or political-philosophical Western vocabularies) adheres to normative *communitas*, even although quite often the strictest regimes devolve from what are apparently the most spontaneous experiences of *communitas*. This rigor comes about from the fact that *communitas* groups feel themselves initially to be utterly vulnerable to the institutionalized groups surrounding them. They develop protective institutional armor, armor which becomes the harder as the pressures to destroy the primary group's autonomy proportionally increase. They "become what they behold." On the other hand, if they did not "behold" their enemies, they would succumb to them. This dilemma is presumably not resolvable by a growing, changing, innovative species which invents new

tools of thinking as well as of industry and explores new emotional styles as it proceeds through time. The opposition of the old may be as important for change as the innovativeness of the new, inasmuch as together they constitute a problem.

Groups based on *normative* *communitas* commonly arise during a period of religious revival. When normative *communitas* is demonstrably a group's dominant social mode one can witness the process of transformation of a charismatic and personal movement into an ongoing, relatively repetitive social system. The inherent contradictions between spontaneous *communitas* and a markedly structured system are so great, however, that any venture which attempts to combine these modalities will constantly be threatened by structural cleavage or by the suffocation of *communitas*. The typical compromise here—and I refer the reader to *The Ritual Process*, Ch. 4, for illustrative case histories—tends to be a splitting of the membership into opposed factions, a solution which endures only as long as a balance of power is maintained between them. Usually the group which first organizes, then structures itself most methodically, prevails politically or parapolitically, though the key *communitas* values shared by both groups but put into abeyance by the politically successful one may later become resurgent in the latter. Thus the Conventual Franciscans succeeded in getting the Spiritual Franciscans condemned for their *usus pauper*, or extreme view of poverty, but the Capuchin Reform, beginning about three centuries later in 1525, restored many of the primitive ideals of Franciscan poverty and simplicity, which were practiced before the split into Conventuals and Spirituels in the thirteenth century. In symbological terms we have to distinguish between symbols of politico-jural systems and those making up religious systems. *Usus pauper* was a political symbol marking the factional cleavage between the two wings of Franciscanism, while "My Lady Poverty"—itself perhaps a Franciscan variant on the themes of "Our Lady Mary" or of "Our Holy Mother the Church" was a cultural symbol, transcending political structural divisions. *Communitas* tends to generate metaphors and symbols which later fractionate into sets and arrays of cultural values; it is in the realms of physical life-support (economics) and social control (law, politics) that symbols acquire their "social-structural" character. But, of course, the cultural and social-structural realms interpenetrate and overlap as concrete individuals pursue their interests, seek to attain their ideals, love, hate, subdue, and obey one another, in the flux of history. I will not advance at this point the view that the "extended-case method," with the social drama as one of its techniques, offers a useful way of studying symbols and their meanings as events within the total flow of social events, for I am still concerned with the problem of the relationships between symbols, the liminal, the liminoid, *communitas*, and social structure.

Communitas exists in a kind of "figure-ground" relationship with social structure. The boundaries of each of these—insofar as they constitute

explicit or implicit models for human interaction—are defined by contact or comparison with the other. In the same way, the liminal phase of an initiation rite is defined by the surrounding social statuses (many of which it abrogates, inverts, or invalidates), and the “sacred” is defined by its relation to the “profane”—even in a single culture there is much relativity here, for if A is “sacred” to B, he may be simultaneously “profane” to C, and “less sacred” to D. Situational selection prevails here, as in many other aspects of sociocultural process. *Communitas*, in the present context of its use, then, may be said to exist more in contrast than in active opposition to social structure, as an alternative and more “liberated” way of being socially human, a way both of being detached from social structure (and hence potentially of periodically *evaluating* its performance) and also of a “distanced” or “marginal” person’s being more attached to *other* disengaged persons (and hence, sometimes of evaluating a social structure’s historical performance in common with them). Here we may have a loving union of the structurally damned pronouncing judgment on normative structure and providing alternative models for structure.

The boundaries of the astructural model of human interconnectedness described by ideological *communitas* are “ideally coterminous with those of the human species” (and sometimes extend even beyond that to a generic “reverence for life”). Therefore, those who are experiencing, or have recently experienced *communitas* often attempt to convert a social structural interaction or a set of such interactions (involving the primacy of institutionalized status-role behavior over “freewheeling” behavior) into a direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities, that is, into spontaneous *communitas*. *Communitas* tends to be inclusive (some might call it “generous”), social structure tends to be exclusive, even snobbish, relishing the distinction between we/they or in-group/out-group, higher/lower, betters/menials. This drive to inclusivity makes for proselytization. One wants to make the Others, We. One famous case in the Western tradition is Pentecost, when people of different linguistic and ethnic groups claimed, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, to understand one another completely sub- or trans-linguistically. After that the Pentecostal throng went forth to missionize the world. The glossolalia of some modern Pentecostals appears to be connected with the notion that whereas articulate speech divides people of different linguistic groups and even expedites “sin,” among those of the same speech community, nonsense (archaic) speech facilitates mutual love and virtue. But these conversion attempts by communitarian individuals may be interpreted not only by the power elites of social structure, but *also* by the rank and file who feel safe in their obedience to norm, as a *direct threat* to their *own* authority or safety, and perhaps especially to their institution-based social identities. Thus the expansive tendencies of *communitas* may touch off a repressive campaign by the structurally entrenched elements of society, which leads in turn to more

active, even militant opposition by the communitarians (cf. here the historical process set in train by many millenarian or revivalistic movements); and so on, in an ever spiraling struggle between the forces of structure and the powers of *communitas*. The struggle is rather like what Frye and David Erdman—drawing on Blake's symbols—have called the Orc-Urizen cycle. "Orc" here represents revolutionary energy and "Urizen" the "law-maker and the avenging conscience" (S. Foster Damon); the cycle itself is a partial anticipation of Pareto's "circulation of elites," the "lion"-like revolutionary elites being succeeded by the "fox"-like strategists and tacticians of power maintenance.

In spite of—and, to a considerable extent, because of—this conflict, *communitas* serves important functions for the larger, structured, centristic society. In *The Ritual Process* I noted that

Liminality, marginality, and structural inferiority are conditions in which are frequently generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art. These cultural forms provide men with a set of templates, models, or paradigms which are, at one level, periodical reclassifications of reality (or, at least, of social experience) and man's relationship to society, nature, and culture. But they are more than (mere cognitive) classifications, since they incite men to action as well as thought. (1969:128-129)

When I wrote this, I had not yet made the distinction between *ergic-ludic* ritual liminality and *anergic-ludic* liminoid genres of action and literature. In tribal societies, liminality is often functional, in the sense of being a special duty or performance *required* in the course of work or activity; its very reversals and inversions tend to compensate for rigidities or unfairnesses of normative structure. But in industrial society, the *rite de passage* form, built into the calendar and/or modeled on organic processes of maturation and decay, no longer suffices for total societies. Leisure provides the opportunity for a multiplicity of optional, liminoid genres of literature, drama, and sport, which are not conceived of as "antistructure" to normative structure where "antistructure is an auxiliary function of the larger structure" (Sutton-Smith 1972:17). Rather are they to be seen as Sutton-Smith envisages "play," as "experimentation with variable repertoires," consistent with the manifold variation made possible by developed technology and an advanced stage of the division of labor (1972:18). The liminoid genres, to adapt Sutton-Smith (he was referring to "anti-structure," a term he borrowed from me, but he claimed that I used it in a system-maintenance sense only),

not only make tolerable the system as it exists, they keep its members in a more flexible state with respect to that system, and, therefore, with respect to possible change. Each system [Sutton-Smith goes on] has structural and anti-structural adaptive functions. The normative structure represents the working equilibrium, the anti-structure represents the latent system of potential alternatives from which novelty will arise when contingencies in the normative system require it. . . . We might more correctly call this second system the *proto-structural* system because it is the precursor of innovative normative forms. It is the source of new culture. (1972:18-19)

In the so-called "high culture" of complex societies, the liminoid is not only removed from a *rite de passage* context, it is also "individualized." The solitary artist *creates* the liminoid phenomena, the collectivity *experiences* collective liminal symbols. This does not mean that the maker of liminoid symbols, ideas, images, and so on, does so *ex nihilo*; it only means that he is privileged to make free with his social heritage in a way impossible to members of cultures in which the liminal is to a large extent the sacrosanct.

When we compare liminal with liminoid processes and phenomena, then, we find crucial differences as well as similarities. Let me try to set some of these out. In a crude, preliminary way they provide some delimitation of the field of comparative symbology.

1) *Liminal phenomena* tend to predominate in tribal and early agrarian societies possessing what Durkheim has called "mechanical solidarity," and dominated by what Henry Maine has called "status." *Liminoid phenomena* flourish in societies with "organic solidarity," bonded reciprocally by "contractual" relations, and generated by and following the industrial revolution. They perhaps begin to appear on the scene in city-states on their way to becoming empires (of the Graeco-Roman type) and in feudal societies (including not only the European sub-types found between the tenth and fourteenth centuries in France, England, Flanders, and Germany, but also the far less "pluralistic" Japanese, Chinese, and Russian types of feudalism, or quasi-feudalism). But they first begin clearly to develop in Western Europe in nascent capitalist societies, with the beginnings of industrialization and mechanization, the transformation of labor into a commodity, and the appearance of real social classes. The heyday of this type of nascent industrial society was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—climaxing in the "age of enlightenment." It had begun to appear in Western Europe in the second half of the sixteenth century, particularly in England, where, a little later, Francis Bacon published his *Novum Organum* in 1620, a work which definitely linked scientific with technical knowledge. Liminoid phenomena continued to characterize the democratic-liberal societies which dominated Europe and America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These societies were characterized by universal suffrage, the predominance of legislative over executive power, parliamentarianism, a plurality of political parties, freedom of workers and employers to organize, freedom of joint stock companies, trusts, and cartels to organize, and the separation of church and state. Liminoid phenomena are still highly visible in the post-World War Two managerial societies of organized capitalism of the modern United States, Western Germany, France, Britain, Italy, Japan, and other countries of the Western bloc. Here the economy no longer is left even ostensibly to "free competition," but is planned both by the state itself—usually in the interests of the reigning industrial and financial upper middle classes—and by private trusts and cartels (national and international), often with the support of the state, which puts its consider-

able bureaucratic administrative machinery in their service. Nor are liminoid phenomena absent from the systems of centralized state collectivism exemplified by Russia and China, following their revolutions, and by the "people's democracies" of Eastern Europe (with the exception of Yugoslavia, which has been moving in the direction of decentralized collectivism). Here the new culture tries to synthesize, as far as possible, humanism and technology—not the easiest of tasks—substituting for natural rhythms the logic of technological processes, while attempting to divest these of their socially exploitative character and proposing them to be generated and sustained by the "popular genius." This, however, with collectivism, tends to reduce the potentially limitless freedom of liminoid genres to the production of forms congenial to the goal of integrating humanism (in the sense of a modern, nontheistic, rationalistic viewpoint that holds that man is capable of self-fulfillment, ethical conduct, etc., without recourse to supernaturalism) and technology.

2) *Liminal phenomena* tend to be collective, concerned with calendrical, biological, social-structural rhythms or with crises in social processes whether these result from internal adjustments or external adaptations or remedial measures. Thus they appear at what may be called "natural breaks," natural disjunctions in the flow of natural and social processes. They are thus enforced by sociocultural "necessity," but they contain *in nuce* "freedom" and the potentiality for the formation of new ideas, symbols, models, beliefs. *Liminoid phenomena* may be collective (and when they are so are often directly derived from liminal antecedents), but are more characteristically individual products, though they often have collective or "mass" effects. They are not cyclical, but continuously generated, though in the times and places apart from work settings assigned to "leisure" activities.

3) *Liminal phenomena* are centrally integrated into the total social process, forming with all its other aspects a complete whole, and representing its necessary negativity and subjunctivity. *Liminoid phenomena* develop apart from the central economic and political processes, along the margins, in the interfaces and interstices of central and servicing institutions—they are plural, fragmentary, and experimental in character.

4) *Liminal phenomena* tend to confront investigators rather after the manner of Durkheim's "collective representations," symbols having a common intellectual and emotional meaning for all the members of a given group. They reflect, on probing, the history of the group, i.e., its collective experience, over time. They differ from preliminary or postliminal collective representations in that they are often reversals, inversions, disguises, negations, antitheses of quotidian, "positive," or "profane" collective representations. But they share their mass, collective character.

Liminoid phenomena tend to be more idiosyncratic or quirky, to be generated by specific named individuals and in particular groups—"schools," circles, and coteries. They have to compete with one another for general

recognition and are thought of at first as ludic offerings placed for sale on the "free" market—this is at least true of liminoid phenomena in nascent capitalistic and democratic-liberal societies. Their symbols are closer to the personal-psychological than to the "objective-social" typological pole.

5) *Liminal phenomena* tend to be ultimately eufunctional even when seemingly "inversive" for the working of the social structure, ways of making it work without too much friction.

Liminoid phenomena, on the other hand, are often parts of social critiques or even revolutionary manifestoes—books, plays, paintings, films, etc., exposing the injustices, inefficiencies, and immoralities of the mainstream economic and political structures and organizations.

In complex modern societies both types coexist in a sort of cultural pluralism. But the liminal—found in the activities of churches, sects, and movements, in the initiation rites of clubs, fraternities, masonic orders and other secret societies, etc.—is no longer society-wide. Nor are liminoid phenomena, which tend to be the leisure genres of art, sport, pastimes, games, etc., practiced by and for particular groups, categories, segments, and sectors of large-scale industrial societies of all types. But for most people the liminoid is still felt to be freer than the liminal, a matter of choice not obligation. The liminoid is more like a commodity—indeed, often *is* a commodity, which one selects and pays for—than the liminal, which elicits loyalty and is bound up with one's membership or desired membership in some highly corporate group. One *works at* the liminal, one *plays with* the liminoid. There may be much moral pressure to go to church or synagogue, whereas one queues up at the boxoffice to see a play by Beckett, a performance by Mort Sahl, a Superbowl Game, a symphony concert, or an art exhibition. And if one plays golf, goes yachting, or climbs mountains, one often needs to buy expensive equipment or pay for club membership. Of course, there are also all kinds of "free" liminoid performances and entertainments—Mardi Gras, charivari, home entertainments of various kinds—but these already have something of the stamp of the liminal upon them, and quite often they are the cultural debris of some unforgotten liminal ritual. There are permanent "liminoid" settings and spaces, too—bars, pubs, some cafés, social clubs, etc. But when clubs become exclusivist they tend to generate rites of passage, with the liminal a condition of entrance into the "liminoid" realm.

I am frankly in an exploratory phase just now. I hope to make more precise these crude, almost medieval maps I have been unrolling of the obscure liminal and liminoid regions which lie around our comfortable village of the sociologically known, proven, tried and tested. Discussing both "liminal" and "liminoid" requires studying symbols in social action, in praxis, not entirely at a safe remove from the full human condition. It means studying all domains of expressive culture, not the high culture alone nor the popular culture alone, the literate or the nonliterate, the

Great or the Little Tradition, the urban or the rural. Comparative symbolism must learn how to "embrace multitudes" and generate sound intellectual progeny from that embrace. It must study *total* social phenomena.

I would like to conclude by considering some of the relationships between *communitas*, "flow," the liminal, and the liminoid. Let me briefly try to explain what Mihali Csikszentmihalyi and my friend John McAloon mean by "flowing." "Flow denotes the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement," is "a state in which action follows action according to an internal logic which seems to need no conscious intervention on our part. . . . we experience it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which we feel in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment; between stimulus and response; or between past, present, and future" (Csikszentmihalyi 1972). Some recent research by Callois, Unsworth, Abrahams, and Murphy (and by McAloon and Csikszentmihalyi) has focused on various forms of play and sport (liminoid metagenres of our society) such as mountaineering, rock-climbing, soccer, hockey, chess, long distance swimming, handball, etc., in which the state of flow can be experienced. McAloon and Csikszentmihalyi extend their notion of "flow" beyond play to "the creative experience" in art and literature, and to religious experiences, drawing on many scientific and literary sources. They locate six "elements" or "qualities" or "distinctive features" of the "flow experience." These are:

1) *The experience of merging action and awareness*: there is no dualism in "flow"; while an actor may be aware of what he is doing, he cannot be aware that he is aware—if he is, there is a rhythmic behavioral or cognitive break—self-consciousness makes him stumble, and "flow," perceived from the "outside" becomes non-"flow" or anti-"flow." Pleasure gives way to problem, to worry, to anxiety.

2) This merging of action and awareness is made possible by a *centering of attention* on a limited stimulus field. Consciousness must be narrowed, intensified, beamed in on a limited focus of attention. "Past and future must be given up"—only *now* matters. How is this to be done? Here the conditions that normally prevail must be "simplified" by some definition of situational relevance. What is irrelevant must be excluded. Physiological means to simplify experience are drugs (including alcohol) which do not so much "expand" consciousness as limit and intensify awareness. Intensification is the name of the game. In games this is done by formal *rules* and by such *motivational* means as, for example, competitiveness. A game's rules dismiss as irrelevant most of the "noise" which makes up social reality, the multiform stimuli which impinge on our consciousness. We have to abide by a limited set of norms. Then we are motivated to *do well* by the game's intrinsic structure, often to *do better* than others who subscribe to the same rules. Our minds and our wills are thus disencumbered from irrelevances and sharply focused in certain known directions. *Rewards*

for good knowledge and invincible will, when harnessed to tactical technical skill, complete the focusing. But for our authors the flow's the thing, not the rules, motivations, or rewards. This involves "inner resources" too, the "will to participate" (which like all liminoid phenomena goes back to voluntariness; one *opts* to play), the capacity to shift emphases among the structural components of a game or to innovate by using the rules to generate unprecedented performances. But it is the limitation by rules and motive, the centering of attention, which encourages the flow experience.

3) *Loss of ego* is another "flow" attribute. The "self" which is normally the "broker" between one person's actions and another's, simply becomes irrelevant. The actor is immersed in the "flow," he accepts the rules as binding which are also binding on the other actors—no self is needed to "bargain" about what should or should not be done. The rules ensure the reduction of deviance or eccentricity in much of manifest behavior. Reality tends to be "simplified to the point that is understandable, definable, and manageable" (Csikszentmihalyi 1972:11). This holds good, Csikszentmihalyi says, for "religious ritual, artistic performance, games." Self-forgetfulness here does not mean loss of self-awareness. Kinesthetic and mental awareness is indeed heightened, not reduced; but its full effect comes when flow is recollected later "in tranquility." If flow itself is broken, as we have seen, the special kind of awareness of self intrinsic to it is lost. Again, there is no solipsism, mere autism, about the experience. Flow reaches out to nature and to other men in what Csikszentmihalyi calls "intuitions of unity, solidarity, repletion and acceptance"; all men, even all things, are felt to be one, subjectively, in the flow experience. Much evidence is brought forward to support this; Lévy-Bruhl's "participation mystique" and Suzuki's "non-dualistic (Zen) experience" are cited, as are the comments of athletes and sportsmen.

4) A person "in flow" finds himself "*in control of his actions and of the environment.*" He may not know this at the time of "flow," but reflecting on it he may realize that his skills were matched to the demands made on him by ritual, art, or sport. This helps him to "build a positive self-concept" (p. 13). Outside "flow," such a subjective sense of control is difficult to attain, due to the multiplicity of stimuli and cultural tasks—especially, I would hold, in industrial societies, with their complex social and technical division of labor. But in the ritualized limits of a game or the writing of a poem, a person may *cope*, if he rises to the occasion with skill and tact. With control, worry goes, and fear. Even, as in rock climbing, when the dangers are real, the moment flow begins and the activity is entered, the flow "delights" outweighs the sense of dangers and problems.

5) "Flow" usually "contains coherent, *non-contradictory demands for action*, and provides *clear, unambiguous feedback* to a person's actions. This is entailed by the limiting of awareness to a restricted field of possibilities. Culture reduces the flow possibility to defined channels—chess,

polo, gambling, liturgical action, miniature painting, a yoga exercise, etc. You can "throw yourself" into the cultural design of the game or art, and know whether you have done well or not when you have finished the round of culturally predetermined acts—in the extreme case, if you survive you have performed adequately—in other cases, the public or the critics have an important say, but if you are a real "pro," the final judge is yourself, looking back. Flow differs from everyday in that it contains explicit rules "which make action and the evaluation of action unproblematic" (p. 15). Thus, cheating breaks flow—you have to be a believer, even if this means temporary "willing suspension of unbelief," i.e., choosing (in liminoid fashion) to believe that the rules are "true."

6) Finally "flow" is "autotelic," i.e., *it seems to need no goals or rewards outside itself*. To flow is to be as happy as a human can be—the particular rules or stimuli that triggered the flow, whether chess or a prayer meeting, do not matter. This is important for any study of human behavior, if true, for it suggests that people will culturally manufacture situations which will release flow, or individually seek it outside their ascribed stations in life if these are "flow-resistant."

Csikszentmihalyi goes on to link "flow theory" with information theory and competence theory—but I am not convinced by these speculations. I think he has superbly pinpointed and ascribed qualities to this experience—which *has* to be dealt with phenomenologically in the first place (though we may be able to get more "objective" later with EEG patterns, changes in metabolic rates, etc.).

I would like to say simply that what I call *communitas* has something of a "flow" quality, but it may arise, and often does arise, spontaneously and unanticipated—it does not need rules to trigger it off. In theological language it is sometimes a matter of "grace" rather than "law." Again, "flow" is experienced within an individual, whereas *communitas* at its inception is evidently between or among individuals—it is what all of us believe we share and its outputs emerge from dialogue, using both words and non-verbal means of communication, such as understanding smiles, jerks of the head, and so on, between us. "Flow" for me is already in the domain of what I have called "structure"; *communitas* is always pre-structural, even though those who participate in it have been saturated in structure—being human—since they were infants. But "flow," for me, seems to be one of the ways in which "structure" may be transformed or "liquefied" (like the famed martyr's blood) into *communitas* again. It is one of the techniques whereby people seek the lost "kingdom" or "anti-kingdom" of direct, unmediated communion with one another, even though severe subscription to rules is the frame in which this communion may possibly be induced (the "mantric" frame, one might say).

In societies before the Industrial Revolution, ritual could always have a "flow" quality for total communities (tribes, moieties, clans, lineages,

families, etc.); in post-Industrial societies, when ritual gave way to individualism and rationalism, the flow experience was pushed mainly into the leisure genres of art, sport, games, pastimes, etc. Since work was complex and diversified, its pleasurable, optational equivalent, palliative, or medicine, the domain of leisure genres, also became complex and diversified. However, it was often inversive of the work domain in form if not in function—since the function of many games is to reinforce the mental paradigms we all carry in our heads which motivate us to carry out energetically the tasks our culture defines as belonging to the “work” sphere.

The point here is that ritual (including its liminal phase) in archaic, theocratico-charismatic, patriarchal, and feudal societies (even a little in city-states becoming empires) and certain ancillary institutions such as religious drama provided the main cultural flow-mechanisms and patterns. But in those ages in which the sphere of religious ritual has contracted (as Durkheim puts it), a multiplicity of (theoretically) non-serious, non-earnest genres, such as art and sport (though these may be more serious than the Protestant ethic has defined them to be), have largely taken over the flow-function in culture. *Communitas* is something else, for it does not have to be induced by rules—it can happen anywhere, often in despite of rules. It is more like the “Witness” in Hindu thought which can only watch and love, but *cannot act* (i.e., cannot “flow” in games terms) without changing its nature.

One final point: I have left out both from *communitas* and “flow” an essential feature—the *content* of the experience. This is where the analysis of symbols begins—the symbols of chess, of Impressionist art, of Buddhist meditation, of Christian Marian pilgrimage, of scientific research, of formal logic, have different meanings, different semantic contents. Surely, the processes of *communitas* and flow are imbued with the meanings of the symbols they either generate or are channeled by. Are all “flows” one and do the symbols indicate different kinds and depths of flow?

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THE LIMINAL-NORM

Let us again assemble two paradigms of efficacy, two models of cultural performance legible from our readings. In the first, efficacy grounds itself in embodied transgressions, in practices honed by theater, ritual, and other trainings of the body. Performance here is between theater and ritual: its limen is the theatricalization of ritual and the ritualization of theater. Face-to-face encounters, site-specific events, the co-presencing of individual and social bodies—these instantiate the transformative power of performance in the first decades of Performance Studies, prior even to its appellation. The second model of efficacy, that of resistance, takes off from the discourses of critical theory and the experiments of performance art: its cutting edge is the theory of practice and the practice of theory. Mediated encounters, parodic appropriations, bodies constructed by and through discourse: increasingly (though not exclusively) these have come to make up the efficacy of performance in the last two decades. Passing between the two models, the challenge of efficacy turns itself outside in: from transgressing a totalitarian power from an outside site to resisting a hegemonic power from within that very power arrangement.

Theater and ritual have in no way been left behind in this passage from transgressive to resistant efficacy. They remain two of the most important objects of study, and while their role as models has diminished, it has not been eliminated. Today, the field of cultural performance and the paradigm of Performance Studies cannot be *thought* without citing theater and ritual. They remain, as it were, specific and historical touchstones for any general theory of cultural performance. Theater continues to offer an important formal reference for conceptualizing cultural performance; in addition, theater departments and organizations such as the Association for Theatre in Higher Education and the American Society for Theatre Research provide important bases for its teaching and research. Similarly, the discipline of anthropology continues to provide performance scholars with important methodological approaches, especially those related to ethnographic fieldwork.

Furthermore, between theory and performance art, liminality remains one of the most frequently cited attributes of performative efficacy. Carlson, for instance, closes his 1996 survey with a section entitled “Conclusion: What is Performance?”, which ends with the following definition, one that touches upon both liminality and theatricality.

[Performance] is a specific event with its liminoid nature foregrounded, almost invariably clearly separated from the rest of life, presented by performers and attended by audiences both of whom regard the experience as made up of material to be interpreted, to be reflected upon, to be engaged in—emotionally, mentally, and perhaps

even physically. This particular sense of occasion and focus as well as the overarching social envelope combine with the physicality of theatrical performance to make it one of the most powerful and efficacious procedures that human society has developed for the endlessly fascinating process of cultural and personal self-reflexion and experimentation.⁴¹

Scholars also continue to stress the liminality or “in betweenness” of the paradigm itself. In a 1998 essay, “What Is Performance Studies Anyway?”, Schechner writes: “Performance studies is ‘inter’—in between. It is inter-generic, interdisciplinary, intercultural—and therefore inherently unstable. Performance studies resists or rejects definition. As a discipline, PS cannot be mapped effectively because it transgresses boundaries, it goes where it is not expected to be. It is inherently ‘in between’ and therefore cannot be pinned down or located exactly.”⁴² Liminality, then, remains key to articulating the efficacy of both cultural performance and Performance Studies, whether that efficacy be conceived as transgressive or resistant.

Cutting-edge practices, fringe groups and marginalized peoples, border crossings, transgressions of boundaries and limits—these can and have been theorized in terms of liminality. What is performance? What is Performance Studies? “Liminality” is perhaps the most concise and accurate response to both of these questions. Paradoxically, the persistent use of this concept within the field *has made liminality into something of a norm*. That is, we have come to define the efficacy of performance and of our own research, if not exclusively, then very inclusively, in terms of liminality—that is, a mode of activity whose spatial, temporal, and symbolic “in betweenness” allows for social norms to be suspended, challenged, played with, and perhaps even transformed. The concept has not simply been applied to performances; it has also helped us to *construct* objects of inquiry by guiding the selection of activities to be studied, their formal analysis, and their political evaluation. And as we have seen, the liminal rite of passage also functions as a striking emblem of the paradigm itself, both of its initiation and of its subsequent development.

To underscore the normative dimension of liminality, I have come to call it the *liminal-norm*. More generally, the liminal-norm operates in any situation where the valorization of liminal transgression or resistance itself becomes normative—at which point theorization of such a norm may become subversive. I made up the term “liminal-norm” not long after reading another citation of rites of passage, this one by Michel Foucault. In an interview entitled “Rituals of Exclusion,” Foucault discusses how capitalist norms are inscribed pedagogically:

There is the first function of the university: to put students out of circulation. Its second function, however, is one of integration. Once a student has spent six or seven years of his life within this artificial

society, he becomes “absorbable”: society can consume him. Insidiously, he will have received the values of this society. He will have been given socially desirable models of behavior, so that this ritual of exclusion will finally take on the value of inclusion and recuperation or reabsorption. **In this sense, the university is no doubt little different from those systems in so-called primitive societies in which the young men are kept outside the village during their adolescence, undergoing rituals of initiation which separate them and sever all contact between them and real, active society. At the end of the specified time, they can be entirely recuperated or reabsorbed.**⁴³

In other words, the very same rituals which performance scholars have long cited in theorizing the efficacy of performance, Foucault cites to explain the university’s normative function within contemporary society.⁴⁴

Turner himself recognized the conservative function that liminal rites of passage ultimately play in agrarian, pre-industrial societies, where they almost always reinforce existing social structures. Turning to cultural performances found in industrial societies, he came to distinguish the liminal from the liminoid, the latter referring to cultural activities found in “advanced” societies marked by the sharp separation of labor and leisure.⁴⁵ However, there is little doubt that Turner’s interest and passion lay in the anti-structural elements he theorized in both liminal and liminoid activities, and it was these elements which he stressed in his critical dialogue with Schechner and other performance scholars (elements Foucault does not mention in the text cited above, although elsewhere he does emphasize the importance of “limit-experiences” to his own theoretical work).⁴⁶

The liminal-norm is important here for several interrelated reasons. *First*, it demonstrates how forces of normativity can become mutational, and vice versa. In his ethnographic research, Turner recognized that the liminal practices of Ndembu society could lead to either schism or reinforcement of existing social structures, with reinforcement being the most common outcome. However, as liminality was generalized across the emerging field of cultural performance—that is, as it was re-cited, decontextualized, and recontextualized—the relatively rare instances of schism and radical transformation quickly came to the fore as performance scholars sought to theorize the efficacy of cultural performance during the social unrest found in North America and Western Europe during the 1960s and early 1970s. Liminality almost exclusively became a space and time of transgression and subversion; thus, a concept and practice primarily associated with normative forces had become the embodiment of mutational forces. However, the very success of this generalization process inevitably produced the normalizing effects already noted: the concept of liminality has helped to guide the selection and construction of objects as well as their analysis and evaluation, and in addition, it has shaped Performance Studies’ image of itself, the self-representation of the paradigm in relation to both the academy and

society at large. Again, re-citation, decontextualization, and recontextualization, only here liminal efficacy has become a liminal-norm.

Second, the liminal-norm also suggests that any given conceptual model, even one constructed and deployed to theorize transgression or resistance, is necessarily limited in terms of both its formal and its functional aspects. This does not imply that one must—or even can—avoid modelization or generalization altogether. As indicated earlier, the formation of theoretical concepts presupposes movements of generalization, as does the emergence of a research paradigm such as Performance Studies. The challenge, then, is not to abandon conceptual modelization, but rather to inscribe this movement within one's specific situation, to fold generalization back on itself in order to avoid reducing performance to any one model, be it theater or ritual or performance art or such theoretical models as formalism, psychoanalysis, feminism, deconstruction, queer theory, or postcolonial theory. These models have all been extremely productive to the study of cultural performance, yet all have their own perspectives, their own limits. The task is thus also to multiply the models at one's disposal while at the same time opening up these models to their "own" alterity. To cite another yet model: Félix Guattari describes schizoanalysis as a process of "metamodelisation," one that, "rather than moving in the direction of reductionist modelisations which simplify the complex, will work toward its complexification, its processual enrichment, toward the consistency of its virtual lines of bifurcation and differentiation, in short towards its ontological heterogeneity."⁴⁷ I have attempted here to analyze the workings of not one but several models crucial to the emergence and development of Performance Studies. In doing so, I have focused special attention on liminal rites of passage because they are a particularly rich and productive model of the paradigm's movement of generalization. This modelization process I have nicknamed the "passage to paradigm." In other words, liminal rites provide us with a (and not *the*) metamodel of the paradigm, one that I have tried to crack open by citing its normative and mutational dimensions, as well as other models and movements.

Third, as a metamodel, the liminal-norm can help us resituate the borders and limits of Performance Studies itself. This resituation or displacement of borders is crucial to the challenge guiding our entire project, the rehearsal of a general theory of performance. This project entails challenging Performance Studies, that is, challenging ourselves. By focusing on liminal activities, on transgressive and resistant practices, or, more generally, upon socially efficacious performances, we have overlooked the importance of *other* performances, performances whose formalization and study also took off in the United States and which have since gone global. These other performances are not metaphorical displacements of theatrical or cultural activities, though they certainly and mistakenly can be reduced to them. Nor would we describe these other performances as primarily

transgressive or resistant, far from it. As we shall see, their function is for the most part highly normative, so normative in fact that one might justifiably align them with the Establishment, the System, the Machine—in short, with the very institutions and forces against which cultural performance has directed much of its efficacious efforts over the past half century. But recognizing one's own involvement with these normative performances is, paradoxically, essential to making such efforts more diverse, more concrete, more efficacious. It is also essential to our general theory.

The development of such a theory is highly problematic. Carlson writes that if we “consider performance as an essentially contested concept, this will help us to understand the futility of seeking some overarching semantic field to cover such seemingly disparate usages as the performance of an actor, of a schoolchild, of an automobile.”⁴⁸ I agree. But at stake in such usages is not simply different meanings of the term “performance,” but also entirely different sets of discourses and practices, different infrastructures and histories, different paradigms of performance. More profoundly, what's at stake in our general theory is not an overarching semantic field of performance, but rather an underworldly stratum of performative power and knowledge, a pragmatic formation upon which all this contesting of performance unfolds. The question “What is performance?” perhaps remains inescapable, especially when surveying a paradigm or defining a field, but to map different terrains of this stratum—which is less a metaphysical foundation than an onto-historical sedimentation of forces—a more urgent question becomes “*which* performance?”

Philosophically speaking, to pose the question “What is?” presupposes a unified form while promising a single, correct answer, while the question “Which one?” assumes a multiplicity of forces that must be *actively* interpreted and evaluated.⁴⁹ This will be my assumption. Rehearsing a general theory of performance, we must not only use different concepts, nor only contest and critique them; we must also *create* concepts, *initiate* models, *launch* movements of generalization. Performance Studies scholars have obviously created multiple and diverse concepts and continue to do so. However, this multiplicity and diversity is itself largely determined by our paradigmatic perspective, which I have called here the challenge of efficacy. Direct, or rather internal, analysis of this perspective can only proceed so far, for we cannot easily get a perspective on our perspective, on the critical and affective investments in a field we have constructed and to some extent been constructed through. To open an angle on what amounts to our paradigmatic presuppositions and prejudices, we must turn elsewhere, for “prejudices are found by contrast, not by analysis.”⁵⁰ Our rehearsal of a general theory must thus seek out other sites, other premises, other performances.

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Destination Culture

*Tourism,
Museums,
and
Heritage*

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Objects of Ethnography

Moon rocks, a few small strips of meat dried Hidatsa-style before 1918, dust from Jerusalem, "a knot tied by the wind in a storm at sea," bottle caps filled with melted crayon made for skelley (a New York City street game), "a drop of the Virgin's milk," pieces of the dismantled Berlin Wall.¹ Each object is shown to the public eye protected and enshrined. Were the criterion of "visual interest" to determine what should be exhibited, such rocks, bits of meat, dust, knots, and toys, if saved at all, would await attention of another kind—perhaps by microscope, telescope, laboratory test, nutritional analysis, written description, diagram, or report of miracles. Why save, let alone display, things that are of little visual interest? Why ask the museum visitor to look closely at something whose value lies somewhere other than in its appearance?

To suggest that objects lacking visual interest might be of historical or cultural or religious or scientific interest, while seeming to offer an answer, actually compounds the problem because it leaves unexplored several fundamental assumptions, first among them the notion of artifactual autonomy. It is precisely this autonomy that makes it possible to display objects in and of themselves, even when there is little to inspect with the eye.²

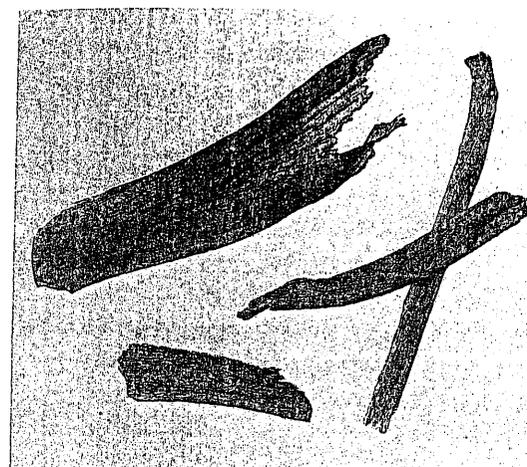
Ethnographic artifacts are objects of ethnography. They are artifacts created by ethnographers. Such objects become ethnographic by virtue of

being defined, segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers. They are ethnographic, not because they were found in a Hungarian peasant household, Kwakiutl village, or Rajasthani market rather than in Buckingham Palace or Michelangelo's studio, but by virtue of the manner in which they have been detached, for disciplines make their objects and in the process make themselves. It is one thing, however, when ethnography is inscribed in books or displayed behind glass, at a remove in space, time, and language from the site described. It is quite another when people are themselves the medium of ethnographic representation, when they perform themselves, whether at home to tourists or at world's fairs, homelands entertainments, or folklife festivals—when they become living signs of themselves.

Exhibiting the Fragment

The artfulness of the ethnographic object is an art of excision, of detachment, an art of the excerpt. Where does the object begin, and where does it end? This I see as an essentially surgical issue. Shall we exhibit the cup with the saucer, the tea, the cream and sugar, the spoon, the napkin and placemat, the table and chair, the rug? Where do we make the cut?

Perhaps we should speak not of the ethnographic object but of the ethnographic fragment. Like the ruin, the ethnographic fragment is informed by a poetics of detachment. Detachment refers not only to the physical act of producing fragments but also to the detached attitude that makes that fragmentation and its appreciation possible. Lovers of ruins in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England understood the distinctive pleasure afforded by architectural fragments, once enough time had passed for a detached attitude to form. The antiquarian John Aubrey valued the ruin as much as he did the earlier intact structure.³ Ruins inspired the feelings of melancholy and wonder associated with the sublime. They stimulated the viewer to imagine the building in its former pristine state. They offered the pleasure of longing for the irretrievable object of one's fantasy. Nor were ruins left to accidental formation. Aesthetic principles guided the selective demolition of ruins and, where a ruin was lacking, the building of artificial ones.⁴ Restoration may be re-



"Dried meat, Hidatsa style. Collected by Gilbert Wilson, pre-1918? Beef."

From the exhibition *The Way to Independence: Memories of a Hidatsa Indian Family*, 1987. Photo by Randy Croce, Minnesota Historical Society.

sisted in cases in which the power of the ruin is its capacity to signify the destructive circumstances of its creation; the skeleton of the Atomic Bomb Dome in Hiroshima does just this. In the case of the Ellis Island restoration, a fragment of the ruin is exhibited as such, in a vitrine, as part of the story of the site. A history of the poetics of the fragment is yet to be written, for fragments are not simply a necessity of which we make a virtue, a vicissitude of history, or a response to limitations on our ability to bring the world indoors. *We make fragments.*⁵

In Situ

In considering the problem of the ethnographic object, it is useful to distinguish *in situ* from *in context*, a pair of terms that call into question the nature of the whole, the burden of interpretation, and the location of meaning.

The notion of *in situ* entails metonymy and mimesis: the object is a part that stands in a contiguous relation to an absent whole that may or may not be re-created. The art of the metonym is an art that accepts the inherently fragmentary nature of the object. Showing it in all its partiality

enhances the aura of its "realness." The danger, of course, is that museums amass collections and are, in a sense, condemned ever after to exhibit them. Collection-driven exhibitions often suffer from ethnographic atrophy because they tend to focus on what could be, and was, physically detached and carried away. As a result, what one has is what one shows. Very often what is shown is the collection, whether highlights, masterpieces, or everything in it. The tendency increases for such objects to be presented as art.

The art of mimesis, whether in the form of period rooms, ethnographic villages, re-created environments, reenacted rituals, or photomurals, places objects (or replicas of them) in situ. In situ approaches to installation enlarge the ethnographic object by expanding its boundaries to include more of what was left behind, even if only in replica, after the object was excised from its physical, social, and cultural settings. Because the metonymic nature of ethnographic objects invites mimetic evocations of what was left behind, in situ approaches to installation tend toward environmental and re-creative displays. Such displays, which tend toward the monographic, appeal to those who argue that cultures are coherent wholes in their own right, that environment plays a significant role in cultural formation, and that displays should present process and not just products. At their most mimetic, in situ installations include live persons, preferably actual representatives of the cultures on display.

In-situ installations, no matter how mimetic, are not neutral. They are not a slice of life lifted from the everyday world and inserted into the museum gallery, though this is the rhetoric of the mimetic mode. On the contrary, those who construct the display also constitute the subject, even when they seem to do nothing more than relocate an entire house and its contents, brick by brick, board by board, chair by chair. Just as the ethnographic object is the creation of the ethnographer, so too are the putative cultural wholes of which they are part. The exhibition may reconstruct Kwakiutl life as the ethnographer envisions it before contact with Europeans, or Hungarian peasant interiors, region by region, as they are thought to have existed before industrialization. Or the display may project a utopian national whole that harmoniously integrates regional diversity, a favorite theme of national ethnographic museums and Ameri-

can pageants of democracy during the first decades of this century. "Wholes" are not given but constituted, and often they are hotly contested⁽⁶⁾

Representational conventions guide mimetic displays, despite the illusion of close fit, if not identity, between the representation and that which is represented.⁷ Indeed, mimetic displays may be so dazzling in their realistic effects as to subvert curatorial efforts to focus the viewer's attention on particular ideas or objects. There is the danger that theatrical spectacle will displace scientific seriousness, that the artifice of the installation will overwhelm ethnographic artifact and curatorial intention.

In Context

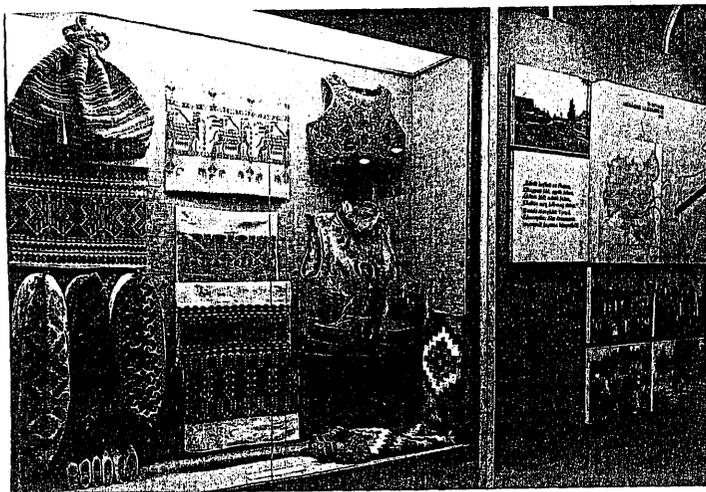
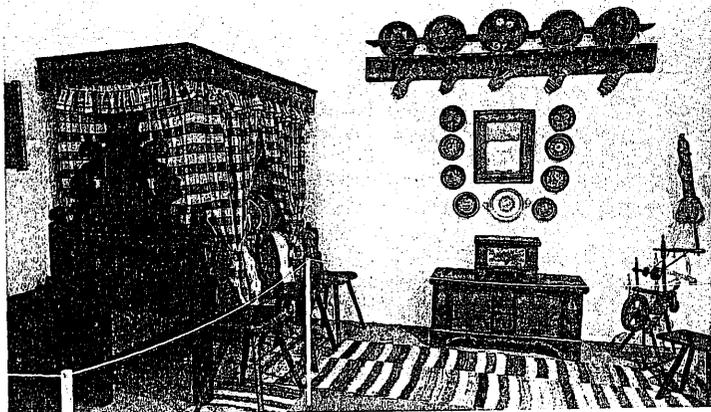
The notion of in context, which poses the interpretive problem of theoretical frame of reference, uses particular techniques of arrangement and explanation to convey ideas. The notion expressed in a 1911 history of the British Museum that "the multifarious objects in the Ethnographical Gallery represent so many starting-points in the world's civilization" places those objects in context, not in situ.⁸ That context is signaled by the title of the chapter devoted to the Ethnographical Gallery, "Civilization in the Making."

Objects are set in context by means of long labels, charts, diagrams, commentary delivered via earphones, explanatory audiovisual programs, docents conducting tours, booklets and catalogs, educational programs, lectures and performances. Objects are also set in context by means of other objects, often in relation to a classification or schematic arrangement of some kind, based on typologies of form or proposed historical relationships. In-context approaches to installation establish a theoretical frame of reference for the viewer, offer explanations, provide historical background, make comparisons, pose questions, and sometimes even extend to the circumstances of excavation, collection, and conservation of the objects on display. There are as many contexts for an object as there are interpretive strategies.

In-context approaches exert strong cognitive control over the objects, asserting the power of classification and arrangement to order large num-

"Room of Sárköz from the second half of the nineteenth century."

Béri Balogh Ádám Museum. Photo by Gabler Csaba. Copyright Képzőművészeti Alap Kiadóvállalata, Budapest.



"Popular art relics of the Bukovinian Székelys."

Béri Balogh Ádám Museum. Photo by Gabler Csaba. Copyright Képzőművészeti Alap Kiadóvállalata, Budapest.

bers of artifacts from diverse cultural and historical settings and to position them in relation to one another. Plants and animals arranged according to the Linnaean classification affirmed the goodness of the divine plan in Charles Willson Peale's museum in Philadelphia during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. A. H. L. F. Pitt Rivers preferred to arrange his series of weapons according to formal criteria, from the simplest to the most complex, to tell the story of mankind's inexorable evolution through stages of racial and cultural development.⁹ Even when the objects themselves are not arranged according to such conceptual schemes but according to geographic area, the viewer may be encouraged to "frame for himself a few general principles for which he can seek out specimens."¹⁰

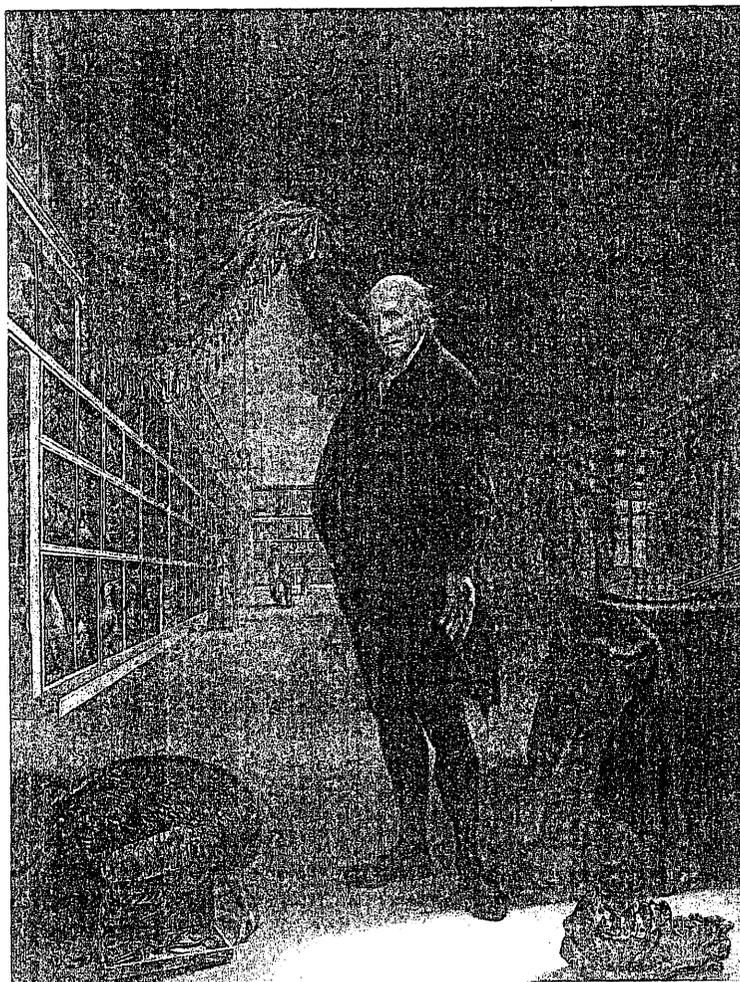
Whether they guide the physical arrangement of objects or structure the way viewers look at otherwise amorphous accumulations, exhibition classifications create serious interest where it might otherwise be lacking. "Than the Ethnographical Gallery in the British Museum there is no department the educational significance of which is so likely to be unappreciated," wrote Henry C. Shelley in 1911, adding that visitors are inclined to indulge in laughter and jokes when confronted with "objects illustrating the manners and customs of what are known as the savage races."¹¹ For instruction to supplant amusement, viewers needed principles for looking. They required a context, or framework, for transforming apparently grotesque, rude, strange, and vulgar artifacts into object lessons. Having been saved from oblivion, the ethnographic fragment now needed to be rescued from trivialization. One way of doing this was to treat the specimen as a document.

Rescuing the Fragment from Trivialization

The problematic relationship of *in situ* and *in context*, which are by no means mutually exclusive approaches, is signaled by Oleg Grabar in his comment about Islamic objects: "[T]hey are in fact to be seen as ethnographic documents, closely tied to life, even a reconstructed life, and more meaningful in large numbers and series than as single creations."¹² Such objects, in Grabar's view, are inherently multiple, documentary, and con-

The Artist in His Museum.

1822, by Charles Willson Peale. Oil on canvas, 103 3/4 in. x 79 7/8 in. Acc. no.: 1878.1.2. Courtesy of the Museum of American Art of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Gift of Mrs. Sarah Harrison (The Joseph Harrison, Jr. Collection).



tingent. They were never intended to hold up to scrutiny as singular creations. Moreover, they are at their most documentary when presented in their multiplicity, that is, as a collection. Grabar diffuses their status as artifacts by according them higher value as "documents," as signs that point away from themselves to something else, to "life." At the same time, he hyperbolizes their status as artifacts by advocating that they be examined in "large numbers and series," a task anticipated and facilitated by the collecting process itself and well suited to typological exhibition arrangements.

Though once multiple, many ethnographic objects become singular, and the more singular they become, the more readily are they reclassified and exhibited as art. The many become one by virtue of the collection process itself. First, collecting induces rarity by creating scarcity: escalating demand reduces the availability of objects. Second, collectors create categories that from the outset, even before there is demand, are marked by the challenges they pose to acquisition: "By creating their own categories, all collectors create their own rarities."¹³ Third, the very ubiquity of the kinds of objects that interest ethnographers contributes to their ephemerality. Commonplace things are worn to oblivion and replaced with new objects, or are viewed as too trivial in their own time to be removed from circulation, to be alienated from their practical and social purposes, and saved for posterity.¹⁴ But no matter how singular the ethnographic object becomes, it retains its contingency, even when, by a process of radical detachment, it is reclassified and exhibited as art.¹⁵

Indeed, the litmus test of art seems to be whether an object can be stripped of contingency and still hold up. The universalizing rhetoric of "art," the insistence that great works are universal, that they transcend space and time, is predicated on the irrelevance of contingency. But the ability to stand alone says less about the nature of the object than about our categories and attitudes, which may account for the minimalist installation style of exhibitions of "primitive art." By suppressing contingency and presenting the objects on their own, such installations lay claims to the universality of the exhibited objects as works of art.

Ethnographic objects move from curio to specimen to art, though not necessarily in that order. As curiosities, objects are anomalous. By definition, they defy classification. Nineteenth-century advocates of scientific

approaches to museum exhibition complained repeatedly about collections of curiosities that were displayed without systematic arrangement. But how could exhibitors be expected to arrange systematically objects that in their terms were unclassifiable? In what category might one exhibit the knot tied by the wind during a storm at sea that was donated to Peale's Museum at the end of the eighteenth century? Probably indistinguishable in appearance from a knot tied by human hands on land during calm weather, this object was an episode in an amazing story waiting to be retold rather than a member of a class of objects relevant to scientific taxonomies of the period.

What we see here are objects that had outlasted the curatorial classifications that once accommodated them in Renaissance cabinets and galleries. Singularities, chance formations that resulted from the "shuffle of things," did fall into a broad category, namely, *mirabilia*.¹⁶ This category included the very large and the very small, the misshapen and the miraculous, and the historically unique: for example, a hat with bullet holes associated with a specific historic event.¹⁷ By the nineteenth century, such objects were anomalous to natural historians interested in taxonomies of the normal, not the singularities of chance formation, though figures such as Joseph Dorfeuille continued to make teratology (the study of the malformed or monstrous) a major attraction in their museums.¹⁸

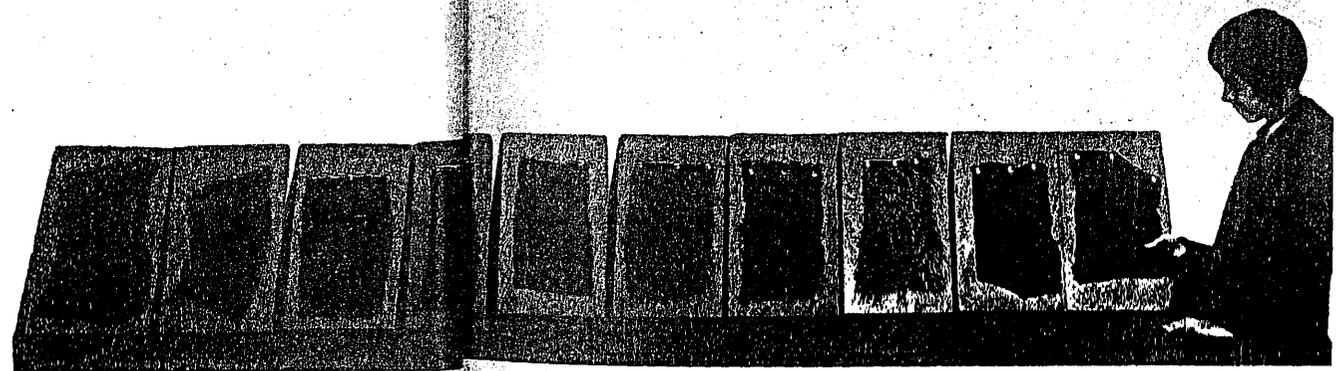
Exhibition classifications, whether Linnaean or evolutionary, shift the grounds of singularity from the object to a category within a particular taxonomy. For a curiosity to become classifiable it had to qualify as representative of a distinguishable class of objects. Peale, for example, was reluctant to show items that fell outside the Linnaean classification ac-

ording to which he arranged objects in his museum in Philadelphia during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. His exhibits of plants and animals were normative: they featured typical members of each class. The comprehensiveness of the classification and orderly arrangement of Peale's collection testified to the purposiveness and goodness of God's creation, a message reinforced by quotations from the Bible mounted on the walls. With his fine American specimens, Peale intended to refute the view of Buffon, an eighteenth-century naturalist, that New World species were inferior to those of Europe. A mark of the seriousness and scientific nature of such exhibitions was the absence of freakish aberrations.¹⁹

In contrast, the exhibit for the International Eugenics Conference at the American Museum of Natural History in 1932 subjected to orderly arrangement the very anomalies (trembling guinea pigs, triplets, a picture drawn by a color-blind man, deformed eyeballs) that a century earlier would have appeared as curiosities defying classification. The structure of genetic inheritance now provided the matrix for the orderly display of nature's mistakes, long an attraction in cabinets and freak shows, and for eliminating such errors in the future—sterilization, antimiscegenation laws, and selective mating.²⁰ A logical outgrowth of the exhibition of racial types and the evolution of mankind, such eugenics exhibitions offered classifications that included the visitors themselves. These were interactive displays, for attendants handed out pedigree charts and blank schedules issued by the Eugenics Record Office and encouraged visitors to take tests for taste threshold and artistic capacity, for example, to rank fur samples. A "Eugenic Sterilization" exhibit was nearby.

"Specialized Tests for Sense of Elegance. Quality in Fur... Arrange these ten samples in the order of your feeling for their elegance if made into a woman's 'best coat'... Be guided by your own personal liking or feeling of appreciation... Be not influenced by knowledge of cost or fashion—try to respond to real quality."

Copyright 1934 by the Williams & Wilkins Co., Baltimore. Reproduced with permission.



Displays in the dime museum tested credulity—Ripley's Believe It or Not. Scientific exhibits struggled to achieve intelligibility—the object lessons of Dr. George Brown Goode, director of the U.S. National Museum. Exhibitions of art faced a different challenge. Refusing to define the objects in his collection either as curios (singular anomalies) or as ethnographic artifacts (representative examples of a class of objects), Hadji Ephraim Benguiat, a prime lender of Jewish ceremonial art to the Smithsonian Institution at the turn of the century, thought of his possessions as objects of art, a status derived from their perfection and his connoisseurship. Benguiat identified the classificatory skills of the art collector with his powers of discrimination. At the climactic instant of acquisition—each time he or she accepts or rejects an object—the collector “classifies.” Benguiat was interested in only one category, the perfect. This category was coterminous with his entire collection, seen as a supreme singularity made up of many singular artifacts. They were displayed accordingly.

Jewels and gems dazzle. They invite appreciation, not analysis. There is no place in this empire of things, ruled by the collector of collectors, for copies, photographs, models, homologues, dioramas, or tableaux. There is no place here for displaying continuous series of objects—without regard for the artistic excellence of each and every one—to make some historical point, no place for a system of classification that would array objects within theoretical hierarchies. Unmitigated excellence in everything shown, ubiquitous singularity, and the unifying principle of the collector's power—this is the message of the jewel box.

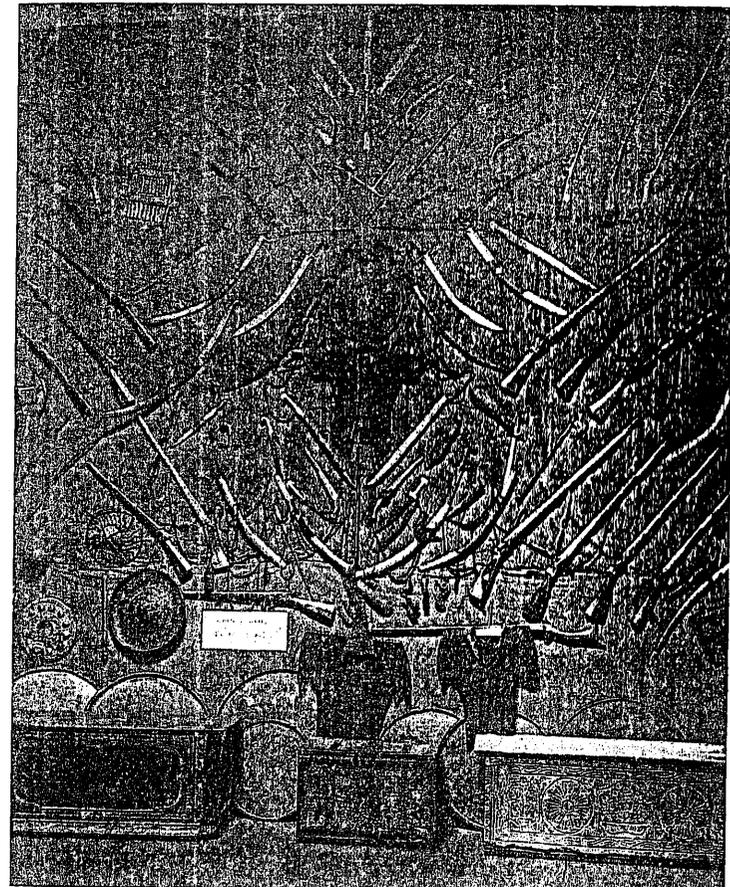
No matter how perfect this collection and each object within it, however, Benguiat's treasures could be reclassified for scientific purposes, and in the various exhibitions where they were featured, they moved from category to category.²³

The Limits of Detachment

Not all that the ethnographic surgeon subjects to cognitive excision can be physically detached, carried away, and installed for viewing. What happens to the intangible, the ephemeral, the immovable, and the animate? The in-

“Collection of Oriental Arms and Armor.” Some of the arms shown here “belonged to the notorious brigand ‘Katirjiani,’ who was such a lover of fine arms that he frequently attacked a caravan and sacrificed the lives of his men just to acquire other specimens of arms, as the jewelled or inlaid decoration was always executed according to the personal taste of the owner, so that there are seldom two alike.”

From *Fine Art Portfolio Illustrating Some of the Exhibits of the H. Ephraim Benguiat Museum Collection and the Historical Damascus Palace* (St. Louis: Louisiana Purchase Exposition, 1904), 29.



tangible, which includes such classic ethnographic subjects as kinship, worldview, cosmology, values, and attitudes, cannot be carried away. The ephemeral encompasses all forms of behavior—everyday activities, storytelling, ritual, dance, speech, performance of all kinds. Now you see it, now you don't. The immovable, whether a mesa, pyramid, cliff dwelling, or landform, can be recorded in photographs but presents formidable logistical obstacles to those who would detach and carry it away. The animate has been collected, both dead and alive. Dried, pickled, or stuffed, botanical and zoological specimens become artifacts for the museum. Alive, flora and fauna present storage problems that are solved by gardens and zoos in which living collections are on view. But what about people? Bones and mummies, body parts in alcohol, and plaster death masks may be found in museums. Living human specimens have been displayed in zoos, formal exhibitions, festivals, and other popular amusements.

If we cannot carry away the intangible, ephemeral, immovable, and animate, what have we done instead? Typically, we have inscribed what we cannot carry away, whether in field notes, recordings, photographs, films, or drawings. We have created ethnographic documents. Like ethnographic objects, these documents are also artifacts of ethnography, but true to what I would call the fetish-of-the-true-cross approach, ethnographic objects, those material fragments that we can carry away, are accorded a higher quotient of realness. Only the artifacts, the tangible metonyms, are really real. All the rest is mimetic, second order, a representation, an account undeniably of our own making. We have here the legacy of Renaissance antiquarians, for whom "visible remains" were used to corroborate written accounts. Objects, according to Giambattista Vico, were "manifest testimony" and carried greater authority than texts, even contemporaneous ones.²²

Textualizing Objects/Objectifying Texts

The priority of objects over texts in museum settings was reversed during the second half of the nineteenth century. Goode operated according to the dictum that "the most important thing about an exhibition was the label," a point restated by many who worked with him.²³

The people's museum should be much more than a house of specimens in glass cases. It should be a house full of ideas, arranged with the strictest attention to system.

I once tried to express this thought by saying "*An efficient educational museum may be described as a collection of instructive labels, each illustrated by a well-selected specimen* (emphasis in original)."²⁴

Museums were to teach "by means of object lessons," but objects could not be relied on to speak for themselves.²⁵

The curatorial charge was to create exhibitions that would "furnish an intelligent train of thought" by using objects to illustrate ideas.²⁶ Reacting to the apparent lack of logical arrangement in displays of art collections in many European museums and the low status to which so many private museums in America had descended, Goode had long insisted that the museum of the past was to be transformed from "a cemetery of bric-a-brac into a nursery of living thoughts."²⁷ His model for the public museum was the public library, though he believed that exhibitions had even greater potential as a medium of popular education. Objects were to be read like books: "Professor Huxley has described the museum as a 'consultative library of objects.'"²⁸ Curators were to objectify texts and textualize objects, hence the importance of an organizational scheme for arranging objects and labels to explain them and the willing acceptance of copies, casts, impressions, photographs, diagrams, and other surrogates for primary artifacts. Since the main purpose of a public museum was to educate, "for the purposes of study a cast was as good as an original," and in some cases better.²⁹ Copies came to play a special role.

Though proclaimed as a new approach to the exhibiting of objects, the textualized object was not new; it had been featured in demonstrations and illustrated lectures for centuries. Anatomy lessons were conducted at public dissections as early as the fourteenth century in Bologna, where, as the scholar read the anatomy text, the demonstrator dissected the body, and the ostensor, the one who showed, pointed a wand at the part of the body under consideration.³⁰ The French anatomy lesson during the seventeenth century was "a great social event that the whole town attended, with masks, refreshments, and diversions."³¹

The increasing emphasis on ostension—on showing—during the nineteenth century suggests a shift in the foundation of authoritative knowledge from a reliance primarily on rhetoric to an emphasis on information, particularly in the form of visual facts.³² By the end of the eighteenth century, Peale could boast that in the lecture room of his museum, presentations were illustrated with real specimens from his collection, consistent with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's admonition that "teachers never substitute representation for reality, show for substance—to teach, in short, from actual objects."³³ In this respect, Peale was in tune with a more general tendency of the period toward the "decidedly empirical or evidential nature of lecturing," though even under the guise of science, objects were used for their dramatic effect: "William Hazlitt was appalled at one of Carlisle's lectures on human emotions to find a dissected heart and brain being circulated among the audience."³⁴

In many ways, the approach to museum exhibitions advocated by Goode during the latter part of the nineteenth century should be seen in relation to the illustrated lecture, its history and requirements. Complaining in 1891 about the decline of "entertainments worthy of civilized communities—concerts, readings, lectures"—and the rise of illustration, including the diagram, blackboard, and stereopticon, Goode wanted the museum to fill the gap left by the decline of lectures and scientific, literary, and artistic societies.³⁵ The written label in an exhibition was a surrogate for the words of an absent lecturer, with the added advantage that the exhibited objects, rather than appear briefly to illustrate a lecture, could be seen by a large public for a longer period of time.

It is precisely in these terms that Washington Matthews introduced his lecture "Some Sacred Objects of the Navajo Rites" at the Third International Folk-Lore Congress of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893.

Someone has said that a first-class museum would consist of a series of satisfactory labels with specimens attached. This saying might be rendered: "The label is more important than the specimen." When I have finished reading this paper, you may admit that this is true in the case of the little museum which I have here to show: A basket, a fascicle of plant fibres; a

few rudely painted sticks, some beads and feathers put together as if by children in their meaningless play, for the total of the collection. You would scarcely pick these trifles up if you saw them lying in the gutter, yet when I have told all I have to tell about them, I trust they may seem of greater importance, and that some among you would be as glad to possess them as I am. I might have added largely to this collection had I time to discourse about them, for I possess many more of their kind. It is not a question of things, but of time. I shall do scant justice to this little pile within an hour. An hour it will be to you, and a tiresome hour, no doubt; but you may pass it with greater patience when you learn that this hour's monologue represents to me twelve years of hard and oft-baffled investigation. Such dry facts as I have to relate are not to be obtained by rushing up to the first Indian you meet, notebook in hand. But I have no time for further preliminary remarks, and must proceed at once to my descriptions.³⁶

In this demonstration of connoisseurship, the ethnographer is a detective who toils long and hard to decipher material clues. This master of induction competes both with the native informant and with other ethnographers, not for the objects, but for the facts that comprise his descriptions. His lecture is a long label, a performed description that elevates what would otherwise be viewed as "trifles." Neither the modest specimens nor the dry facts are expected to interest the listener. Rather, it is the ethnographer's own expenditure of time and effort—his expertise—that creates value.

This effect is achieved rhetorically, for the more unprepossessing the evidence, the more impressive the ethnographic description. Characterizing his own recounting of the facts as "minute to a tedious degree" and "not one half the particulars that I might appropriately have told you," Matthews admits to having reached the limits of his ability to describe when challenged by the drumstick on the table. Not even the Navajo can describe in words how the drumstick is made, "so intricate are the rules pertaining to its construction." Apologizing for not having fresh yucca on hand with which to demonstrate the process, Matthews offers to take anyone who is interested to the "yucca-covered deserts of Arizona" where he can "show him how to make a drum stick." In this way, Matthews con-

fronts two basic problems in ethnographic display. First he makes the apparently trivial interesting by performing ethnography (the illustrated lecture). Then he addresses the limitations of verbal description by offering to play Indian (the demonstration).³⁷ The profusion of facts that Matthews presents to his listeners, his apologies for their dry and tedious character notwithstanding, is a classic case of what Neil Harris has identified as the operational aesthetic—"a delight in observing process and examining for literal truth."³⁸

Exhibiting Humans

Not only inanimate artifacts but also humans are detachable, fragmentable, and replicable in a variety of materials. The inherently performative nature of live specimens veers exhibits of them strongly in the direction of spectacle, blurring still further the line between morbid curiosity and scientific interest, chamber of horrors and medical exhibition, circus and zoological garden, theater and living ethnographic display, scholarly lecture and dramatic monologue, cultural performance and staged re-creation. The blurring of this line was particularly useful in England and the United States during the early nineteenth century because performances that would be objectionable to conservative Protestants if staged in a theater were acceptable when presented in a museum, even if there was virtually nothing else to distinguish them. This reframing of performance in terms of nature, science, and education rendered it respectable, particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century. If in the scientific lecture the exhibitor was the performer, ethnographic displays shifted the locus of performance to the exhibit proper and in so doing, made ample use of patently theatrical genres and techniques to display people and their things.

In what might be characterized as a reciprocity of means and complementarity of function, museums used theatrical crafts of scene painting for exhibits and staged performances in their lecture rooms, while theaters used the subjects presented in museums, including live exotic animals and humans, and the technologies demonstrated there in their stage productions. Museums served as surrogate theaters during periods when

theaters came under attack for religious reasons, while theaters brought a note of seriousness to their offerings by presenting edifying entertainment. In the drama of the specimen, the curator was a ventriloquist whose task it was to make the object speak. Through scenarios of production and function, curators converted objects into stories: they showed the process by which ceramics and textiles were manufactured, step-by-step, or how they were used in daily life and ceremony. The Smithsonian anthropologist Otis T. Mason was explicit on this point in 1891 when he defined "the important elements of the specimen" as "the dramatis personae and incidents."³⁹

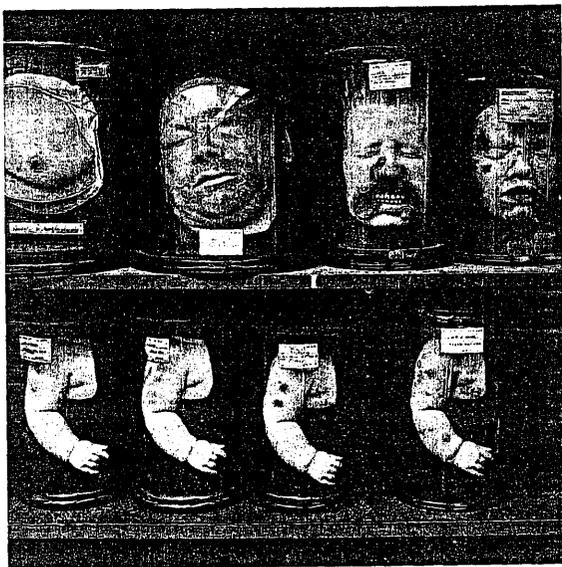
Living or Dead

Human displays teeter-totter on a kind of semiotic seesaw, equiposed between the animate and the inanimate, the living and the dead. The semiotic complexity of exhibits of people, particularly those of an ethnographic character, may be seen in reciprocities between exhibiting the dead as if they are alive and the living as if they are dead, reciprocities that hold for the art of the undertaker as well as the art of the museum preparator.

Ethnographic displays are part of a larger history of human display, in which the themes of death, dissection, torture, and martyrdom are intermingled. This history includes the exhibition of dead bodies in cemeteries, catacombs, homes, and theaters, the public dissection of cadavers in anatomy lessons, the vivisection of torture victims using such anatomical techniques as flaying, public executions by guillotine or gibbet, heads of criminals impaled on stakes, public extractions of teeth, and displays of body parts and fetuses in anatomical and other museums, whether in the flesh, in wax, or in plaster cast.⁴⁰ The body parts arrived not only as by-products of dissections but also as a result of amputations, for example, the trigger finger of a villain.⁴¹ Effigies of men tortured and executed in the very cages in which they were displayed were an attraction at the Münster Zoo.⁴²

Ethnographic subjects were easily incorporated into such modes of display.⁴³ The remains of the dead—tattooed Maori heads, Aztec skulls, and

bones removed from Indian graves—had long been excavated and shown as ethnographic specimens. Live subjects provided expanded opportunities for ethnographic display. While live, human rarities figured in museological dramas of cognitive vivisection. When dead, their corpses were anatomized and their bones and fleshy body parts incorporated into anatomical exhibits. The *vanitas mundi* was a way of exhibiting dissected materials: one such anatomical allegory was created out of the skeleton of a fetus, tiny kidney stones, a dried artery, and a hardened vas deferens. Articulated skeletons, taxidermy, wax models, and live specimens also offered conceptual links between anatomy and death in what might be considered museums of mortality.⁴⁴



"Specimens on Shelf." Wax models, circa 1850–1920. Top, left to right: Recklinghausen's disease of breast; active erysipelas on face; gangrenous ulceration of lip and nares; rupia (tertiary syphilis) of face. Bottom, left to right: arms of infants bearing vaccinia (cowpox) on sixth to eighth day, on ninth to tenth day, and on fourteenth to sixteenth day; arm bearing roseola varicella (chicken pox).

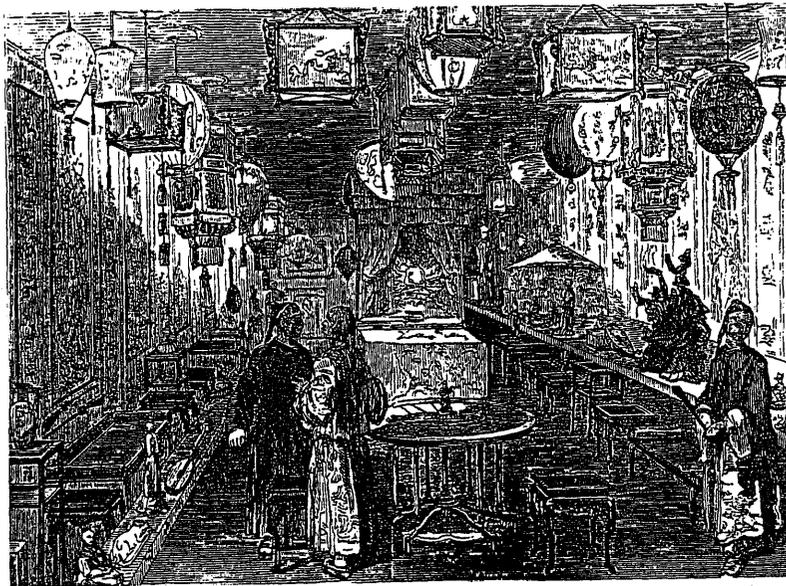
Collection of the Mütter Museum of The College of Physicians of Philadelphia. Photo Arne Svenson, copyright 1993.

Wax models as a form of three-dimensional anatomical illustration were commonly used to teach medicine, especially pathologies of the skin, and were featured in anatomical displays open to the public. Rackstrow's Museum of Anatomy and Curiosities, which was popular in London during the mid-eighteenth century, offered visitors wax replicas of the human body in various states of health and disease, inside and out, including reproductive organs and fetuses, some of them preserved in alcohol rather than represented in wax.⁴⁵ With the rising interest in racial typologies and evolution during the mid-nineteenth century, Sarti's Museum of Pathological Anatomy in London, and others like it, became the place to exhibit culturally constructed anatomical pathologies (parts of a Moorish woman's anatomy), missing links in the evolutionary sequence (wax figures of African "savages" with tails), and wax tableaux of ethnographic scenes.⁴⁶ As early as 1797, Peale had completed wax figures for "a group of contrasting races of mankind" that included natives from North and South America, the Sandwich Islands, Otaheite, and China. The faces are thought to have been made from life casts. The figures were outfitted with appropriate clothing and artifacts. Half a century later, the Gallery of All Nations in Reimer's Anatomical and Ethnological Museum in London featured "the varied types of the Great Human Family," including the Aztec Lilliputians that shortly before had appeared live in the Liverpool Zoo.⁴⁷

The "gallery of nations" idea, which since the late sixteenth century had served as the organizing principle for books devoted to customs, manners, religions, costumes, and other ethnographic topics, was easily adapted to the exhibition of ethnographic specimens.⁴⁸ A logical spinoff was the monographic display. Nathan Dunn's celebrated Chinese collection, which was installed in Peale's museum in 1838 and moved to London in 1841, offered, according to a diarist of the period, "a perfect picture of Chinese life."

Figures of natural size, admirably executed in clay, all of them portraits of individuals, are there to be seen, dressed in the appropriate costume, engaged in their various avocations and surrounded by the furniture, implements and material objects of daily existence. The faces are expressive, the

attitudes natural, the situation & grouping well conceived, and the aspect of the whole very striking and lifelike. Mandarins, priests, soldiers, ladies of quality, gentlemen of rank, play-actors and slaves; a barber, a shoemaker and a blacksmith employed in their trades; the shop of a merchant with purchasers buying goods, the drawing room of a man of fortune with his visitors smoking and drinking tea & servants in attendance; all sitting, standing, almost talking, with the dress, furniture and accompaniments of actual life. Some of the costumes are of the richest and most gorgeous description. Models of country houses and boats, weapons, lamps, pictures, vases, images of Gods, and porcelain vessels, many of them most curious and beautiful, and in number, infinite. Mr. Dunn was in the room himself and explained to us the nature and uses of things.⁴⁹



Saloon of a Chinese junk.

From *Illustrated London News*, 20 May 1948. Photo courtesy Guildhall Library, Corporation of London.

The attention in this description to the individuation of faces reflects the more general preoccupation with “types” and the notion of physiognomy as a key to moral character.⁵⁰

Physiognomic types and their racial implications were presented not only in galleries of nations and in the later “types of mankind” exhibitions but also in crowd scenes and group portraits of life in contemporary European and American cities, as well as in the literature of the period. So great was the fascination with physiognomy that at Peale’s museum, where portraits of great men “etched the outlines of genius” and those of “savages” revealed their physiognomy, museum visitors could take home as a souvenir their own silhouette, made with great exactitude thanks to a mechanical device, the “physiognotrace,” invented in 1803 and demonstrated in the museum gallery.⁵¹

Dunn’s Chinese exhibition inspired other such displays, notably, scenes of daily life at the Oriental and Turkish Museum during the 1850s in London. Viewers were astonished by the wax figures, which a journalist of the time praised for their realism: “[T]he arms and legs of males are rough with real hair, most delicately applied—actual drops of perspiration are on the brows of the porters.”⁵² Clearly, the mannequins were more than clothes hangers, for not only ethnographic artifacts but also physiognomy was on display.

It is precisely the mimetic perfection of such installations, and perhaps also their preoccupation with physiognomy, that so disturbed Franz Boas, who resisted the use of realistic wax mannequins in ethnographic recreations. They were so lifelike they were deathlike. Boas objected to “the ghastly impression such as we notice in wax-figures,” an effect that he thought was heightened when absolutely lifelike figures lacked motion.⁵³ Furthermore, wax as a medium more nearly captured the color and quality of dead than living flesh, and in their frozen pose and silence wax figures were reminiscent of the undertaker’s art, a connection that wax museums capitalized on in deathbed and open casket scenes featuring famous persons.

Fear of verisimilitude did not inhibit Artur Hazelius, who in his effort to present Sweden “in summary” began installing wax tableaux—“folk-life pictures”—in the 1870s. Inspired by genre paintings, these senti-

mental scenes in wax integrated costumes, furniture, and utensils that Hazelius had collected in Sweden and other parts of Scandinavia. Featured not only in his Museum of Scandinavian Ethnography, which opened in 1873, but also at world's fairs in 1876 (Philadelphia) and 1878 (Paris), these displays utilized techniques Hazelius had seen at the many international expositions and museums he visited. He used the habitat group, a fixture of natural history museums. He turned to the wax tableau, which, like the *tableau vivant*, was often modeled on a painting or sculpture and captured a dramatic moment in a narrative. He also drew on the period room and travel panorama. By 1891, he had realized his dream of exhibiting Swedish folklife in "living style" at Skansen, his open-air museum. In addition to buildings, plants, and animals, the museum featured peasants in native dress, traditional musicians and artisans,

The Infant's Death, one of several "Swedish character groups" in the main building of the Centennial Exposition, Philadelphia, 1876. This "living picture" was based on Amalia Lindgren's painting (1858) and was shown again in 1878 at the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris.

From *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 26 August 1876, p. 409.



costumed receptionists and guides, restaurants, craft demonstrations, and festivals. Hazelius's Skansen museum became the prototype for hundreds of other open-air museums throughout Europe, many of them still functioning today.⁵⁴

Animal or Actor

People have been displayed as living rarities from as early as 1501, when live Eskimos were exhibited in Bristol. A Brazilian village built by Indians in Rouen in the 1580s was burned down by French soldiers, an event that pleased the king so much that it was restaged the following day.⁵⁵ "Virginians" were featured on the Thames in 1603.⁵⁶ Over a period of five centuries, audiences flocked to see Tahitians, Laplanders, "Aztecs," Iro-

Open-air museum of Skansen.

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quois, Cherokees, Ojibways, Iowas, Mohawks, Botocudos, Guianese, Hotentots, Kaffirs, Nubians, Somalis, Sinhalese, Patagonians, Tierra del Fuegians, Ilongots, Kalmucks, Amapondans, Zulus, Bushmen, Australian aborigines, Japanese, and East Indians. They could be seen in various cities in England and on the Continent, in taverns and at fairs, on the stage in theatrical productions, at Whitehall, Piccadilly, and Vauxhall Gardens, along the Thames, at William Bullock's London Museum (better known as Egyptian Hall because of its architectural style), in zoos and circuses, and, by the latter half of the nineteenth century, at world's fairs.⁵⁷

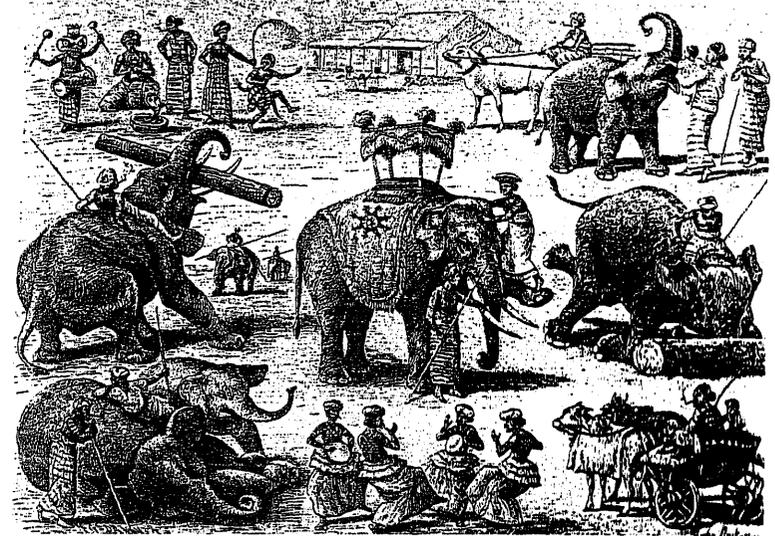
Basically, there were two options for exhibiting living ethnographic specimens: the zoological and the theatrical. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the distinction between zoological and theatrical approaches was often unclear and both were implicated in the staging of wildness, particularly in Carl Hagenbeck's productions. The zoological option depended on traditions of displaying exotic animals, including the circus, which featured trained animals, and the zoo, where live exotic specimens were shown in cages, in fantastic buildings, and, eventually, in settings re-creating their habitat in realistic detail, though here too animal acts could be found. It was not uncommon in the nineteenth century for a living human rarity to be booked into a variety of venues—theaters, exhibition halls, concert rooms, museums, and zoos—in the course of several weeks or months as part of a tour.

London Museum, or Egyptian Hall, was dubbed the "ark of zoological wonders" by at least one observer of the period, because of the wide range of live exhibits, human and animal, presented there.⁵⁸ While the term "ark" evokes the discourse of natural theology, as opposed to natural history, and suggests that the sheer variety of divine creation rather than scientific classification was the focus, Bullock found in environmental displays a fine way to combine theatrical effect, the experience of travel, and geographic principles.

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, geography was also an omnibus discipline devoted to all that is on the earth's surface, including people in their environment; geography subsumed anthropology and ethnography as subfields. Location on the earth's globe and relationships of specimens to landforms, climate, and local flora and fauna offered an alternative principle for arranging exhibitions of animals and people

Carl Hagenbeck's Sinhalese caravan.

From *Die Gartenlaube*, no. 34 (1884).

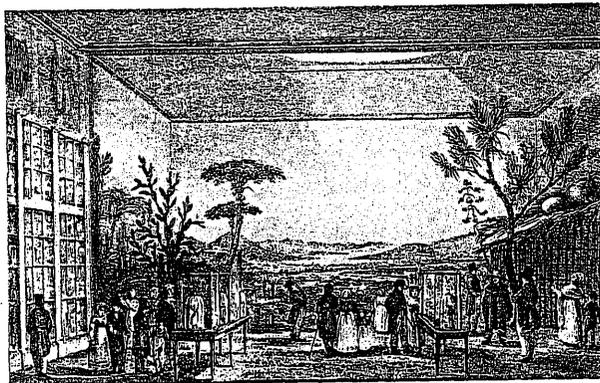


and encouraged environmental displays that showed the interrelation of elements in a habitat. Those who collected their own specimens, had firsthand knowledge of their habitat, and controlled how their materials were exhibited were more likely to present animals and people in their home environments. Like Bullock, who collected material for his displays while traveling and then tried to re-create the places he had visited, Peale hunted for many of his specimens himself, mounted them, and created settings for them based on his observations while hunting.

The passion for close visual observation on the spot had transformed how landscapes were experienced and described during the eighteenth century and shaped how specimens brought into galleries were exhibited, to the point that the experience of travel became the model for exhibitions about other places.⁵⁹ Visitors were offered the display as a surrogate for travel, and displays in turn participated in the discourse of travel, the

subject of chapter 5. Billed as travel experiences, panoramas were narrated by travelers who served as guides-at-a distance through landscapes they had personally traversed. Individuals who had assisted hunters and collectors abroad were brought into exhibitions both to complete the scene and to comment on it, thus transferring to the re-created travel setting the roles of native guide and animal handler.

Returning from Mexico in 1823 with casts of ancient remains, ethnographic objects, specimens of plants and animals, and a Mexican Indian youth, Bullock designed an exhibition that would make visitors feel like they were in Mexico enjoying a panoramic view of Mexico City (painted on the wall) and intimate contact with its inhabitants. An observer of the period reported that "[i]n order to heighten the deception, and to bring the spectator actually amidst the scenes represented, [he presented] a *fac simile* [*sic*] of a Mexican cottage and garden, with a tree, flowers, and fruit; they are exactly the size of their natural models, and bear an identity not to be mistaken." To complete the effect, Bullock installed the Mexican Indian youth in the cottage and had him describe objects to the visitors "as far as his knowledge of our language permits," thus making him do double duty as ethnographic specimen and museum docent.⁶⁰



William Bullock's exhibit of Mexico.

Lithograph by A. Aiglo, 1825. Photo courtesy Guildhall Library, Corporation of London.

Living Style

The moment live people are included in such displays the issue arises: what will they do? In considering the options for presenting people in "living style," it is useful to distinguish staged re-creations of cultural performances (wedding, funeral, hunt, martial arts display, shamanic ritual) and the drama of the quotidian (nursing a baby, cooking, smoking, spitting, tending a fire, washing, carving, weaving).⁶¹

In a highly popular African display mounted in 1853 at St. George's Gallery, Hyde Park, thirteen Kaffirs "portrayed 'the whole drama of Caffre life' against a series of scenes painted by Charles Marshall. They ate meals with enormous spoons, held a conference with a 'witchfinder' . . . , and enacted a wedding, a hunt, and a military expedition, 'all with characteristic dances,' the whole ending with a programmed general *mêlée* between the rival tribes."⁶² Two decades earlier, in 1822, Bullock had a Laplander family and live reindeer perform at Egyptian Hall, where they drove their sledge around a frosty panorama fitted out with their tents, utensils, and weapons. The Laplanders had been brought to care for the reindeer, who, it was hoped, could be introduced into England, but when this proved impractical, the Laplanders were recycled as ethnographic exhibits.⁶³ Ethnologists in London kept track of new ethnographic arrivals and took advantage of their presence for their research.⁶⁴

Whereas the notion that native life was inherently dramatic allowed it to be staged and billed as theater, the ability of natives to perform, and particularly to mime, was taken by some viewers as evidence of their humanity. Charles Dickens, who was otherwise disdainful of the people in live ethnographic displays, commented on seeing the Bushmen in Egyptian Hall in 1847, "Who that saw the four grim, stunted, abject Bushpeople at the Egyptian Hall—with two natural actors among them out of that number, one a male and the other a female—can forget how something human and imaginative gradually broke out in the ugly little man, when he was roused from crouching over the charcoal fire, into giving a dramatic representation of the tracking of a beast, the shooting of it with poisoned arrows, and the creature's death."⁶⁵ The Bushmen were installed against a scenic African background, and in addition to offering the "cultural performances" that so captivated Dickens, they slept and smoked, nursed an infant, and otherwise went about the business of daily

William Bullock's exhibit of Laplanders.

Engraving by Thomas Rowlandson, 1822. Photo courtesy Guildhall Library, Corporation of London.



Bushmen, with their agent, on display at Egyptian Hall.

From *Illustrated London News*, 12 June 1847. Photo courtesy Guildhall Library, Corporation of London.



life.⁶⁶ What is so extraordinary about Dickens's statement is the implication that what makes the Bushmen human is not their ability to hunt but their ability to mime the hunt—that is, their ability to represent.

As the everyday life of others came into focus as a subject for exhibition, ethnography offered, at least for some, a critique of civilization. In his 1911 account of the British Museum, Henry C. Shelley commented, "Perhaps the hilarity with which the ordinary visitor regards the object lessons of ethnography arises from his overweening conceit of the value and importance of his own particular form of civilization. No doubt he has much in common with that traveller who lost his way on his journey and described the climax of his experience in these words: 'After having walked eleven hours without having traced the print of a human foot, to my great comfort and delight, I saw a man hanging upon a gibbet; my pleasure at the cheering prospect was inexpressible, for it convinced me that I was in a civilized country.'"⁶⁷ This is the ethnological effect in reverse: our own barbarity is experienced as civilized.

Exhibiting the Quotidian

Genre Errors

The drama of the quotidian feeds on what John MacAloon calls a *genre error*; one man's life is another man's spectacle.⁶⁸ Exhibitions institutionalize this error by producing the quotidian as spectacle, and they do this by building the role of the observer into the structure of events that, left to their own devices, are not subject to formal viewing. Following Dean MacCannell's analysis of "staged authenticity," such exhibitions "stage the back region," thereby creating a new front region.⁶⁹ In what is a logical corollary of the autonomous object, people, their realia and activities, are mounted in a hermetic aesthetic space—fenced off in a zoological garden, raised up on a platform in a gallery, placed on a stage, or ensconced in a reconstructed village on the lawn of the exhibition grounds—and visitors are invited to look.

There is something about the seamlessness of the commonsense world, its elusiveness, that makes such genre errors so appealing. For the quotidian, by virtue of its taken-for-grantedness, presents itself as given, natural,

just there, unnoticed because assumed. It becomes available for contemplation under special conditions, most commonly through the repetition that produces boredom, or through the comparisons (induced by contrast, incongruity, violation, and impropriety) that call the taken-for-granted into question.⁷⁰ The task of creating fissures that offer evidence that the ordinary is really there propels the fascination with penetrating the life space of others, getting inside, burrowing deep into the most intimate places, whether the interior of lives or the innermost recesses of bodies. In making a spectacle of oneself, or others, "what is private or hidden becomes publicly exhibited; what is small or confined becomes exaggerated, grand or grandiose."⁷¹ The everyday lives of others are perceptible precisely because what they take for granted is not what we take for granted, and the more different we are from each other, the more intense the effect, for the exotic is the place where nothing is utterly ordinary. Such encounters force us to make comparisons that pierce the membrane of our own quotidian world, allowing us for a brief moment to be spectators of ourselves, an effect that is also experienced by those on display.

Imagine being installed in a room at an exhibition where one's only instruction was to go about one's daily chores just like at home—making coffee, reading the *New York Times*, working at the computer, talking on the phone, walking the dog, sleeping, flossing, opening the mail, eating granola, withdrawing cash from a money machine—while curious visitors looked on. The challenge in such displays is to avoid "performance," that is, to maintain an asymmetrical reciprocity, whereby those who are

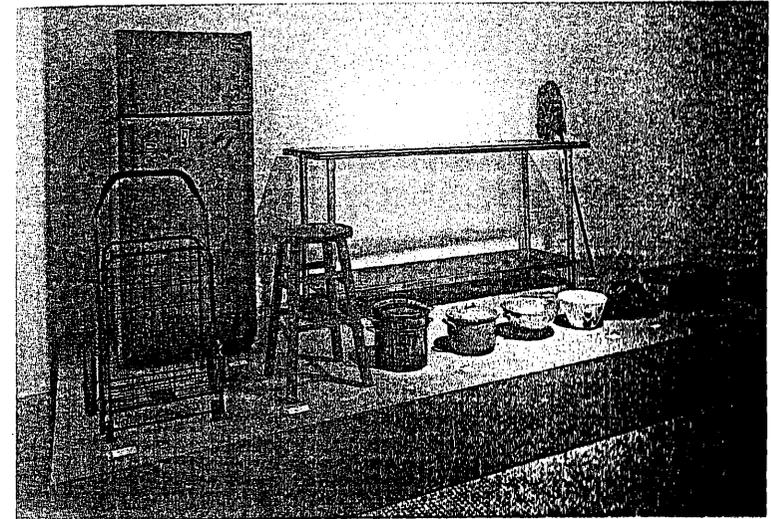
"Great Excitement—Indian Lady Throwing Out Dishwater" at the World's Columbian Exposition.
From *Chicago Sunday Herald*, 17 September 1893.



GREAT EXCITEMENT—INDIAN LADY THROWING
OUT DISHWATER.

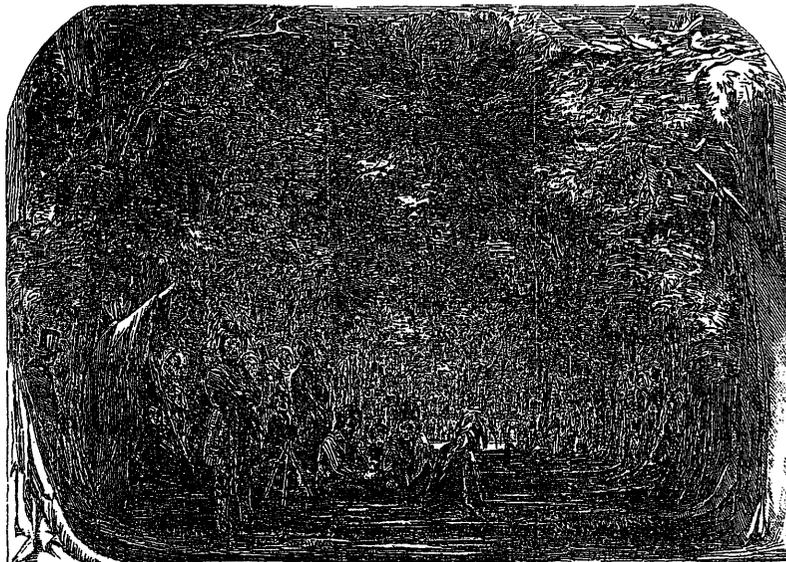
Contents of a New York apartment.

Displayed at the New-York Historical Society, 1995. *Inventory*, an installation by Christian Boltanski for *Lost: New York Projects*, a Citywide Project of the Public Art Fund. Photo by Dorothy Zeldman.



being watched go about their business as if no one were paying attention to them, though we have long known that what we observe is changed by virtue of being observed. Or, closer to home, imagine that the contents of your apartment are removed—everything in your medicine cabinet, kitchen cupboards, and wardrobe, your refrigerator and sofa, vacuum cleaner and radio, socks and laxatives—and installed in a local museum. Christian Boltanski effected precisely such a removal at the Baden-Baden Kunsthalle in 1973 and more recently at the New-York Historical Society in 1995. Titled "Inventory," the installation served as "an ironically pathetic museum dedicated to an anonymous person," someone close at hand and very much alive, though the experience was more like viewing the personal effects of the deceased—perhaps forensic evidence gathered by the police from the scene of a crime—or the possessions of a displaced person, whether confiscated or abandoned.⁷²

The reciprocity of the museum effect can be triggered by a simple "turn of the head," which bifurcates the viewer's gaze between the exotic display and her own everyday world. A visitor to the Bushman exhibition at Egyptian Hall in 1847 commented, "It was strange, too, in looking through one of the windows of the [exhibition] room into the busy street, to reflect that by a single turn of the head might be witnessed the two extremes of humanity."⁷³ The pane of glass that separated the illusion of being somewhere else from the immediacy of life on London streets was eliminated in presentations that depended in part for their effect on intensifying just such incongruities. In George Catlin's display in London in 1844, "[t]he spectacle of Red Indians encamped [in four wigwams] and demonstrating their horsemanship on the greensward at Vauxhall, where eighteenth-century beaux had strolled with the belles of Fanny Burney's set, must have been one of the more striking sights of the day."⁷⁴



"Fête Champêtre at Charlton House—the North American Indians encamped in the park."

Sketched by G. Harrison. *Illustrated London News*, 5 July 1845.

To those who complained that "to place the savage man in direct contrast with the most elaborate of man's performances is too abrupt a proceeding, besides being useless," Dr. John Conolly, president of the Ethnological Society of London, answered in 1855 that the inclusion of ethnological exhibits at the Crystal Palace in Sydenham offered valuable contrasts. In his view, these displays "set off the splendour of . . . [man's] performances when his social advantages are enlarged" and showed that everyone can "emerge from barbarism and want to refinement and enjoyment"—a message both of British superiority and of optimism in the perfectibility of humankind.⁷⁵

The incongruity of intercalating two different quotidian reaches an apotheosis of sorts in displays that presented exotic people not in their native habitat but in ours. Ironically, at least one observer of pygmies playing the piano in a well-appointed drawing room on Regent Street in 1853 thought this arrangement preferable to having them "set up on a platform to be stared at, and made to perform distasteful feats," for among other things, "the visitor literally gives them a call, and becomes one of their society," which is to say one's own society. These pygmies had learned English and acquired the "rudiments of European civilization."⁷⁶

The Museum Effect

Once the seal of the quotidian is pierced, life is experienced as if represented: the metaphors of life as a book, stage, and museum capture this effect with nuances particular to each metaphor. Like the picturesque, in which paintings set the standard for experience, museum exhibitions transform how people look at their own immediate environs. The museum effect works both ways. Not only do ordinary things become special when placed in museum settings, but the museum experience itself becomes a model for experiencing life outside its walls. As the gaze that penetrated exhibitions of people from distant lands was turned to the streets of European and American cities, urban dwellers such as James Boswell reported that walking in the streets of London in 1775 was "a high entertainment of itself. I see a vast museum of all objects, and I think with a kind of wonder that I see it for nothing."⁷⁷

Bleeding into the ubiquity of the commonsense world, the museum effect brings distinctions between the exotic and the familiar closer to home. Calibrations of difference become finer. The objects differentiated draw nearer. One becomes increasingly exotic to oneself, as one imagines how others might view that which we consider normal: writing about the *danse du ventre* in the Little Cairo area of the Midway Plaisance at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Frederic Ward Putnam commented that visitors might assume wrongly that this dance was "low and repulsive" because they did not understand it, but that "the waltz would seem equally strange to these dusky women of Egypt."⁷⁸

In America and England during the 1890s, recently arrived immigrants became the ethnographic other, in part as a way of creating social distance under the threatening conditions of physical proximity. A paper entitled "Mission-Work among the Unenlightened Jews," which was delivered at the Jewish Women's Congress in 1893 at the Chicago World's fair, characterized immigrants in London and New York as "half-dressed, pale-skinned natives in our own towns" and noted that "Borrioboola Gha has been supplanted by 'Whitechapel,' 'Mulberry Bend,' and the nearest district tenements."⁷⁹

The trope of the city as dark continent and the journalist and social reformer as adventurer-ethnographer was common in such mid-nineteenth-century accounts as Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861-1862).⁸⁰ One of the attractions of poor neighborhoods was their accessibility to the eye, their "intimacy at sight." Any stranger could see openly on the streets what in better neighborhoods was hidden in an inaccessible domestic interior, a closed carriage, or under layers of clothing. At the turn of the twentieth century in New York City, one writer remarked,

Mankind is not only the noblest study of man, but the most entertaining. People are more interesting than things or books, even newspapers. The East Side is especially convenient for observation of people because there are such shoals of them always in sight, and because their habits of life and manners are frank, and favorable to a certain degree of intimacy at sight. Where each family has a whole house to itself and lives inside of it, and

the members never sally out except in full dress—hats, gloves, and manners—it is hopeless to become intimately acquainted with them as you pass on the sidewalk. You may walk up and down Fifth Avenue for ten years and never see a Fifth Avenue mother nursing her latest born on the doorstep, but in Mott or Mulberry or Cherry Street that is a common sight, and always interesting to the respectful observer. When the little Fifth Avenue children are let out, if they don't drive off in a carriage, at least they go with a nurse, and are clothed like field daisies, and under such restraint as good clothes and even the kindest nurses involve. But the East Side children tumble about on the sidewalk and pavement hour after hour, under slight restraint and without any severe amount of oversight, hatless usually, barehanded and barefooted when the weather suffers it.⁸¹



Maypole on a Lower East Side street.

From E. S. Martin, "East Side Considerations,"
Harper's New Monthly Magazine 96 (May 1898).

The blend here of repulsion and attraction, condemnation and celebration, so typical of the reception of ethnographic displays in exhibition halls, reveals that the source of the critique is also the basis of the appeal. "Intimacy at sight," which suggests a kind of social nakedness, combines with the "view from the sidewalk" to verge on what might be termed social pornography—the private made public. Or rather, disparities in class and in cultural definitions of private and public are exploited here: the discrepancy between what others make public that we consider private also generates voyeuristic excitement in zoos, particularly in primate displays. Similarly, in madhouses, which from the early seventeenth century in Europe also combined confinement with display, the public was free to enter and observe the ravings of lunatics.⁸² While respectability has the power to control access to sight, to conceal, poverty, madness, children, animals, and the "lower" orders of humankind reveal by exposing themselves fully to view. Historically, ethnography has constituted its subjects at the margins of geography, history, and society. Not surprisingly, then, in a convergence of moral adventure, social exploration, and sensation seeking, the inner city is constructed as a socially distant but physically proximate exotic—and erotic—territory. Visits to this territory tempt the adventurer to cross the dangerous line between voyeurism and acting out.⁸⁵

Slumming, like tourism more generally, takes the spectator to the site, and as areas are canonized in a geography of attractions, whole territories become extended ethnographic theme parks. An ethnographic bell jar drops over the terrain. A neighborhood, village, or region becomes for all intents and purposes a living museum in situ. The museum effect, rendering the quotidian spectacular, becomes ubiquitous.

The Panoptic Mode

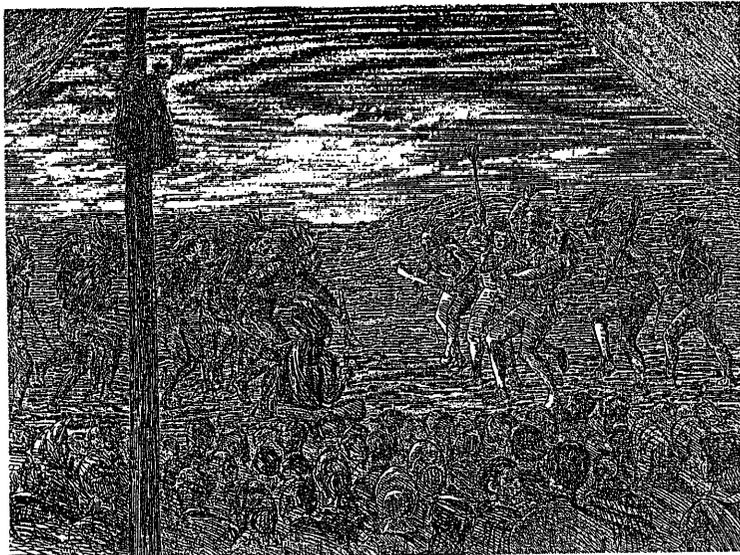
In contrast with the panoramic perspective of all-encompassing classifications, in situ approaches to the display of the quotidian work in a panoptic mode whereby the viewer sees without himself being visible. The panoramic approach lays out the whole world conceptually in a Linnaean classification or evolutionary scheme or experientially in a scenic effect, which makes such technologies of seeing as the eidophusikon, a small mechanical theater, and the related theatrical panorama and dio-

rama, so appealing. Offered a supreme vantage point, the viewer is master of all that he surveys. The view is comprehensive, extensive, commanding, aggrandizing. As a prospect, it holds in it scenarios for future action.⁸⁴

In contrast, the panoptic approach offers the chance to see without being seen, to penetrate interior recesses, to violate intimacy. In its more problematic manifestations, the panoptic mode has the quality of peep show and surveillance: the viewer is in control, like a warden in a prison. In its more benign mode, the panoptic takes the form of hospitality, a host welcoming a guest to enter a private sphere.⁸⁵ A recent guide to ethnographic re-creations of "homes" at the Field Museum in Chicago exemplified the panoptic mode: "Each of the houses has had part of the walls and roof removed so you may peek inside."⁸⁶ The issue is the power to open up to sight differentially, to show with respect to others what one would not reveal about oneself—one's body, person, and life.

Live exhibits as a representational mode make their own kinds of claims. Even when efforts are taken to the contrary, live exhibits tend to make people into artifacts because the ethnographic gaze objectifies. Where people are concerned, there is a fine line between attentive looking and staring. To make people going about their ordinary business objects of visual interest and available to total scrutiny is dehumanizing, a quality of exhibitions that was not lost on some viewers in London during the nineteenth century who complained about live displays on humanitarian grounds.⁸⁷

Live displays, whether re-creations of daily activities or staged as formal performances, also create the illusion that the activities you watch are being done rather than represented, a practice that creates the effect of authenticity, or realness. The impression is one of unmediated encounter. Semiotically, live displays make the status of the performer problematic, for people become signs of themselves. We experience a representation, even when the representers are the people themselves. Self-representation is representation nonetheless. Whether the representation essentializes (you are seeing the quintessence of Balineseness) or totalizes (you are seeing the whole through the part), the ethnographic fragment returns with all the problems of capturing, inferring, constituting, and presenting the whole through parts.



"War Dance—Indian Department," at the Metropolitan Fair in Manhattan, 1864, one of several Sanitary Fairs organized during the Civil War. Such performances, in combination with displays of artifacts, helped raise money for the medical care of the wounded, who had been dying in large numbers because of unhygienic conditions. The reciprocity of disappearance and exhibition, the former a condition for the latter, is expressed by one reporter, as follows:

In the Fourteenth Street Buildings BIERSTADT'S INDIAN WIGWAM has been constantly crowded by visitors desiring to study the habits and peculiarities of the aborigines. Several performances have been given daily by the Indians. Our sketch represents a WAR DANCE, as given on several occasions to the intense gratification of all spectators. Historically, no feature of the fair has greater interest than this in which the life of those who, only a little while ago, held undisputed possession of our continent, is reproduced by a handful of the once absolute tribes for the pleasure of the pale-faced race, whose ancestors pushed them into obscurity and historical oblivion.

Harper's Weekly (23 April 1864): 260.

Performing Culture

We might distinguish between the museum as a form of interment—a tomb with a view—and the live display, which is not without its own relationship to disappearance, as Native American performances in the nineteenth century attest. These metaphors have roots in the history of interment and incarceration as display traditions in their own right. Differences between them are expressed in the sensory organization of display.

The Senses Compartmentalized

The partiality so essential to the ethnographic object as a fragment is also expressed in the fragmentation of sensory apprehension in conventional museum exhibitions. With the important exceptions of popular entertainment, opera, masques and banquets, and avant-garde performance, among others, the European tendency has been to split up the senses and parcel them out one at a time to the appropriate art form. One sense, one art form. We listen to music. We look at paintings. Dancers don't talk. Musicians don't dance. Sensory atrophy is coupled with close focus and sustained attention. All distractions must be eliminated—no talking, rustling of paper, eating, flashing of cameras. Absolute silence governs the etiquette of symphony halls and museums. Aural and ocular epiphanies in this mode require pristine environments in which the object of contemplation is set off for riveting attention. Rules posted at the entrance and guards within ensure that decorum prevails. When reclassified as "primitive art" and exhibited as painting and sculpture, as singular objects for visual apprehension, "ethnographic artifacts" are elevated, for in the hierarchy of material manifestations the fine arts reign supreme. To the degree that objects are identified with their makers, the cultures or civilizations represented by works of art also rise in the hierarchy.

In contrast with conventional exhibitions in museums, which tend to reduce the sensory complexity of the events they represent and to offer them up for visual delectation alone, indigenous modes of display, particularly the festival, present an important alternative. As multisensory, multifocus events, festivals may extend over days, weeks, or months. They

"Tamil Theatrical Company: From South India, their performances are of extraordinary length, and last sometimes for twelve hours."

From *Souvenir of Ceylon: 24 Choice Photographic Character Studies* (Colombo, Ceylon: Plâté, n.d.).



require selective disattention, or highly disciplined attention, in an environment of sensory riot. The closeness of focus we expect to sustain in silence for a one-hour concert is inappropriate for events so large in scale and long in duration. Participants in the Ramlila, a festival and ritual drama that extends over many days in northern India, bring food, sleep through parts of the event, talk to their neighbors, get up, walk around, leave, return. All the senses—olfactory, gustatory, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, visual—are engaged. The experience tends to be environmental, as episodes of the drama are enacted in various locations, rather than hermetically sealed into an aesthetic space created by a proscenium, frame, or vitrine. Sensory saturation rather than sensory atrophy or single-sense epiphany is the order of the day. Sensory apprehension and attention must be structured differently in such events.

Every Day a Holiday

The festival, both as it occurs locally and as an anthology of ethnographic displays, can be seen as a form of environmental performance. Though museum exhibitions can also be considered a form of environmental theater—visitors moving through the space experience the *mise-en-scène* visually and kinesthetically—they tend to proceed discursively. Arts festivals are generally less didactic and less textual. They depend more on performance, reserving extended textual analysis, to the degree that it is offered, for the program booklet, in this way avoiding the awkwardness of discoursing about living people in their very presence.

There is a convergence of sensibility here between ethnographers interested in the festival as a display genre and the discovery by the historical avant-garde of the theatricality of everyday life and their interest in vernacular genres. Rejecting the conventions of classical European theater, with its dependence on the dramatic text, formal theater architecture, and mimetic conventions, Antonin Artaud, Bertolt Brecht, and eastern European directors working during the interwar years looked to Balinese and Chinese performance and European folk and popular forms for new artistic possibilities. Their artistic sensibility valorized forms that were otherwise of strictly local or ethnographic interest and offered the possibility of experiencing them with a distinctly modernist sensibility as models of pure theatricality. They created new audiences for "ethnographic performances" and a hospitable climate for festivals that excerpted and re-presented them.

Tourists who have difficulty deciphering and penetrating the quotidian of their destination find in festivals the perfect entrée. Public and spectacular, festivals have the practical advantage of offering in a concentrated form, at a designated time and place, what the tourist would otherwise search out in the diffuseness of everyday life, with no guarantee of ever finding it. Typically, local festivals are simply put on the tourist itinerary. A 1981 brochure issued by India's Department of Tourism does just this.

Why festivals? Because they celebrate the joy of life. The Indian calendar is a long procession of festivals. The traveller may come when he pleases,

a spectacle always awaits him. If you find yourself in the right place at the right time, it is possible to go through the calendar with a festival daily! It may be the harvest in the south, the golden yellow of short-lived spring in the north, the seafront spectacle of Ganesh's immersion in Bombay, the fantastic car festival of Puri, the snake-boat races in Kerala or the Republic Day pageant in New Delhi. Each is different. Every region, every religion has something to celebrate. . . . Take in a festival when you come to India. No land demands so much of its legends—or, in celebrating the past, bedecks the present so marvellously.



Chinese New Year.

Chinatown, New York, 1985. Lion dance by Pak Hok martial arts club in front of a restaurant. Photo by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.

While large festivals can usually absorb tourists with ease, producers may take steps to keep casual observers away from smaller events they might overwhelm. Still other local ceremonies that are extremely costly to produce thrive as a result of tourist interest and dollars: cremations in Bali, which require vast sums of money, can now occur on a larger scale and more often thanks to the revenues generated by tourists who pay to attend them.

Festivals are cultural performances par excellence. Their boundaries discernable in time and space, they are particularly amenable to encapsulation. Because whole festivals generally offer more than the casual traveler can consume, and because such complex events do not travel well, entrepreneurs often excerpt local festivals and incorporate their parts into other kinds of events. In an effort to make such attractions more profitable, as well as to restrict the access of tourists to areas of local life declared off-limits, events are adapted to the special needs of recreational travelers. Events staged specifically for visitors are well suited for export because they have already been designed for foreign audiences on tight schedules. Exported events developed for international expositions may be brought back home in the hope of attracting tourists into the local economy. Balinese performances developed for the Colonial Exposition in Paris in 1931 were brought back to Bali, where versions of them continue to be presented to tourists.

Import the tourist? Or export the village and festival? These processes are reciprocal. Ethnographic displays are not only a way to re-create the travel experience at a remove. Increasingly, these displays are introduced at the travel destinations themselves, where they may displace the travel experience altogether. All of Polynesia is represented on forty-two acres of the Hawaiian island Oahu, at the Polynesian Cultural Center: according to a 1985 promotional brochure, "[m]ore people come to know and appreciate Polynesia while touring these beautifully landscaped grounds than will ever visit those fabled islands."⁸⁸

As mass tourism has grown in the postwar period, festivals of all kinds have proliferated with the explicit intention of encouraging tourism. A 1954 guide to festivals in Europe makes this very point.

[The abundance of festivals] means fun for everyone who wants to frolic with our friends abroad when they are in their most festive moods, or they can frolic with us if they are so inclined. . . . [Americans want to satisfy their] curiosity about how other people live. . . . As everyone knows, just about the best time to see the most people in any region is at a festival. That is also a fine time to learn what interests or amuses them, because a festival invariably reflects the character of the region in which it takes place and dramatizes the economic and recreational attractions, as well as the spiritual and aesthetic aims of the people.⁸⁹

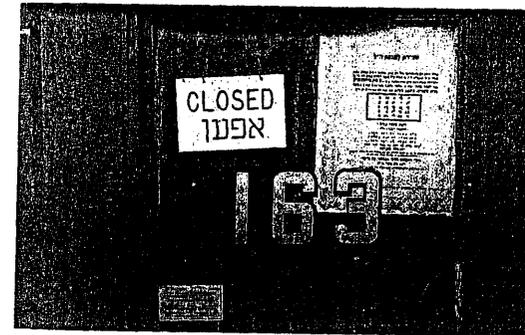
We have here the major tropes of ethnographic display, from the perspective of the tourism industry—the promise of visual penetration; access to the back region of other people's lives, the life world of others as our playground; and the view that people are most themselves when at play and that festivals are the quintessence of a region and its people.⁹⁰ To "frolic with our friends abroad" becomes the paradigm for intercultural encounter. The foreign vacationer at a local festival achieves perfect synchrony: everyone is on holiday, or so it seems. But to know a society only in its festival mode, filtered through the touristic lens of spectacle, is to raise another set of problems—the illusion of cultural transparency in the face of undeciphered complexity and the image of a society always on holiday. To festivalize culture is to make every day a holiday.

Folkloric Performance

The living quality of such performances does not make them any less autonomous as artifacts, for songs, tales, dances, and ritual practices are also ethnographically excised and presented as self-contained units, though not in quite the same way as material artifacts. You can detach artifacts from their makers, but not performances from performers. True, artifacts can be photographed and performances can be recorded. But artifacts are not photographs and performances are not recordings. While the pot can survive the potter (though it too will eventually crumble to dust), music cannot be heard except at the moment of its making. Like dance and other forms of performance, musical performance is evanescent and in

Purim.

Williamsburg, Brooklyn, 1982. Hasidic children, one costumed as the Biblical high priest Aaron and the other wearing an apron in the form of a Yiddish eye chart, deliver customary gifts of prepared food. Photo by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.



Storefront in Hasidic Williamsburg, Brooklyn, 1982. The sign says "closed" in English and "open" in Yiddish.

Photo by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.

need of constant renewal. To achieve for drumming the sense of "realness" conveyed by the physical presence of the drum, we need the drummer. But a drummer drumming is no less an ethnographic fragment. The proscenium stage, master of ceremonies, and program booklet are to the drummer what the vitrine, label, and catalog are to the drum. The centrality of human actors in performance and the inseparability of process and product are what distinguish performances from things. While an artifact may be viewed as a record of the process of its manufacture, as an indexical sign—process is there in material traces—performance is all process. Through the kind of repetition required by stage appearances, long runs, and extensive tours, performances can become like artifacts. They freeze. They become canonical. They take forms that are alien, if not antithetical, to how they are produced and experienced in their local settings, for with repeated exposure, cultural performances can become routinized and trivialized. The result may be events that have no clear analogue within the community from which they purportedly derive and that come to resemble one another more than that which they are intended to re-present.

Embedded in the flow of life, artifacts and performances that have historically interested ethnographers are contingent: they are not generally made to stand alone, set off for exclusively aesthetic attention. Forms that are perfectly satisfying in their indigenous setting—chants, drumming, a cappella ballads, repetitive dance steps—challenge audiences who are exposed to them on stages where they are used to seeing opera and ballet. Professional folkloric companies adapt such forms to European production values. To hold the interest of new audiences, folkloric troupes design a varied and eclectic program of short selections. They also depend on musical accompaniment (such as piano or orchestra), European harmony, concertized arrangements and vocal styles on the model of European opera, and movement styles on the order of ballet to reduce the strangeness and potential boredom of a cappella song, unison music, and repetitive (and not apparently virtuosic) dance for unfamiliar audiences. To meet strict time requirements and deliver exactly what has been advertised and announced in a printed program, improvisation may be curtailed, if not eliminated. A tightly coordinated ensemble of trained professionals, often more or less the same age and physical type, wear stylized,

often uniform, costumes while executing highly choreographed routines with great precision. A frontal orientation accommodates the proscenium stage, to which is added theatrical effects (sound, lighting, sets). There is a tendency toward the virtuosic, athletic, dramatic, and spectacular.

The repertoires of folkloric troupes typically include excerpts from festivals and rituals—weddings, healing ceremonies, and hunting rituals are favorites. While such excerpts allude to the contingent nature of music and dance, they partake of theater, having been severed from their local social and ceremonial settings and reclassified as art. At the same time, the proprietary rights to the material have been transferred from local areas to the "nation," where regional forms are declared national heritage. National troupes typically perform traditions from across the land, no matter what the personal histories of the performers. Since everyone can perform everything and everything belongs to everyone, differences do not differentiate. Polyglot programs, besides offering variety, generally represent an "imagined community" in which diversity is harmoniously integrated. Difference is reduced to style and decoration, to spice of life. Cultural difference is then praised for the variety and color it adds to an otherwise bland scene. ^{over, far below} --D KdK

Such choices in repertoire and style are ideologically charged. Folkloric troupes attempt to find a middle ground between exotic and familiar pleasures and to bring these forms (and their performers) into the European hierarchy of artistic expression, while establishing their performances as national heritage. The more modern the theater where the troupe performs the better, for often there is a dual message: powerful, modern statehood, expressed in the accoutrements of civilization and technology, is wedded to a distinctive national identity. The performance offers cultural content for that identity. Such assertions are not confined to the concert stage. They are implicated in claims to territorial sovereignty, the drawing of political boundaries, the choice of official language, and many other matters of vital concern in the tension among nation, state, and culture. Claims to the past lay the foundation for present and future claims. Having a past, a history, a "folklore" of your own, and institutions to bolster these claims, is fundamental to the politics of culture: the possession of a national folklore, particularly as legitimated by a national museum and troupe, is cited as a mark of being civilized.

Folk Festival

As a venue for the representation of culture, the festival derives its celebratory tone and environmental approach to staging from the joyful events associated with the traditional feasts and fêtes that honor a religious anniversary, event, or personage. But unlike feasts (the etymological root of *festival*), which do what they are about, festivals of the kind that interest us here re-enact, re-present, and re-create activities and places in a discrete performance setting designed for specular (and aural) commerce.⁹¹ Such events acquire a distinctive (if plural) semiotic status. Quivering with issues of authenticity and iconicity, these events tend to make a clear separation between doers and watchers—or among kinds of doers—even with efforts to encourage “participation.”

These issues are dramatized by the highly successful Festival of American Folklife, produced annually since 1967 on the Mall in Washington, D.C., by the Office of Folklife Programs at the Smithsonian Institution. This pioneering program is sensitive to the issues raised here and addresses them by experimenting with new ways to present folklife to the public. Two cases are particularly instructive here: the Festival of India and the Old Ways in the New World programs. Seen in historical perspective, these programs blend the national and state pavilions and ethnographic villages, long a staple feature of world's fairs, and the homelands exhibitions and festivals that celebrated immigrant “gifts” during the first half of this century.⁹²

Festival of India Recognizing the festival as a readymade genre of presentation, the 1975 guidelines for the Festival of American Folklife advised the following:

Because many genres survive in the context of esoteric community celebrations and rituals, large scale traditional celebration events should be used as organizing structures for “Old Ways in the New World” programs. Such events can be parades, processions, picnics, festivals, religious ceremonies, wedding festivities, or any similar event in which performing arts are closely associated with other traditional expressive forms. . . . Celebration events should allow direct participation by Festival visitors.⁹³

However connected it may be to what communities do at home, the festival within a festival is a re-creation. At its most mimetic, it offers a sumptuous alternative to the sensory atrophy of the bare stage.⁹⁴ The festival-within-a-festival format also presents formidable ethnographic and logistical challenges, particularly at the points where the two festivals are incompatible.

This insight guided the decision in 1985 to embed a festival within a festival within a festival—the mela within the Festival of India within the Festival of American Folklife.

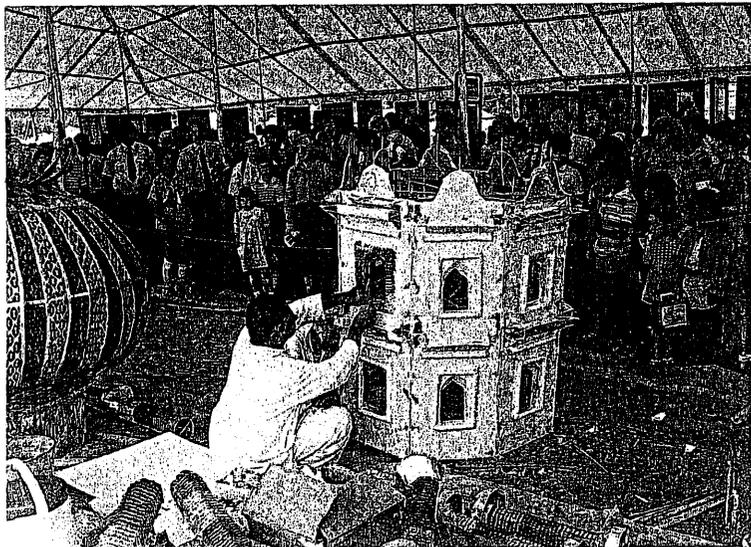
The Mela program on the Mall is really a fair within a fair. It is a composite mela, compressing both space and time to present selectively only a few of India's many traditions. Just as a mela would in India, the program encourages visitors to learn about and participate in Indian culture. The structures on the Mall have been built largely with natural and hand-crafted materials from India, while the site itself has been designed to reflect indigenous Indian concepts.⁹⁵

The *mela*, the fair that accompanies religious festivals in India, did indeed offer an ingenious format for displaying many kinds of artifacts, activities, and people (dance, music, acrobatics, street performers, religious observance, food, architecture, crafts) as they are integrated in their native setting. But of course this mela was to occur during a festival of our own making, and our festival and those of India are not necessarily compatible. Smithsonian festivals are events produced for the public with the taxpayers' dollars: they are not-for-profit ventures and studiously avoid the slightest hint of commercialism. Things are not for sale, except at the one small gift shop inconspicuously positioned at the edge of the main events. Goods are carefully selected for their appropriateness, and salespersons are expected to be well informed about the objects, their makers, and their makers' communities. They offer items relating to all the exhibits.

Indian fairs, by contrast, are full of things to buy. Each craftsperson and stall keeper competes with the others to sell goods. The Smithsonian mela on the Mall was a representation of a commercial environment,

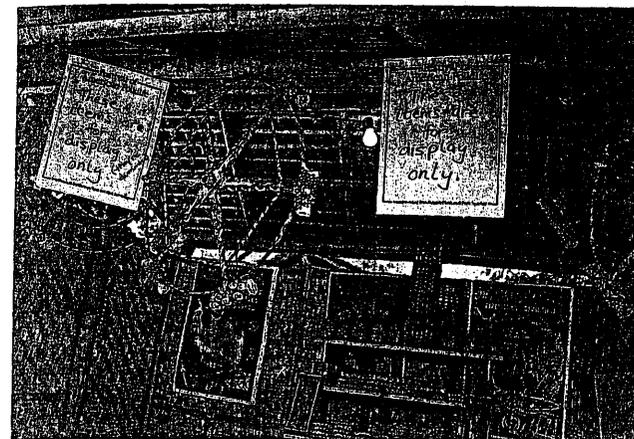
Mela exhibition, Festival of American Folklife, Washington, D.C., 1985. Habib-ur-Rehman fashions a *taziya*, a facsimile tomb of Hussein, out of tied bamboo and cut paper. In the background are photo-text panels explaining Indian religions, fairs, festivals, cosmological concepts, and aesthetic traditions.

Photo courtesy the Smithsonian Institution.



which, while mimetically very complete, paradoxically stopped short of commercial exchange. Indeed, it was necessary to post signs in the stalls to indicate that the goods were *not* for sale. Perhaps as a concession to authenticity, visitors were actually allowed to make purchases at a few designated stalls as well as in the sales tent. What do you get when a commercial Indian fair is embedded inside a noncommercial Smithsonian festival? Stalls of goods for sale that cannot be sold.⁹⁶

Food presented a similar problem. Clearly, the Department of Health would not countenance unlicensed vendors from India feeding visitors to the Mall. Instead, an Indian hotel chain catered the festival from a central



"These items are for display only," with graffiti "(they're dummies)," on signs in a market stall.

Mela exhibition, Festival of American Folklife, Washington, D.C., 1985. Photo by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.

post in the mela. Even were Department of Health requirements to be met, festival planners would probably encounter the resistance of local vendors to any intrusion on their economic turf by traditional cooks brought in for the day. Local commerce effectively inhibits efforts to re-create the culinary environment of traditional festivals.

Though intended as an evocative re-creation, ethnographically accurate and authentic in most details, the festival-within-the-festival is a distinct type of performance event, and the visitor inevitably experiences it as such. Though the intention may be to create the illusion of being in India, it is the re-creation itself that is experienced, with all of its tensions and ambiguities. When carried to extremes, as in the case of first-person interpretation at Plimoth Plantation, visitors experience the thrill of the hyperreal and at the same time perceive the fragility of the membrane that has been constructed to separate the present place and time from that which has been reconstructed.⁹⁷

"Old and New at Caesarea's Ancient Theatre." Israeli folk dance ensemble at an archeological site near Haifa, ca. 1966.

Copyright by "Palphot," Herzlia.



Old Ways in the New World Raising yet another set of problems, the Old Ways in the New World program integrated the national pavilion, foreign village, and homelands exhibition in an attempt to juxtapose folk artists in immigrant communities with their counterparts in their home countries. This was also a way to involve foreign countries in a festival of American folklife. But the assumption of a Jewish "old world" presented insurmountable problems. There was no Old World, as the European Jewish communities, from which most American Jews derive, were largely destroyed during the Holocaust.⁹⁸ Eliding differences between Old World and homeland, Israel was selected as the Jewish Old World for the purposes of the festival. But the "old ways" of American Jews were not to be found in the newly formed Jewish state, which was itself a case of new ways in a New World. Nor was Israel willing to be cast as the repository of the old ways of American Jews—quite the contrary.

"Amnon Oved (left) and Moshe Oved dance traditional Yemenite dances at the Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D.C. [1976]. They are one of six groups of Israeli Jews who are demonstrating the richness of traditions found in Israel today."

Photo courtesy the Smithsonian Institution.



When working with the Ministry of Education and Culture in Israel to identify appropriate performers for the Jewish section of the Bicentennial Festival of American Folklife in 1976, I was instructed to bring the finest exponents of "authentic" traditional art forms. Some of the performers who met this standard were born in Yemen, Morocco, or Iraq and were advanced in years. Israeli cultural officials wanted to send Israeli folk dance troupes, arguing that they were young, athletic, lively, versatile, and specially adapted for the stage. Not only were the professional folk dance troupes costumed and choreographed, but, I was told, they had been trained to perform the music and dance of the many different Jewish communities living in Israel, as well as the horas and other dances associated with the new state. Their performances conformed to professional standards and were stylized to reduce their strangeness. These were precisely the groups the Smithsonian's Office of Folklife Programs had in

structed me *not* to bring. The Israeli officials complained further that my choices would present entirely the wrong image of contemporary Israel and would offer a poor performance to boot: Israel and its culture were not to be represented by old immigrants performing exotic music of the Diaspora. Even to the extent that we succeeded in bringing traditional performers of our choice, we still faced the problem of relating these traditions to those of Jewish immigrants in America.

Staging Culture

A key to the appeal of many festivals, with their promise of sensory saturation and thrilling strangeness, is the insatiable and promiscuous human appetite for wonder. The irreducibility of strangeness, a feature of tourist discourse more generally, inscribes on the geography of the exotic a history of receding thresholds of wonder: as exposure exhausts novelty, new ways to raise the threshold of wonder must be found.⁹⁹ The passion for wonder also accounts for the primacy of spectacle as a presentational mode and for the tension between the very unspectacular nature of much material that we might want to present and the audiences' expectation that they will get a good show. Given the special way that spectacle works (clear separation of observer and actor, primacy of the visual mode, and an aggrandizing ethos), the spectacle of festival evokes what MacAloon has characterized as diffuse wonder or awe and precipitates intellectual and moral ambiguity, even with the various efforts to mitigate the effects.

We complain of ritual degenerating into spectacle, into sheer show. Historically, however, we have long valued the inscrutable strangeness of the exotic as an end in itself. The appeal of the villages on the Midway of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago depended largely on such mystification, and many multicultural festivals today still feed this appetite while at the same time encouraging understanding and reflection by offering "interpretation." That we objectify culture has long been recognized; festivals, however, also objectify the human performers and implicate them directly in this process. This is an inherently problematic way to confront cultural questions, for spectacle, by its very nature, displaces analysis and tends to suppress profound issues of conflict and marginalization. The more ethnographic festivals and museum exhibitions

succeed in their visual appeal and spectacular effect, the more they re-classify what they present as art and risk appealing to prurient interest.

Fighting the spectacular and the illusion of re-creation, the Office of Folklife Programs at the Smithsonian Institution has long advocated what might be called an ascetic approach to staging.

Costumes used only for stage performances, or for other exoteric purposes, are not appropriate for the Festival. This matter should be thoroughly reviewed in the field and reiterated in formal invitations and correspondence with participating groups and individuals.

In 1974, all the Greek-American participants, and most of the foreign Greek participants wore ordinary clothes throughout the five-day presentation. Costume was not a part of the two Greek-American *glendis* held on the Mall, because it is not customarily worn at *glendis* in this country. A few elderly participants from Greece wore traditional clothes every day, as they always do at home.¹⁰⁰

The concern that costumes that are worn only for stage performances not be donned for the Smithsonian presentation presents a paradox: from the perspective of many participants, the folklife festival is a stage performance, so why not wear costumes? There is a conflict here between two aesthetics.

As the Smithsonian's guidelines suggest, festivals organized by dominant cultural institutions such as museums and state folklife programs or funded by state and federal agencies share a performance discourse that often stands in contrast (if not in opposition) to the ways communities stage themselves. These differences are more than matters of taste and style; they offer different approaches to the marking of authenticity. Hallmarks of the festivals mounted by professional folklorists in the past include a focus both on performers who claim the forms they perform as their birthright and on the traditional components of their repertoire. Performance practices that entail an adaptation to the concert stage are discouraged, despite the fact that communities have often developed their own troupes, costumes, repertoires, choreography, musical arrangements, interpretations, dramatizations, and other conventions for presenting their performing arts on the concert stage for themselves and for outsiders.

Such adaptations, often derided as touristic kitsch, are studiously avoided by folklorists in favor of a very different set of conventions, many of which have evolved specifically for the "folklife festival." Typically, solo performers and ensembles are selected from among those who normally play at a community's festivities. Wearing ordinary clothing, they play on a bare stage within a large tent, the audience seated on bleachers or benches, or they play on a concert stage in an indoor auditorium. High-tech sound equipment and professional stage technicians ensure the best possible acoustics and documentary recording of the event. Explanatory text panels may be mounted near the entrance to the tent, and a large photomural of the performer's home environment may serve as a backdrop. An informed "presenter" introduces the performers, with sensitive explanations about the history, context, and meaning of what the audience is about to hear. The program booklet supplements the presentation with illustrated essays about the communities and traditions featured at the festival. Formal concerts are complemented by interactive and didactic workshops, demonstrations, lectures, and films.

Performers are discouraged from the use of electronic instruments (though there are exceptions), "ethnic costumes," nontraditional repertoires, concertized performance styles, choreography adapted for the stage, and other overtly theatrical concessions. There is thus a suppression of *representation* markers and a foregrounding of *presentation* markers, an avoidance of the suggestion of "theater" and an attempt to achieve the quality of pure presence, of a slice of life. Given the history of national troupes and pavilions and homelands exhibitions, it is easy to see why groups would expect to appear in costume and in organized troupes. This is, after all, the public face, as they have constructed it, of their private lives. And given the way that spectacle brings authenticity into question, it is easy to see why an ascetic aesthetic to staging should appeal to festival producers aiming to present rather than represent that life.

Performing Difference

The interest in displaying performance or in using performance as a way of displaying culture is, like the series of objects arranged to show a con-

tinuous historical process, linked to particular theoretical orientations. First, performance-oriented approaches to culture place a premium on the particularities of human action, on language as spoken and ritual as performed. Such approaches resist stripping the observed behavior of contingency in order to formulate norms, ideals, and structures of competency.¹⁰¹ Second, cultural performances as units of analysis have offered a distinct methodological advantage to those grappling with large and complex societies, where approaches that worked well in small settings are inadequate.¹⁰² The Manchester school of social anthropology found in "social dramas"—events that involved a breach of some kind and efforts to deal with it—a useful way to focus cultural analysis.¹⁰³ The sociologist Erving Goffman brought a dramaturgical approach to the analysis of ordinary social life in his own milieu. Third, performance, whether a focus for research or the basis of ethnographic display, is compatible with efforts among folklorists, ethnomusicologists, and anthropologists to deal with issues of diversity, pluralism, cultural equity, and empowerment, particularly when participants can control how they are represented.¹⁰⁴

The issue of who is qualified to perform culture is thorny because it reveals the implicit privileging of descent over consent in matters of cultural participation.¹⁰⁵ Though the guidelines for producing folklife festival programs stress visitor "participation," they are also usually clear in specifying that the "performers" at the festival are to be those to whom the arts "belong" by virtue of their having been acquired in a traditional manner and setting, that is, by insiders from insiders—by descent, though this distinction is not rigidly applied. "Outsiders," those who have chosen to learn the art even though they were not born into the communities that transmit it, are generally considered revivalists and may be excluded on this count, though here too the matter is more complicated. Thus those who are licensed to do are distinguished from those who are mandated to watch. The event is to be structured, however, in ways that will allow the watchers to "participate," a notion that generally stops short of permitting them to perform the tradition themselves, except as they are invited to join a procession or the group dancing and singing.

The curatorial problem in folk festivals is the delicate one of determining not only what meets certain standards of excellence but, first

and foremost, what qualifies as authentic folk performance. As a result, performances at folk festivals are often artifacts of the discipline of folklore, whatever else they may be. We speak of the Child ballads, the Grimm *märchen*, the Perrault fairy tales, and other traditional forms that have been canonized in printed collections, museum exhibitions, commercial recordings, and folk festivals. We also create the criteria by which the multiplicity of forms we find can be sorted into their "preferred" and "residual" categories.¹⁰⁶

There is a danger in what Stuart Hall calls self-enclosed approaches, which, "valuing 'tradition' for its own sake, and treating it in an ahistorical manner, analyze cultural forms as if they contained within themselves from their moment of origin, some fixed and unchanging meaning or value."¹⁰⁷ Further, those who organize folk festivals must accept the responsibility for representing those they include in "their most traditionalist form."¹⁰⁸ While folklife festivals attempt to represent traditions that would otherwise not be exposed, it is also the case that those who perform tend to be represented exclusively in traditional terms.

Following Hall, we might consider the opposition of folklore/not folklore, not as a descriptive problem or a matter of coming up with the right inventory of cultural forms, but rather in terms of the "forces and relations which sustain the distinction, the difference" between what counts as a genuine tradition, a revival, fakelore, or elite culture. Hall suggests that the categories tend to remain, though the inventories change, and that institutions such as universities, museums, and arts councils play a crucial role in maintaining the distinctions: "The important fact, then, is not a mere descriptive inventory—which may have the negative effect of freezing popular culture into some timeless descriptive mould—but the relations of power which are constantly punctuating and dividing the domain of culture into its preferred and its residual categories."¹⁰⁹ Similarly, by aestheticizing "folklore"—no matter what is gained by the all-inclusive definition of folklore as the arts of everyday life—we are in danger of depoliticizing what we present by valorizing an aesthetics of marginalization.

Though there are still many festivals devoted to the traditions of a single ethnic group, large-scale events sponsored by city, state, and federal

Factory workers in Troy, New York, present a Ukrainian wedding party, as remembered from their native village, at the homelands exhibition in the State Educational Building in Albany, New York, 1920.



agencies are generally multicultural in nature. They participate in the discourse of pluralism, of unity in diversity. They risk what might be termed the "banality of difference," whereby the proliferation of variation has the neutralizing effect of rendering difference (and conflict) inconsequential.¹¹⁰ This is the effect, by design, of the pageants of democracy so popular during the first decades of this century.¹¹¹ Though offered as an alternative to the brutal efforts of nativists to suppress difference and preserve the preeminence of Anglo stock and culture, the unity-in-diversity discourse can also have a neutralizing effect.

In festivals of cultural performances, respectability and decorum, values of the dominant cultural institutions that stage the event, tend to diffuse the oppositional potential so essential to festivals. For this and other reasons, these festivals have a tendency to reinforce the status quo even as enlightened organizers and performers struggle to use them to voice oppositional values. Carnival represented is carnival tamed. In the case of the

homelands exhibitions and festivals, immigrant organizations were already doing a good job of supporting a wide variety of cultural activities. "National festivals" organized by immigrant groups in American cities during the last decades of the nineteenth century attracted tens of thousands of participants. In the homelands exhibitions and festivals organized during the first half of this century, "cooperation" between Americanization agencies and immigrant groups, however well-intentioned, also involved co-optation. Homelands exhibitions were designed to gain the trust of immigrants, who, it was hoped, would allow themselves to be helped by Americanization organizations. These events were not simply displays of immigrant gifts—crafts, music, dance, and wholesome values. Equally important—and the organizers were explicit on this point—they were good public relations for the Americanization workers and social reformers, who were themselves on display. Through such exhibits and festivals, they could show their success in working with immigrants and lobby for increased support.

Exhibitions, whether of objects or people, are displays of the artifacts of our disciplines. They are for this reason also exhibits of those who make them, no matter what their ostensible subject. The first order of business is therefore to examine critically the conventions guiding ethnographic display, to explicate how displays constitute subjects and with what implications for those who see and those who are seen. Museum exhibitions, folkloric performances, and folklife festivals are guided by a poetics of detachment, in the sense not only of material fragments but also of a distanced attitude. The question is not whether an object is of visual interest, but rather how interest of any kind is created. All interest is vested.

Exhibiting Jews

The Crystal Palace, which opened in London in 1851, ushered in an era of international expositions. Though rooted in an earlier history of trade fairs and industrial exhibitions, the great world's fairs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were unprecedented in scale and extravagance. In spectacular exhibition halls, the nations of the world compared themselves, competed for preeminence, and projected a utopian future built on the machine, international trade, and world peace. Whole cities were built to accommodate these fairs, and millions of people attended them. Coming as they did with the growing military and economic power of modern nation-states, the consolidation of large colonial empires, the mass migration of populations, and the rapid rise of industrialization, world's fairs offer for analysis a virtual phantasmagoria of "imagined communities" and "invented traditions."¹

Between 1851 and 1940 Jews represented themselves at international expositions in Europe and America in a wide range of ways. They defended such universal values as religious freedom. They framed the presentation of Jewish subjects in terms of art and civilization and secured for Judaism a central place in the history of religion. By the early twentieth century, immigrants in American cities were re-creating the Diaspora as a world's fair in miniature. Jews in Europe and America were also

II Ethnography

Performing as a Moral Act Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance

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

—ALASDAIR MACINTYRE (1984, 221)

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

—VINE DELORIA, JR. (1969, 98)

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

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

ing maturity. I begin with texts, then weave contexts around them to make them meaningful, to make life comprehensible. (Glassie 1982, xvi)

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

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

Since Dewey, it has been much more difficult to regard thinking as an abstention from action, theorizing as an alternative to commitment, and the intellectual life as a kind of secular monasticism, excused from accountability by its sensitivity to the Good. (Geertz 1968, 140)

This view cuts off the safe retreat into aestheticism, art for art’s sake, and brings performance “out into the public world where ethical judgment can get at it” (Geertz 1968, 139).

Moral and ethical questions get stirred to the surface because ethnographers of performance explode the notion of aesthetic distance.¹ In their fieldwork efforts to grasp the native’s point of view, to understand the human complexities displayed in even the most humble folk performance, ethnographers try to surrender themselves to the centripetal pulls of culture, to get close to the face of humanity where life is not always pretty. Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard wrote that fieldwork “requires a certain kind of character and temperament. . . . To succeed in it a man must be able to abandon himself to native life without reserve” (Geertz 1983, 72–73). Instead of worrying about maintaining aesthetic distance, ethnographers try to bring “the enormously distant enormously close without becoming any less far away” (Geertz 1983, 48).

Moreover, ethnographers work with expressivity, which is inextricable from its human creators. They must work with real people, human-kind alive, instead of printed texts. Opening and interpreting lives is very different from opening and closing books. Perhaps that is why ethnographers worry more about acquiring experiential insight than maintaining aesthetic distance. Indeed, they are calling for empathic performance as a way of intensifying the participative nature of fieldwork, and as a corrective to foreshorten the textual distance that results from writing monographs about the people with whom one lives and studies (Turner

1982). When one keeps intellectual, aesthetic, or any other kind of distance from the other, ethnographers worry that other people will be held at an ethical and moral remove as well.

Whatever else one may say about ethnographic fieldwork, Geertz reminds us, "one can hardly claim that it is focused on trivial issues or abstracted from human concerns" (Geertz 1968, 139). This kind of research "involves direct, intimate and more or less disturbing encounters with the immediate details of contemporary life" (Geertz 1968, 141). When ethnographers of performance complement their participant observation fieldwork by actually performing for different audiences the verbal art they have studied *in situ*, they expose themselves to double jeopardy. They become keenly aware that performance does not proceed in ideological innocence and axiological purity.

Most researchers who have extended ethnographic fieldwork into public performance will experience resistance and hostility from audiences from time to time.² This disquieting antagonism, however, more than the audience approval, signals most clearly that ethnographic performance is a form of conduct deeply enmeshed in moral matters. I believe that all performance has ethical dimensions, but have found that moral issues of performance are more transparent when the performer attempts to engage ethnic and intercultural texts, particularly those texts outside the canon and derived from fieldwork research.

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

I have performed the stories of the refugees for dozens of audiences. In addition to academic audiences, where the performance usually complements a theoretical argument I want to make about the epistemologi-

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

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

lected and thus making the people “sound stupid and backward.” Weeks after a performance I’ve received letters from people telling me how angry they were, that they “couldn’t sleep” when thinking about the performance, and that it had given them “bad dreams.”

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

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

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

I agree with Wallace Bacon that the validity of an intercultural performance is “an ethical concern no less than a performance problem”

(Bacon 1984). Good will and an open heart are not enough when one “seeks to express cultural experiences which are clearly separate from his or her lived world” (Bacon 1984, 95). I would like to sketch four ethical pitfalls, performative stances towards the other that are morally problematic. I name these performative stances “The Custodian’s Rip-Off,” “The Enthusiast’s Infatuation,” “The Curator’s Exhibitionism,” and “The Skeptic’s Cop-Out.” These four problem areas can be graphically represented as the extreme corners of a moral map articulated by intersecting axes of ethnographic tensions. The vertical axis is the tensive counterpull between Identity and Difference, the horizontal axis between Detachment and Commitment (see Figure 1). The extreme points of both sets of continua represent “dangerous shores” to be navigated, binary oppositions to be transcended. The center of the map represents the moral center that transcends and reconciles the spin-off extremes. I call this dynamic center, which holds in tensive equipoise the four contrarities, “Dialogical Performance.”³ After mapping the five performative stances in order to see their alignments, I will discuss each one in more detail.⁴

The Custodian’s Rip-Off

The sin of this performative stance is Selfishness. A strong attraction toward the other coupled with extreme detachment results in acquisitiveness instead of genuine inquiry, plunder more than performance. Bacon provided a striking example of this performative stance when he cited the case of the Prescott Smoki cultural preservation group who continued to perform the Hopi Snake Dance over the vigorous objections of Hopi elders. This group appropriated cherished traditions, reframed them in a way that was sacrilegious to the Hopi, and added insult to injury by selling trinkets for \$7.50, all in the name of preserving “dying cultures” (Bacon 1984, 94–95). The immorality of such performances is unambiguous and can be compared to theft and rape.

Potential performers of ethnographic materials should not enter the field with the overriding motive of “finding some good performance material.” An analogy from my fieldwork situation would be my performance of some of the stunningly theatrical shaman chants of Hmong healers replete with black veil over face and sacred costume. Not even a Hmong man or woman may perform these sacred traditions at will. You must be called to shamanic performance, which typically is signaled by a life-threatening illness, during which you have tremors, “shake” (*oy nang*, the Hmong word for “shaman,” is the same word for “shake”).

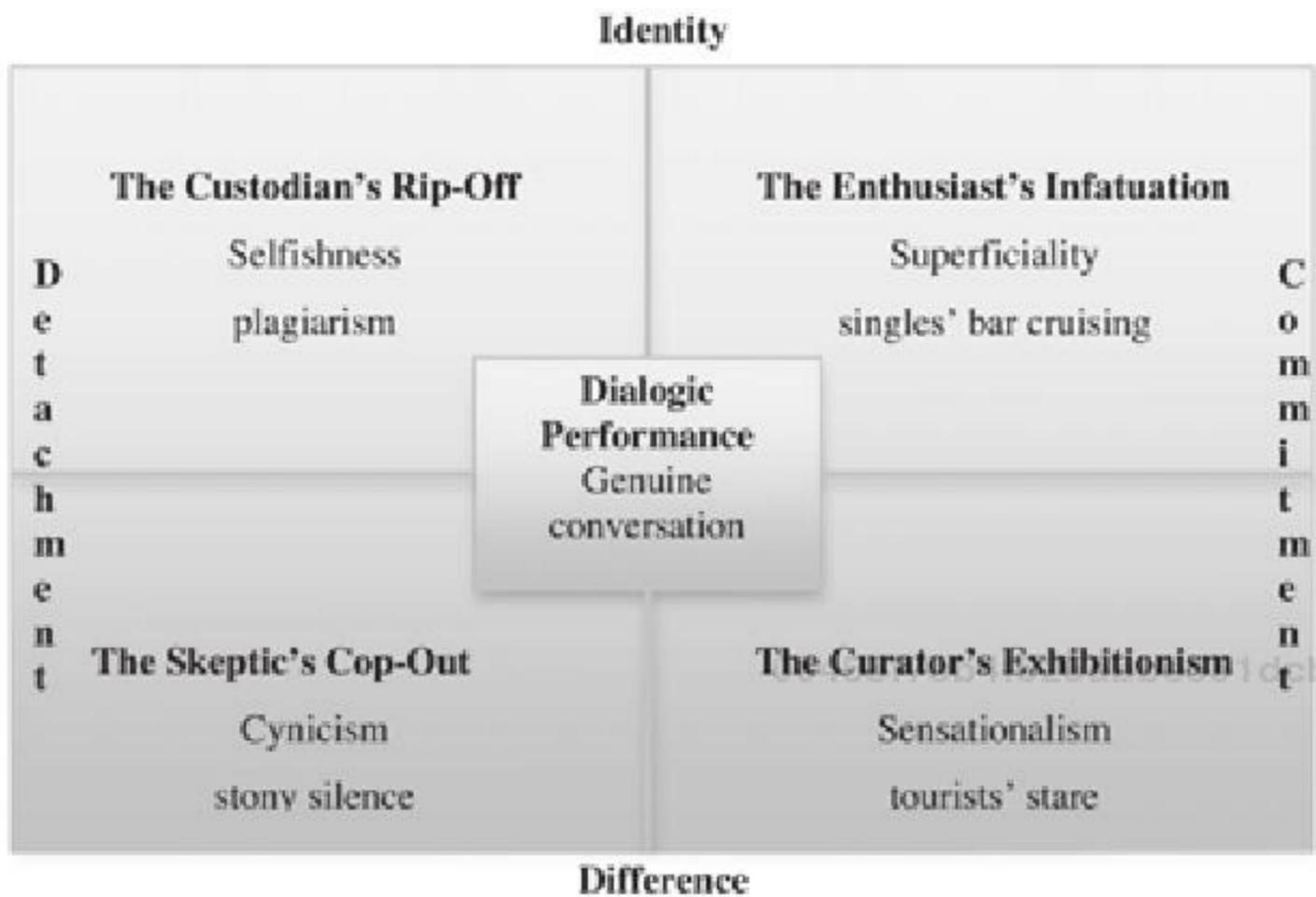


Figure 1: Moral Mapping of Performative Stances Toward the Other

When the shaman shakes and chants, he or she is talking and pleading with the spirits that control the world. These ecstatic performances are extraordinarily delicate and dangerous affairs. A Hmong shaman risks his or her life each time the soul leaves the body and ascends the tree of life on the ecstatic journey to the spirit kingdom. I had worked with the Hmong for about three years before I was privileged to witness one of these ecstatic trance performances. Now I am not only permitted, but encouraged to videotape them. I have even participated in one of these rituals of affliction as the victim. An elderly shaman “shook”—went into ecstatic performance—for my blind eye. However, I would never try to simulate one of these powerful performances because not only would that be a desecration, it would be perceived by the Hmong as having catastrophic consequences.

The Enthusiast's Infatuation

Too facile identification with the other coupled with enthusiastic commitment produces naive and glib performances marked by superficiality. This is the quadrant of the quick-fix, pick-up artist, where performance runs aground in the shallows. Eager performers get sucked into

the quicksand belief, “Aren’t all people really just alike?” Although not as transparently immoral as “The Custodian’s Rip-Off,” this performative stance is unethical because it trivializes the other. The distinctiveness of the other is glossed over by a glaze of generalities.

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

Can we really love someone if we know little or nothing of his identity, if we see, in place of that identity, a projection of ourselves or ideals? We know that such a thing is quite possible, even frequent, in personal relations; but what happens in cultural confrontations? Doesn’t one culture risk trying to transform the other in its own name, and therefore risk subjugating it as well? How much is such love worth? (Todorov 1984, 168)⁵

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

Fredric Jameson, to whom we are indebted for naming the Identity-Difference interpretive dilemma, (Jameson 1979) complements Todorov by showing how too easy affirming of identity not only banalizes the other, but seals off the self from any moral engagement:

. . . if we choose to affirm the identity of the alien object with ourselves—if, in other words, we decide that Chaucer, say . . . or the narratives of nineteenth-century Russian gentry, are more or less directly or intuitively accessible to us . . . then we have presupposed in advance what was to have been demonstrated, and our apparent comprehension of these alien texts must be haunted by the nagging suspicion that we have all the while remained locked in our own present with its television sets and superhighways . . . and that we have never really left home at all, that our feeling of *Verstehen* is little better than mere psychological projection, that we have somehow failed to touch the strangeness and the resistance of a reality genuinely different from our own. (Jameson 1979)

Secure in our protective solipsism, those of us in this performative stance will never permit the other “to come before us as a radically different life form that rises up to call our own form of life into question and to pass judgment on us, and through us, on the social formation in which we live” (Jameson 1979, 70). Superficiality suffocates self as well as other.

The Curator's Exhibitionism

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

Jameson explains that when one affirms "from the outset, the radical Difference of the alien object from ourselves, then at once the doors of comprehension begin to swing closed . . ." (Jameson 1979, 43). The manifest sin of this quadrant is Sensationalism, and it is an immoral stance because it dehumanizes the other. Todorov makes strikingly clear the moral consequences of exoticizing the other in his brilliant case study of the most dramatic encounter with the other in our history, the discovery and conquest of America.⁶ He clarifies how the snap-shot perspectives of "Noble Savage" and "dirty dog" can come from the same view-finder:

How can Columbus be associated with these two apparently contradictory myths, one whereby the other is a 'noble savage' (when perceived at a distance) and one whereby he is a "dirty dog," a potential slave? It is because both rest on a common basis, which is the failure to recognize the Indians, and the refusal to admit them as a subject having the same rights as oneself, but different. Columbus has discovered America but not the Americans. (Jameson 1979, 49)

Too great a distance—aesthetic, romantic, political—denies to the other membership in the same moral community as ourselves.

The Skeptic's Cop-Out

The fourth corner of the map is the prison-house of Detachment and Difference in which, according to Jameson, "we find ourselves separated by the whole density of our own culture from objects or cultures thus initially defined as other from ourselves and thus as irremediably inac-

cessible” (Jameson 1979, 43–44). Instead of a performative stance, it is an easy bail-out into the no man’s land of paralyzing skepticism. This corner of the map is the refuge of cowards and cynics. Instead of facing up to and struggling with the ethical tensions and moral ambiguities of performing culturally sensitive materials, the skeptic, with chilling aloofness, flatly declares, “I am neither black nor female: I will not perform from *The Color Purple*.”

When this strange coupling of naive empiricism and sociobiology—only blacks can understand and perform black literature, only white males John Cheever’s short stories—is deconstructed to expose the absurdity of the major premise, then the “No Trespassing” disclaimer is unmasked as cowardice or imperialism of the most arrogant kind. It is only the members of the dominant culture who can hold to this high purity argument regarding cultural intercourse. It is a fact of life of being a member of a minority or disenfranchised subculture that one must and can learn how to perform cultural scripts and play roles that do not arise out of one’s own culture. As a matter of sheer survival refugees must learn how to play American ways of thinking and social conduct. “Code-switching” is a commonplace ethnographic term used to describe the complex shifts minority peoples deftly and continuously negotiate between the communication styles of dominant culture and subculture. Todorov, who refers to his own “simultaneous participation in two cultures,” (Todorov 1984, 69) offers a strong rebuttal to the skeptic’s position:

Ultimately, understanding between representatives of different cultures (or between parts of my own being which derive from one culture or the other) is possible, if the will-to-understand is present: there is something beyond “points of view,” and it is characteristic of human beings that they can transcend their partiality and their local determinations. (Todorov 1984, 70)

There is no null hypothesis in the moral universe. Refusal to take a moral stand is itself a powerful statement of one’s moral position. That is why I have placed squarely on the moral map the skeptic’s refusal to risk encounter to show that nihilism is as much a moral position as its diagonal counterpart, naive enthusiasm. In my view, “The Skeptic’s Cop-Out” is the most morally reprehensible corner of the map because it forecloses dialogue. The enthusiast, one can always hope, may move beyond infatuation to love. Relationships that begin superficially can sometimes deepen and grow. Many of my students begin in the enthusiast’s corner

of the map. It is the work of teaching to try to pull them toward the center. The skeptic, however, shuts down the very idea of entering into conversation with the other before the attempt, however problematic, begins. Bacon, who is keenly aware of the “deep and difficult and enduring problems,” (Bacon 1984, 96) rejects the skeptic’s cop-out when facing up to the alternatives for action in the world:

What, then, do we do? Do we give up performing ethnic materials? Do we say, with Anaya, that to the Hispanics belong Hispanic treasures? Surely not, because our world has never before cried out so needfully for understanding among us all. Never has a sense of the other seemed more crucial for our own humanity. The embodiment of texts of all kinds is . . . one real path to the understanding of others. (Bacon 1984, 97)

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

Dialogical Performance

One path to genuine understanding of others, and out of this moral morass and ethical minefield of performative plunder, superficial silliness, curiosity-seeking, and nihilism, is dialogical performance.⁷ This performative stance struggles to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another. The aim of dialogical performance is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another. It is a kind of performance that resists conclusions, it is intensely committed to keeping the dialogue between performer and text open and ongoing. Dialogical understanding does not end with empathy. There is always enough appreciation for difference so that the text can interrogate, rather than dissolve into, the performer. That is why I have charted this performative stance at the center of the moral map. More than a definite position, the dialogical stance is situated in the space *between* competing ideologies. It brings self and other together even while it holds them apart. It is more like a hyphen than a period.

The strength of the center is that it pulls together mutually opposed energies that become destructive only when they are vented without the counterbalancing pull of their opposite. For example, good performative

ethnographers must continuously play the oppositions between Identity and Difference. Their stance toward this heuristically rich paradox of fieldwork (and performance) is both/and, yes/but, instead of either/or. They affirm cross-cultural accessibility without glossing very real differences. Moreover, they respect the Difference of the other enough to question and make vulnerable her own *a priori* assumptions. When we have true respect for the Difference of other cultures, then we grant them the potential for challenging our own culture. Genuine dialogical engagement is at least a two-way thoroughfare. Glassie insists that the ethnographer's home culture should be as open to interpretation, questioning, weighing of alternatives, as the host culture.

Old societies alienated from us by chronology become but academic curios, no challenge at all to the status quo. The outward search for alternatives can likewise die into thrills and souvenirs, but when the traveler is serious, the quest through space leads through confrontation into culture, into fear, and it can prove trying, convincing, profoundly fruitful. The reason to study people, to order experience into ethnography, is not to produce more entries for the central file or more trinkets for milord's cabinet of curiosities. It is to stimulate thought, to assure us there are things we do not know, things we must know, things capable of unsettling the world we inhabit. (Glassie 1982, 12–13)

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

Ethnography is interaction, collaboration. What it demands is not hypotheses, which may unnaturally close study down, obscuring the integrity of the other, but the ability to converse intimately. (Glassie 1982, 14)

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

Dialogic criticism speaks not *of* works but *to* works, rather *with* works. It refuses to eliminate either of the two voices present. . . . The author is a “thou,” not a “he,” an interlocutor with whom one discusses and even debates human values. (Todorov 1984, 72)

He argues that the honesty of dialogic criticism lies in two voices that can speak simultaneously and interactively. Like good conversation, the event is a cooperative enterprise between two voices, neither of which succumbs to monologue: “. . . as in personal relations, the illusion of fusion is sweet, but it is an illusion, and its end is bitter, to recognize others as others permits loving them better” (Todorov 1984, 73).

Dialogical performance is a way of having intimate conversation with other people and cultures. Instead of speaking about them, one speaks to and with them. The sensuous immediacy and empathic leap demanded by performance is an occasion for orchestrating two voices, for bringing together two sensibilities. At the same time, the conspicuous artifice of performance is a vivid reminder that each voice has its own integrity. The performer of a Laotian cosmological legend stands before an audience in all his Scots-German facticity. Dialogical performance celebrates the paradox of “how the deeply different can be deeply known without becoming any less different” (Geertz 1983, 48). Bacon quoted Auden, who evocatively etched the moral lineaments of dialogical performance: “When truly brothers/men don’t sing in unison/but in harmony” (Bacon 1984, 94).

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

Scholars need energy to gather enough information to create full portraits. They need imagination to enter between facts, to feel what it is like to be, to think and act as another person. They need courage to face alternatives, comparing different experiences to help their fellows locate themselves. (Glassie 1982, 12)

If we bring to our work energy, imagination, and courage—qualities that can be exercised and strengthened through dialogical performance—then we can hope not to trample on “the sweet, terrible wholeness of life” (Glassie 1982, xiv).

Finally, you don’t have to do years of fieldwork with a people before you

can perform their verbal art. Fieldwork is enormously time-consuming and labor-intensive; it appeals to a certain kind of person and temperament, but certainly it's not for everyone. Ethnographers would be selfish and arrogant to set themselves up as cultural game wardens, insisting that you have to have "been there" before you understand. Geertz is quite insistent that good ethnography is not dependent on the fieldworker's being possessed of some mystical powers that enable her to "commune with natives"; good ethnography can be done "without recourse to pretensions to more-than-normal capacities for ego-effacement and fellow-feeling" (Geertz 1977, 492). He argues that ethnographic understanding "is more like grasping a proverb, catching an allusion, seeing a joke—or, as I have suggested, reading a poem—than it is like achieving communion" (Geertz 1977, 492).

It is the responsibility of the ethnographer of performance to make performance texts derived from fieldwork that are accessible—and that means performable—for responsible interpreters of texts who have callings other than fieldwork.⁸ The ethnographic movement in performance studies will die if it does not reach out to share the human dignity of the other, the other-wise, with audiences larger than a coterie of specialists. If it turns in upon itself, then, quite appropriately, it will become an "inside joke" that only fieldworkers can "get." The ethnographic movement is dependent on the existence of traditional interpreters and teachers of literature, who continue to deepen in new generations of students sensitivity to the other of a Renaissance text, or a contemporary poem, so that when performance texts from nonliterate cultures are produced and made available, it will be possible for more voices to join the human dialogue.

NOTES

1. For an incisive historical explanation of this concept, see Beverly Whitaker Long, "A 'Distanced' Art: Interpretation at Mid-Century," *Performance of Literature in Historical Perspectives*, ed. David Thompson (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), pp. 567–88. See also the provocative discussion of "moral distance" in Mary Frances HopKins, "From Page to Stage: The Burden of Proof," *The Southern Speech Communication Journal*, 47 (Fall 1981), 1–9.

2. See Jean Speer and Elizabeth Fine, "What Does a Dog Have to do with Humanity?: The Politics of Humanities Public Programming," paper presented at the Eastern Communication Association Convention, Ocean City, Md., 1983.

3. I have discussed "dialogical performance" in the philosophical context of the theories of Martin Buber, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Wallace Bacon in "Performance and Dialogical Understanding: In Quest of the Other," *Proceedings of the Ninth International Colloquium on Communication*, ed. Janet McHughes (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1984).

4. This graphic representation is derived from Mary Douglas' method of grid/group analysis. See *Cultural Bias* (1978) and *In the Active Voice* (1982).

5. *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 168. It is noteworthy that two other books have appeared recently that deal centrally with the concept of "the other": Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1983); Michael Theunissen, *The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber*, trans. Christopher Macann (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1984).

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

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

8. See Elizabeth C. Fine, *The Folklore Text From Performance to Print* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984), and Dennis Tedlock, *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

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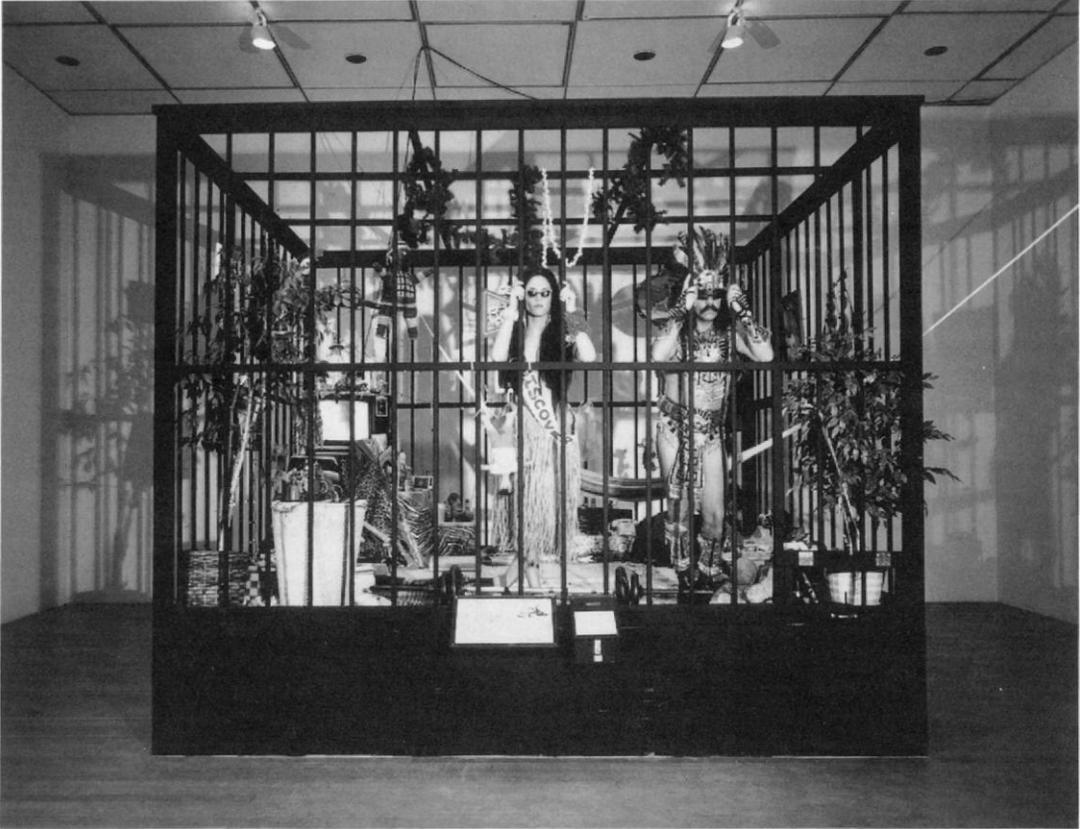
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The Other History of Intercultural Performance

Coco Fusco

In the early 1900s, Franz Kafka wrote a story that began, "Honored members of the Academy! You have done me the honor of inviting me to give your Academy an account of the life I formerly led as an ape" (1979:245). Entitled "A Report to an Academy," it was presented as the testimony of a man from the Gold Coast of Africa who had lived for several years on display in Germany as a primate. That account was fictitious and created by a European writer who stressed the irony of having to demonstrate one's humanity; yet it is one of many literary allusions to the real history of ethnographic exhibition of human beings that has taken place in the West over the past five centuries. While the experiences of many of those who were exhibited is the stuff of legend, it is the accounts by observers and impresarios that comprise the historical and literary record of this practice in the West. My collaborator Guillermo Gómez-Peña and I were intrigued by this legacy of performing the identity of an Other for a white audience, sensing its implications for us as performance artists dealing with cultural identity in the present. Had things changed, we wondered? How would we know, if not by unleashing those ghosts from a history that could be said to be ours? Imagine that I stand before you then, as did Kafka's character, to speak about an experience that falls somewhere between truth and fiction. What follows are my reflections on performing the role of a noble savage behind the bars of a golden cage.

Our original intent was to create a satirical commentary on Western concepts of the exotic, primitive Other; yet, we have had to confront two unexpected realities in the course of developing this piece: 1) a substantial portion of the public believed that our fictional identities are real ones; and 2) a substantial number of intellectuals, artists, and cultural bureaucrats have sought to deflect attention from the substance of our experiment to the "moral implications" of our dissimulation, or in their words, our "misinforming the public" about who we are. The literalism implicit in the interpretation of our work by individuals representing the "public interest" bespeaks their investment in positivist notions of "truth" and depoliticized, ahistorical notions of "civilization." This "reverse ethnography" of our interactions with the public will, I hope, suggest the culturally specific nature of their tendency toward the literal and moral interpretation.



1. *Two Undiscovered Amerindians visit Irvine, California.* Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco perform at the Art Department of the University of California, Irvine in February 1992. The local health officials were mostly concerned with excrement disposal, a fear redolent of Orange County's right-wing extremists' characterization of Mexican immigrants as "environmental hazards." (Photo by Catherine Opie)

When we began to work on this performance as part of a counter-quincentenary project, the Bush administration had drawn clear parallels between the "discovery" of the New World and his New World Order. We noted the resemblance between official quincentenary celebrations in 1992 and the ways that the 1892 Columbian commemorations had served as a justification for the U.S.'s then new status as an imperial power. And yet, while we anticipated that the official quincentenary celebration was going to form an imposing backdrop, what soon became apparent was that for both Spain and the United States, the celebration was a disastrous economic venture, and even an embarrassment. The Seville Expo went bankrupt; the U.S. Quincentenary Commission was investigated for corruption; the replica caravels were met with so many protestors that the tour was cancelled; the Pope changed his plans and didn't hold mass in the Dominican Republic until after October 12th; American Indian Movement activist Russell Means succeeded in getting Italian-Americans in Denver to cancel their Columbus Day parade; and the film super-productions celebrating Columbus—from *1492: The Discovery* to *The Conquest of Paradise*—were box office failures. Columbus, the figure who began as a symbol of Eurocentrism and the American entrepreneurial spirit, ended up being devalued by excessive reproduction and bad acting.

As the official celebrations faded, it became increasingly apparent that Columbus was a smokescreen, a malleable icon to be trotted out by the mainstream for its attacks on "political correctness." Finding historical justification for Columbus's "discovery" became just another way of affirming

Europeans' and Euro-Americans' "natural right" to be global cultural consumers. The more equitable models of exchange proposed by many multiculturalists logically demanded a more profound understanding of American cultural hybridity, and called for redefinitions of national identity and national origins. But the concept of cultural diversity fundamental to this understanding strikes at the heart of the sense of control over Otherness that Columbus symbolized, and was quickly cast as unAmerican. Resurrecting the collective memory of colonial violence in America that has been strategically erased from the dominant culture was described consistently throughout 1992 by cultural conservatives as a recipe for chaos. More recently, as is characterized by the film *Falling Down*, it is seen as a direct threat to heterosexual white male self-esteem. It is no wonder that contemporary conservatives invariably find the focus by artists of color on racism "shocking" and inappropriate, if not threatening to national interests, as well as to art itself.

Out of this context arose our decision to take a symbolic vow of silence with the cage performance, a radical departure from Guillermo's previous monolog work and my activities as a writer and public speaker. We sought a strategically effective way to examine the limits of the "happy multiculturalism" that currently reigns in cultural institutions, as well as to respond to the formalists and cultural relativists who reject the proposition that racial difference is absolutely fundamental to aesthetic interpretation. We looked to Latin America, where consciousness of the repressive limits on public expression is far more acute than here, and found many examples of how popular opposition has for centuries been expressed through the use of satiric spectacle. Our cage became the metaphor for our condition, linking the racism implicit in ethnographic paradigms of discovery with the exoticizing rhetoric of "world beat" multiculturalism. Then came a perfect opportunity: In 1991, Guillermo and I were invited to perform as part of the Edge '92 Biennial, which was to take place in London and also in Madrid as part of the quincentennial celebration of Madrid as the capital of European culture. We took advantage of Edge's interest in locating art in public spaces to create a site-specific performance for Columbus Plaza in Madrid, in commemoration of the so-called Discovery.

Our plan was to live in a golden cage for three days, presenting ourselves as undiscovered Amerindians from an island in the Gulf of Mexico that had somehow been overlooked by Europeans for five centuries. We called our homeland Guatinau, and ourselves Guatinauis. We performed our "traditional tasks," which ranged from sewing voodoo dolls and lifting weights to watching television and working on a laptop computer. A donation box in front of the cage indicated that for a small fee, I would dance (to rap music), Guillermo would tell authentic Amerindian stories (in a nonsensical language) and we would pose for polaroids with visitors. Two "zoo guards" would be on hand to speak to visitors (since we could not understand them), take us to the bathroom on leashes, and feed us sandwiches and fruit. At the Whitney Museum in New York, we added sex to our spectacle, offering a peek at authentic Guatinaui male genitals for \$5. A chronology with highlights from the history of exhibiting non-Western peoples was on one didactic panel, and a simulated Encyclopedia Britannica entry with a fake map of the Gulf of Mexico showing our island was on another. After our three days in May 1992, we took our performance to Covent Garden in London. In September, we presented it in Minneapolis, and in October, at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. In December, we were on display in the Australian Museum of Natural History in Sydney and in January 1993, at the Field Mu-

Intercultural Performance

Performance Art in the West did not begin with Dadaist “events.” Since the early days of the Conquest, “aboriginal samples” of people from Africa, Asia, and the Americas were brought to Europe for aesthetic contemplation, scientific analysis, and entertainment. Those people from other parts of the world were forced first to take the place that Europeans had already created for the savages of their own Medieval mythology; later with the emergence of scientific rationalism, the “aborigines” on display served as proof of the natural superiority of European civilization, of its ability to exert control over and extract knowledge from the “primitive” world, and ultimately of the genetic inferiority of non-European races. Over the last 500 years, Australian Aborigines, Tahitians, Aztecs, Iroquois, Cherokee, Ojibways, Iowas, Mohawks, Botocudos, Guianese, Hottentots, Kaffirs, Nubians, Somalians, Singhalese, Patagonians, Terra del Fuegians, Kahucks, Anapondans, Zulus, Bushman, Japanese, East Indians, and Laplanders have been exhibited in the taverns, theatres, gardens, museums, zoos, circuses, and world’s fairs of Europe, and the freak shows of the United States. Some examples are:

1493: An Arawak brought back from the Caribbean by Columbus is left on display in the Spanish Court for two years until he dies of sadness.

1501: “Eskimos” are exhibited in Bristol, England.

1550s: Native Americans are brought to France to build a Brazilian village in Rouen. The King of France orders his soldiers to burn the village as a performance. He likes the spectacle so much that he orders it restaged the next day.

1562: Michel de Montaigne is inspired to write his essay *The Cannibals* after seeing Native Americans brought to France as a gift to the king.

1613: In writing *The Tempest* Shakespeare models his character Caliban on an “Indian” he has seen in an exhibition in London.

1617: Pocahontas, the Indian wife of John Rolfe, arrives in London to advertise Virginia tobacco. She dies of an English disease shortly thereafter.

1676: Wampanoag Chief Metacom is executed for fomenting Indigenous rebellion against the Puritans, and his head is publicly displayed for 25 years in Massachusetts.

1788: Arabanoo of the Cammeragal people of North Sydney, Australia, is captured by Governor Phillip. At first Arabanoo was chained and guarded by a convict; later he was shown off to Sydney society. He died a year later from smallpox.

1792: Bennelong and Yammerawannie of the Cadigal people of South Sydney travel to England with Governor Phillip where they are treated as curiosities. Yammerswannie dies of pneumonia.

1802: Pemulwuy. Aboriginal resistance fighter from the Bidjegal people, is shot by white settlers in Australia. His head is cut off and preserved and sent to England to be displayed at the London Museum.

1810–1815: “The Hottentot Venus” (Saartje Benjamin) is exhibited throughout Europe. After her death, her genitals are dissected by French scientists and remain preserved in Paris’s Museum of Man to this day.

1822: “Laplander” family is displayed with live reindeer in The Egyptian Hall in London.

1823: Impresario William Bullock stages a Mexican “peasant” diorama in which a Mexican Indian youth is presented as ethnographic specimen and museum docent.

1829: A “Hottentot” woman exhibited nude is the highlight of a ball given by the Duchess du Barry in Paris.

1834: After General Rivera's cavalry completed the genocide of all the Indians in Uruguay, four surviving Charrúas are donated to the Natural Sciences Academy in Paris and are displayed to the French public as specimens of a vanished race. Three die within two months, and one escapes and disappears, never to be heard from again.

1844: George Catlin displays "Red Indians" in England.

1847: Four "Bushmen" on exhibit at The Egyptian Hall in London are written about by Charles Dickens.

1853: Thirteen Kaffirs are displayed in the St. George Gallery in Hyde Park, London.

1853: "Pygmies" dressed in European garb are displayed playing the piano in a British drawing room as proof of their potential for "civilization."

1853-1901: Maximo and Bartola, two microcephalic San Salvadorans tour Europe and the Americas, and eventually join Barnum and Bailey's Circus. They are billed as "the last Aztec survivors of a mysterious jungle city called Ixinaya."

1878: The skeleton of Truganini, a Tasmanian Aboriginal, is acquired by the Royal Society of Tasmania. Her remains are displayed in Melbourne in 1888 and 1904 and then returned to the Hobart's museum where they are displayed from 1904 until the mid-1960s.

1879: P.T. Barnum offers Queen Victoria \$100,000 for permission to exhibit captured warrior Zulu Chief Cetewayo, and is refused.

1882: W.C. Coup's circus announces the acquisition of "a troupe of genuine male and female Zulus."

1893: The skeleton of Neddy Larkin, an Aboriginal from New South Wales, is sold to the Harvard University Peabody Museum together with a collection of stuffed animals, stones, tool, and artifacts.

1898: At the Trans-Mississippi International Exposition in Omaha, Nebraska, a mock Indian battle is staged, and President William McKinley watches.

1905: The sole surviving member of the Yahi tribe of California, Ishi, is captured and displayed for the last five years of his life at the Museum of the University of California. Presented as a symbol of the U.S.'s defeat of Indian nations, Ishi is labeled the last Stone Age Indian in America.

1906: Ota Benga, the first "pygmy" to visit America after the slave trade, is put on display in the primate cage at the Bronx Zoo. A group of black ministers protest the zoo's display, but local press argue that Ota Benga was probably enjoying himself.

1911: The Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company is sold for \$250,000, after 30 years of performances in the U.S. 150 shows include one or more Kickapoo Indians as proof that the medicines being hawked were derived from genuine Indian medicine.

1931: The Ringling Circus features 15 Ubangis, including "the nine largest-lipped women in the Congo."

1992: A black woman midget is exhibited at the Minnesota State Fair, billed as "Tiny Teesha, the Island Princess."

In most cases, the human beings that were exhibited did not choose to be on display. More benign versions continue to take place these days in festivals and amusement parks with the partial consent of those on exhibit. The contemporary tourist industries and cultural ministries of several countries around the world still perpetrate the illusion of authenticity to cater to the Western fascination with otherness. So do many artists.

seum of Chicago. In early March, we were at the Whitney for the opening of the biennial, the only site where we were recognizably contextualized as an artwork. Prior to our trip to Madrid, we did a test run under relatively controlled conditions in the Art Gallery of U.C.-Irvine.

Our project concentrated on the “zero degree” of intercultural relations in an attempt to define a point of origin for the debates that link “discovery” and “Otherness.” We worked within disciplines that blur distinctions between the art object and the body (performance), between fantasy and reality (live spectacle), and between history and dramatic reenactment (the diorama). The performance was interactive, focussing less on what we did than how people interacted with us and interpreted our actions. Entitled *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit...*, we chose not to announce the event through prior publicity or any other means, when it was possible to exert such control; we intended to create a surprise or “uncanny” encounter, one in which audiences had to undergo their own process of reflection as to what they were seeing, aided only by written information and parodically didactic zoo guards. In such encounters with the unexpected, people’s defense mechanisms are less likely to operate with their normal efficiency; caught off guard, their beliefs are more likely to rise to the surface.

Our performance was based on the once popular European and North American practice of exhibiting indigenous people from Africa, Asia, and the Americas in zoos, parks, taverns, museums, freak shows, and circuses. While this tradition reached the height of its popularity in the 19th century, it was actually begun by Christopher Columbus, who returned from his first voyage in 1493 with several Arawaks, one of whom was left on display at the Spanish Court for two years. Designed to provide opportunities for aesthetic contemplation, scientific analysis, and entertainment for Europeans and North Americans, these exhibits were a critical component of a burgeoning mass culture whose development coincided with the growth of urban centers and populations, European colonialism, and American expansionism.

In writing about these human exhibitions in America’s international fairs from the late-19th and early 20th century, Robert W. Rydell (author of *All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Exhibitions, 1876–1916* [1984]) explains how the “ethnological” displays of nonwhites—which were orchestrated by impresarios but endorsed by anthropologists—confirmed popular racial stereotypes and built support for domestic and foreign policies. In some cases, they literally connected museum practices with affairs of state. Many of the people exhibited during the 19th century were presented as the chiefs of conquered tribes and/or the last survivors of “vanishing” races. Ishi, the Yahi Indian who spent five years living in the Museum of the University of California at the turn of the century, is a well-known example. Another lesser known example comes from the U.S.–Mexico War of 1836, when Anglo-Texan secessionists used to exhibit their Mexican prisoners in public plazas in cages, leaving them there to starve to death. The exhibits also gave credence to white supremacist worldviews by representing nonwhite peoples and cultures as being in need of discipline, civilization, and industry. Not only did these exhibits reinforce stereotypes of “the primitive” but they served to enforce a sense of racial unity as whites among Europeans and North Americans, who were divided strictly by class and religion until this century. Hence, for example, at the Columbian Exhibition of 1893 in Chicago, ethnographic displays of peoples from Africa and Asia were set up outside “The White City,” an enclosed area celebrating science and industry.

Emerging at a time when mass audiences in Europe and America were barely literate and hardly cognizant of the rest of the world, the displays were an important form of public “education.” These shows were where most whites “discovered” the non-Western sector of humanity. I like to call them the origins of intercultural performance in the West. The displays were living expressions of colonial fantasies and helped to forge a special place in the European and Euro-American imagination for nonwhite peoples and their cultures. Their function, however, went beyond war trophies, beyond providing entertainment for the masses and pseudo-scientific data for early anthropologists. The ethnographic exhibitions of people of color were among the many sources drawn on by European and American modernists seeking to break with realism by imitating the “primitive.” The connection between West African sculpture and Cubism has been discussed widely by scholars, but it is the construction of ethnic Otherness as essentially *performative* and located in the body that I here seek to stress.

The interest that modernists and postmodernists have had in non-Western cultures was preceded by a host of references to “exotics” made by European writers and philosophers over the past five centuries. The ethnographic shows and the people brought to Europe to be part of them have been alluded to by such writers as William Shakespeare, Michel Montaigne, and William Wordsworth. In the 18th century, these shows, together with theatre and popular ballads, served as popular illustrations of the concept of the Noble Savage so central to Enlightenment philosophy. Not all the references were positive; in fact, the 19th-century humanist Charles Dickens found that the noble savage as an idea hardly sufficed to make an encounter with Bushmen in Egyptian Hall in 1847 a pleasurable or worthwhile experience:

Think of the Bushmen. Think of the two men and the two women who have been exhibited about England for some years. Are the majority of persons—who remember the horrid little leader of that party in his festering bundle of hides, with his filth and his antipathy to water, and his straddled legs, and his odious eyes shaded by his brutal hand, and his cry of “Qu-u-u-aaa” (Bosjeman for something desperately insulting I have no doubt)—conscious of an affectionate yearning towards the noble savage, or is it idiosyncratic in me to abhor, detest, abominate, and abjure him? [...] I have never seen that group sleeping, smoking, and expectorating round their brazier, but I have sincerely desired that something might happen to the charcoal smoldering therein, which would cause the immediate suffocation of the whole of noble strangers. (Altwick 1978:281)

Dickens’ aversion does not prevent him from noting, however, that the Bushmen possess one redeeming quality: their ability to break spontaneously into dramatic reenactments of their “wild” habits. By the early 20th century, the flipside of such revulsion—in the form of fetishistic fascination with exotic artifacts and the “primitive” creativity that generated them—had become common among the members of the European avantgarde. The Dadaists, often thought of as the originators of performance art, included several imitative gestures in their events, ranging from dressing up and dancing as “Africans,” to making “primitive-looking” masks and sketches. Tristan Tzara’s dictum that “Thought is made in the mouth,” a performative analog to Cubism, refers directly to the Dadaist belief that Western art tradition could be subverted through the appropriation of the perceived

orality and performative nature of the “non-Western.” In a grand gesture of appropriation, Tzara anthologized African and Southern Pacific poetry culled from ethnographies into his book, *Poèmes Nègres*, and chanted them at the infamous Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1917. Shortly afterward, Tzara wrote a hypothetical description of the “primitive” artist at work in *Note on Negro Art*, imputing near shamanistic powers on the Other’s creative process:

My other brother is naive and good, and laughs. He eats in Africa or along the South Sea Islands. He concentrates his vision on the head, carves it out of wood that is hard as iron, patiently, without bothering about the conventional relationship between the head and the rest of the body. What he thinks is: man walks vertically, everything in nature is symmetrical. While working, new relationships organize themselves according to degree of necessity; this is how the expression of purity came into being. From blackness, let us extract light... Transform my country into a prayer of joy or anguish. Cotton wool eye, flow into my blood. Art in the infancy of time, was prayer. Wood and stone were truth... Mouths contain the power of darkness, invisible substance, goodness, fear, wisdom, creation, fire. No one has seen so clearly as I this dark grinding whiteness. (1992:57–58)

Tzara is quick to point out here that only he, as a Dadaist, can comprehend the significance of the “innocent” gesture of his “naive and good” brother. In *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), James Clifford explains how modernists and ethnographers of the early 20th century projected coded perceptions of the black body—as imbued with vitalism, rhythm, magic, and erotic power, another formation of the “good” versus the irrational or bad savage. Clifford questions the conventional mode of comparison in terms of affinity, noting that this term suggests a “natural” rather than political or ideological relationship. In the case of Tzara, his perception of the “primitive” artist as part of his metaphorical family conveniently recasts his own colonial relation to his imaginary “primitive” as one of kinship. In this context, the threatening reminder of difference is that original body, or the physical and visual presence of the cultural Other, must therefore be fetishized, silenced, subjugated, or otherwise controlled to be “appreciated.” The significance of that violent erasure is diminished—it is the “true” avantgarde artist who becomes a better version of the “primitive,” a hybrid or a cultural transvestite. Mass culture caged it, so to speak—while artists swallowed it.

This practice of appropriating and fetishizing the primitive and simultaneously erasing the original source continues into contemporary “avantgarde” performance art. In his 1977 essay “New Models, New Visions: Some Notes Toward a Poetics of Performance,” Jerome Rothenberg envisioned this phenomenon in an entirely celebratory manner, noting correlations between Happenings and rituals, meditative works and mantric models, Earthworks and Native American sculptures, dreamworks and notions of trance and ecstasy, bodyworks and self-mutilation, and performance based on several other variations of the shamanistic premise attributed to non-Western cultures. Rothenberg claims that unlike imperialism’s models of domination and subordination, avantgarde performance succeeded in shifting relations to a “symposium of the whole,” an image strikingly similar to that of world-beat multiculturalism of the 1980s. Referring to Gary Snyder’s story of Alfred Kroeber and his (unnamed)



Mojave informant in 1902, Rothenberg notes Snyder's conclusion that "The old man sitting in the sand house telling his story is who we must become—not A.L. Kroeber, as fine as he was" (1977:15). Rothenberg goes on to claim that artists are to critics what aborigines are to anthropologists, and therefore suffer from the same misrepresentation. "The antagonism of literature to criticism" he writes, "is, for the poet and artist, no different from that to anthropology, say, on the part of the Native American militant. It is a question in short of the right to self-definition" (1977:15).

Redefining these "affinities" with the primitive, the traditional, and the exotic has become an increasingly delicate issue as more artists of color enter the sphere of the "avantgarde." What may be "liberating" and "transgressive" identification for Europeans and Euro-Americans is already a symbol of entrapment within an imposed stereotype for Others. The "affinity" championed by the early moderns and postmodern cultural transvestites alike is mediated by an imagined stereotype, along the lines of Tzara's "brother." Actual encounters could threaten the position and supremacy of the appropriator unless boundaries and concomitant power relations remain in place. As a result, the same intellectual milieu that now boast Neoprimitive body piercers, "nomad" thinkers, Anglo *comadres*, and New Age earth worshippers continue to evince a literal-minded attitude toward artists of color, demonstrating how racial difference is a determinant in one's relation to notions of the "primitive." In the 1987 trial of minimalist sculptor Carl Andre—accused of murdering his wife, the Cuban artist Ana Mendieta—the defense continuously suggested that her Earthworks were indicative of suicidal impulses prompted by her "satanical" beliefs; the references to Santería in her work could not be interpreted as self-conscious. When Cuban artist José Bedia was visited by the French curators of the

2. *Two Undiscovered Amerindians visit Covent Garden, London in May 1992. Audience members, after initial shyness, would feed Gómez-Peña and Fusco from outside the cage. (Photo by Peter Barker)*

Les Magiciens de la Terre exhibition in the late '80s, he was asked to show his private altar to "prove" that he was a true Santería believer. A critically acclaimed young African-American poet was surprised to learn last year that he had been promoted by a Nuyorican Poet's Café impresario as a former L.A. gang member, which he never was. And while performing *Border Brujo* in the late 1980s, Gómez-Peña encountered numerous presenters and audience members who were disappointed that he was not a "real shaman" and that his "tongues" were not Nahuatl but a fictitious language.

Our cage performances forced these contradictions out into the open. The cage became a blank screen onto which audiences projected their fantasies of who and what we are. As we assumed the stereotypical role of the domesticated savage, many audience members felt entitled to assume the role of the colonizer, only to then find themselves uncomfortable with the implications of the game. Unpleasant but important associations have emerged between the displays of old and the multicultural festivals and ethnographic dioramas of the present. The central position of the white spectator, the objective of these events as a confirmation of their position as global consumers of exotic cultures, and the stress on authenticity as *an aesthetic value*, all remain fundamental to the spectacle of Otherness many continue to enjoy.

The original ethnographic exhibitions often presented people in a simulation of their "natural" habitat, rendered either as an indoor diorama, or as an outdoor re-creation. Eyewitness accounts frequently note that the human beings on display were forced to dress in the European notion of their traditional "primitive" garb, and to perform repetitive, seemingly ritual tasks. At times, nonwhites were displayed together with flora and fauna from their regions, and artifacts, which were often fakes. They were also displayed as part of a continuum of "outsiders" that included "freaks," or people exhibiting physical deformities. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, many of them were presented so as to confirm Social Darwinist ideas of the existence of a racial hierarchy. Some of the more infamous cases involved individuals whose physical traits were singled out as evidence of the bestiality of nonwhite people. For example, shortly after the annexation of Mexico and the publication of John Stephens' account of travel in the Yucatan, which generated popular interest in pre-Columbian cultures, two microcephalics (or pinheads) from Central America, Maximo and Bartola, toured the U.S. in P.T. Barnum's circus; they were presented as Aztecs. This set off a trend that would be followed by many other cases into the 20th century. From 1810-1815, European audiences crowded to see the Hottentot Venus, a South African woman whose large buttocks were deemed evidence of her excessive sexuality. In the United States, several of the "Africans" exhibited were actually black Americans, who made a living in the 19th century by dressing up as their ancestors, just as many Native Americans did dressing up as Sioux whose likenesses, thanks to the long and bloody Plains Wars of the late 19th century, dominate the American popular imagination.

For Gómez-Peña and myself, the human exhibitions dramatize the colonial unconscious of American society. In order to justify genocide, enslavement, and the seizure of lands, a "naturalized" splitting of humanity along racial lines had to be established. When rampant miscegenation proved that those differences were not biologically based, social and legal systems were set up to enforce those hierarchies. Meanwhile, ethnographic spectacles circulated and reinforced stereotypes, stressing that "difference" was apparent in the bodies on display. They thus naturalized fetishized representations of Otherness, mitigating anxieties generated by the encounter with difference.

In his essay, "The Other Question" (1990), Homi Bhabha explains how racial classification through stereotyping is a necessary component of colonialist discourse, as it justifies domination and masks the colonizer's fear of the inability to always already know the Other. Our experiences in the cage have suggested that even though the idea that America is a colonial system is met with resistance—since it contradicts the dominant ideology's presentation of our system as a democracy—the audience reactions indicate that colonialist roles have been internalized quite effectively.

The stereotypes about nonwhite people that were continuously reinforced by the ethnographic displays are still alive in high culture and the mass media. Imbedded in the unconscious, these images form the basis of the fears, desires, and fantasies about the cultural Other. In "The Negro and Psychopathology" (1967), Frantz Fanon discusses a critical stage in the development of children socialized in Western culture, regardless of their race, in which racist stereotypes of the savage and the primitive are assimilated through the consumption of popular culture: comics, movies, cartoons, etc. These stereotypical images are often part of myths of colonial dominion (for example, cowboy defeats Indian, conquistador triumphs over Aztec Empire, colonial soldier conquers African chief, and so on). This dynamic also contains a sexual dimension, usually expressed as anxiety about white male (omni)potence. In *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (1990), Octave Mannoni coined the term the "Prospero complex," described as the white colonial patriarch's continuous fear that his daughter might be raped by a nonwhite male. Several colonial stereotypes also nurture these anxieties, usually representing a white woman whose "purity" is endangered by black men with oversized genitals, or suave Latin lovers, or wild-eyed Indian warriors; and the common practice of publicly lynching black men in the American South is an example of a ritualized white male response to such fears. Accompanying these stereotypes are counterparts that humiliate and debase women of color, mitigating anxieties about sexual rivalry among women. In the past, there was the subservient maid and the overweight and sexless Mammy; nowadays, the hapless victim of a brutish or irrational dark male whose tradition is devoid of "feminist freedoms" is more common.

These stereotypes have been analyzed endlessly in recent decades, but our experiences in the cage suggest that the psychic investment in them does not simply wither away through rationalization. The constant concern about our "realness" revealed a need for reassurance that a "true primitive" *did* exist, whether we fit the bill or not, and that s/he be visually identifiable. Anthropologist Roger Bartra sees this desire as being part of a characteristically European dependence on an "uncivilized other" in order to define the Western self. In his book *The Savage in the Mirror* (1992), he traces the evolution of the "savage" from mythological inhabitants of forests to "wild" and usually hairy men and women who even in the modern age appeared in freak shows and horror films. These archetypes eventually were incorporated into Christian iconography and were then projected onto peoples of the New World, who were perceived as either heathen savages capable of reform or incorrigible devils who had to be eradicated.

While the structure of the so-called primitive may have been assimilated by the European avantgarde, the function of the ethnographic displays as popular entertainment was largely superseded by industrialized mass culture. Not unsurprisingly, the popularity of these human exhibitions began to decline with the emergence of another commercialized form of voyeurism, the cinema, and their didactic role was assumed by ethnographic film. Founding fathers of the ethnographic filmmaking practice, such as Robert

Flaherty and John Grierson, continued to compel people to stage their supposedly "traditional" rituals, but the tasks were now to be performed for the camera. One of the most famous of the white impresarios of the human exhibits in the United States, William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody, actually starred in an early film depicting his Wild West show of Native American horsemen and warriors, and in doing so gave birth to the cowboy and Indian movie genre, this country's most popular rendition of its own colonial fantasy. The representation of the "reality" of the Other's life, on which ethnographic documentary was based and still is grounded, is this fictional narrative of Western culture "discovering" the negation of itself in something *authentically* and *radically* distinct. Carried over from documentary, these paradigms also became the basis of Hollywood filmmaking in the '50s and '60s that dealt with other parts of the world in which the U.S. had strategic military and economic interests, especially Latin America and the South Pacific.

The practice of exhibiting humans may have waned in the 20th century, but it has not entirely disappeared. The dissected genitals of the Hottentot Venus are still preserved at the Museum of Man in Paris. Thousands of Native American remains, including decapitated heads, scalps, and other body parts taken as war booty or bounties, remain in storage at the Smithsonian. Shortly before arriving in Spain, we learned of a current scandal in a small village outside Barcelona, where a visiting delegation had registered a formal complaint about a desiccated, stuffed Pygmy man that was on display in a local museum. The African gentleman in the delegation who had initiated the complaint was threatening to organize an African boycott of the '92 Olympics, but the Catalonian townspeople defended what they saw as the right to keep "their own black man." We also learned that Julia Pastrana, a bearded Mexican woman who was exhibited throughout Europe until her death in 1862, is still available in embalmed form for scientific research and loans to interested museums. This past summer, the case of Ota Benga, a Pygmy who was exhibited in the primate cage of the Bronx Zoo in 1906 gained high visibility as plans for a Hollywood movie based on a recently released book were made public. And at the Minnesota State Fair last summer, we saw "Tiny Teesha, the Island Princess," who was in actuality a black woman midget from Haiti making her living going from one state fair to another.

While the human exhibition exists in more benign forms today—that is, the people in them are not displayed against their will—the desire to look upon predictable forms of Otherness from a safe distance persists. I suspect after my experience in the cage that this desire is powerful enough to allow audiences to dismiss the possibility of self-conscious irony in the Other's self-presentation; and even those who saw our performance as art rather than artifact appeared to take great pleasure in engaging in the fiction, by paying money to see us enact completely nonsensical or humiliating tasks. A middle-aged man who attended the Whitney Biennial opening with his elegantly dressed wife insisting on feeding me a banana. The zoo guard told him he would have to pay \$10 to do so, which he quickly paid, insisting that he be photographed in the act. After the initial surprise of encountering caged beings, audiences invariably revealed their familiarity with the scenario to which we alluded.

We did not anticipate that our self-conscious commentary on this practice could be believable. We underestimated public faith in museums as bastions of truth and institutional investment in that role. Furthermore, we did not anticipate that literalism would dominate the interpretation of our work. Consistently from city to city, more than half of our visitors be-



lieved our fiction and thought we were “real,” with the exception of the Whitney, where we experienced the art world equivalent of such misperceptions: some assumed that we were not the artists, but rather actors who had been hired by another artist. As we moved our performance from public site to natural history museum, pressure mounted from institutional representatives obliging to didactically correct audience misinterpretation. We found this particularly ironic, since museum staffs are perhaps the most aware of the rampant distortion of reality that can occur in the labeling of artifacts from other cultures. In other words, we are not the only ones who are lying; our lies simply tell a different story. For making this manifest, we are perceived as either noble savages or evil tricksters, dissimulators who discredit museums and betray public trust. When a few uneasy staff members in Australia and Chicago realized that large groups of Japanese tourists appeared to believe the fiction, they became deeply disturbed, fearing that the tourists would go home with a negative impression of the museum. In Chicago, just next to a review of the cage performance, the daily *Sun-Times* ran a phone-in questionnaire asking readers if they thought the Field Museum *should* have exhibited us, to which 47% answered no, and 53% yes (1993). We seriously wonder if such weighty moral responsibilities are leveled against white artists who present fictions in nonart contexts.

Lest we attribute the now infamous confusion we have generated among the general public to some defect of class or education, let it also be known that misinterpretation has filtered into the echelons of the cultural elite. *Cambio 16*, a left-leaning news magazine in Spain ran a newsbrief on us as two “indians behind bars” who had conducted a political protest (1992). Though ironic in tone, the story only referred to us by our first names, almost as if to make us seem like the latest exotic arrival to a local

3. *Two Undiscovered Amerindians hold a press conference in Sydney, Australia in June 1992. In choosing not to speak, except through unintelligible words and dancing, Gómez-Peña and Fusco confront the assumption in intercultural performance of speechless Others. (Photo courtesy of the Australian Museum)*



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Blood sacrifice is at the base of all their activities! ENGLISH PROFESSOR OBSERVES.



**THE COUPLE IN THE CAGE:
A GUATINAUI ODYSSEY**

a video by Coco Fusco and Paula Heredia

EDITED BY DAISY WRIGHT, PERFORMANCE BY GUILLERMO GÓMEZ PEÑA AND COCO FUSCO

RUNNING TIME 30 MIN

zoo. The trustees of the Whitney Museum questioned curators at a meeting prior to the Biennial asking for confirmation of rumors that there would be “naked people screaming obscenities in a cage” at the opening. When we arrived at UC-Irvine last year, we learned that the Environmental Health and Safety Office had understood that Gómez-Peña and I were anthropologists bringing “real aborigines” whose excrement—if deposited inside the gallery—could be hazardous to the university. This is particularly significant in light of the school’s location in Orange County, where Mexican immigrants are often characterized by right-wing “nativists” as environmental hazards. Upon request from the art department, the office sent several pages of instructions on the proper disposal of human waste and the over 30 diseases that were transmitted through excrement. Interestingly, those institutional representatives who have responded to our performance with moral indignation also see us as dangerous, but in the more ideological sense of being offensive to the public, bad for children, and dishonest subverters of the educational responsibilities of their museums.

I should perhaps note here the number of people who have encountered this performance. We do not have exact figures for Columbus Plaza and Covent Garden, which are both heavily trafficked public areas; however, we do know that 1,000 saw us in Irvine; 15,000 in Minneapolis; approximately 5,000 in both Sydney and Chicago; and 120,000 in Washington, D.C. Audience reactions of those who believe the fiction occasionally include moral outrage that is often expressed paternalistically (i.e., “Don’t you realize,” said one English gentleman to the zoo guards in Covent Garden, “that these poor people have no idea what is happening to them?”). The Field Museum in Chicago received 48 phonecalls, most of which were from people who faulted the museum for having printed misinformation about us in their information sheet. In Washington, D.C., an angry visitor phoned the Humane Society to complain and was told that human beings were out of their jurisdiction. However, the majority of those who were upset only remained so for about five minutes. Others have said they felt that our being caged was justified because we were, after all, different. A group of sailors who were interviewed by a Field Museum staff member said that our being in a cage was a good idea since we might otherwise become frightened and attack. One older African-American man in Washington asserted quite angrily that it would only have been alright to put us in a cage if we had some physical defect that classified us as freaks.

For all the concern expressed about shocking children, we found that their reactions have been the most humane. Young children invariably have gotten the closest to the cage; they would seek direct contact, offer to shake our hands, and try to catch our eyes and smile. Little girls gave me barrettes for my hair and offered me their own food. Boys and girls often asked their parents excellent questions about us, prompting ethical discussions about racism and treatment of indigenous peoples. Not all parents were prepared to provide answers, and some looked very nervous. A woman in London sat her child down and explained how we were just like the people in the displays at the Commonwealth Institute. A school group visiting Madrid told the teacher that we were just like the Arawak Indian figures in the wax museum across the street. And then there have been those children who are simply fascinated by the spectacle; we heard many a child in Sydney, where our cage sat in front of an exhibit featuring giant mechanized insects, yelling, “Mommy, Mommy, I don’t want to see the bugs. I want to stay with the Mexicans!”

The tenor of reactions to seeing “undiscovered Amerindians” in a cage changes from locale to locale; we have noted, for example that in Spain, a

4. *The publicity flyer for Coco Fusco and Paula Heredia’s video “The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinatei Odyssey,” shown at the New York Film Festival in October 1993. The video was based on Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s international tour of Two Undiscovered Amerindian Visits...during the 500-year anniversary of Columbus’s explorations west.*



5. *Two Undiscovered Amerindians visit Columbus Plaza, Madrid, Spain in 1992. Spanish businessmen continually harassed Fusco with sexual innuendos, while Gómez-Peña had his legs stroked in Irvine, California. (Photo by Peter Barker)*

country with no strong tradition of Protestant morality or empirical philosophy, opposition to our work came from conservatives who were concerned with its political implications, and not with the ethics of dissimulation. Some patterns, nonetheless, have repeated themselves. Audience reactions have been largely divided along the lines of race, class, and nationality. Artists and cultural bureaucrats, the self-proclaimed elite, exhibited skeptical reactions that were often the most anxiety-ridden. They sometimes have expressed a desire to rupture the fiction publicly by naming us, or they arrive armed with skepticism as they search for the “believers,” or parody believers in order to join the performance. At the Whitney Biennial the performers of DanceNoise and Charles Atlas, among others, screamed loudly at Gómez-Peña to “free his genitalia” when he unveiled a crotch with his penis hidden between his legs instead of hanging. Several young artists also complained to our sponsors that we were not experimental enough to be considered good performance art. Others at the Whitney and in Australia, where many knew that we were part of the Sydney Biennale dismissed our piece as “not critical.” One woman in Australia sat down with her young daughter in front of the cage and began to apologize very loudly for “having taken our land away.” Trying to determine who really believes the fiction and who doesn’t became less significant for us in the course of this performance than figuring out what the audience’s sense of the rules of the game and their role in it was.

People of color who believe, at least initially, that the performance is real, have at times expressed discomfort *because* of their identification with our situation. In Washington and London, they have made frequent references to slavery, and to the mistreatment of Native peoples and blacks as part of their history. Cross-racial identification with us among whites was

less common, but in London a recently released ex-convict who appeared to be very drunk grabbed the bars and proclaimed to us with tears in his eyes that he understood our plight because he was a "British Indian." He then took off his sweater and insisted that Gómez-Peña put it on, which he did. In general, white spectators tended to express their chagrin to our zoo guards, usually operating under the assumption that *we*, the Amerindians, were being used. They often asked the zoo guards if we had consented to being confined, and then continued with a politely delivered stream of questions about our eating, work, and sexual habits.

Listening to these reactions was often difficult for the zoo guards and museum staff people who assisted us. One of our zoo guards in Spain actually broke down and cried at the end of our performance, after receiving a letter from a young man condemning Spain for having colonized indigenous Americans. One guard in Washington and another in Chicago became so troubled by their own cognitive dissonance that they left the performance early. The director of Native American programs for the Smithsonian told us she was forced to reflect on the rather disturbing revelation that while she made efforts to provide the most accurate representation of Native cultures she could, our "fake" sparked exactly the same reaction from audiences. Staff meetings to discuss audience reactions have been held at the Smithsonian, the Australian Museum, and the Field Museum. In all the natural history museum sites, our project became a pretext for internal discussions about the extent of self-criticism those museums could openly be engaged in. In Australia, our project was submitted to an aboriginal curatorial committee for approval. They accepted, with the stipulation that there be nothing aboriginal in the cage, and that exhibition cases of aborigines be added to our chronology.

Other audience members who realize that we are artists have chastised us for the "immoral" act of duping our audiences. This reaction was rather popular among the British, and has also emerged among intellectuals and cultural bureaucrats in the U.S. I should here note that there are historical precedents for the moralistic responses to the ethnographic display in Britain and the U.S., but in those cases, the appeal was to the inhumanity of the practice, not to the ethics of fooling audiences, which the phony anthropologists who acted as docents in American Dime Museums often did. A famous court case took place in the early 19th century to determine whether it was right to exhibit the Hottentot Venus, and black ministers in the U.S. in the early 20th century protested Ota Benga's being exhibited in the Bronx Zoo. Neither protest triumphed over the mass appeal of the spectacle to whites.

The literalism governing American thought complements the liberal belief that we can eliminate racism through didactic correctives; it also encourages resistance to the idea that conscious methods may not necessarily transform unconscious structures of belief. I believe that this situation explains why moralizing interpreters shift the focus of our work from audience reactions to our ethics. The reviewer sent by the *Washington Post*, for example, was so furious about our "dishonesty" that she could barely contain her anger and had to be taken away by attendants. A MacArthur Foundation representative came to the performance with his wife and they took it upon themselves to "correct" interpretations in front of the cage. In a meeting after the performance, the Foundation representative referred to a "poor Mexican family" who was deeply grateful to his wife for explaining the performance to them. After receiving two written complaints and the *Washington Post* review, the director of public programs for the Smithsonian Natural History Museum gave a talk in Australia severely criti-

cizing us for misleading the public. We have heard that he has since changed his position. What we have not yet fully understood is why so many of these people failed to see our performance as interactive, and why they seem to have forgotten the tradition of site-specific performance with which our work dovetails, an historical development that preceded performance art's theatricalization in the 1980s.

On the whole, audience responses have tended to be less pedantic and more outwardly emotional. Some people who were disturbed by the image of the cage feared getting too close, preferring instead to stay at the periphery of the audience. Barbara Kruger came to see us at U.C. Irvine and went charging out of the gallery as soon as she read the chronology of the human display. Claus Oldenberg, on the other hand, sat at a distance in Minneapolis, watching our audiences with a wry smile on his face. The curator of the Amerindian collection at the British Museum came to look at us. As she posed for a photo she conceded to one of our Edge Biennial representatives that she felt very guilty. Her museum had already declined to give us permission to be displayed. Others found less direct ways of expressing such anxiety. A feminist artist from New York questioned us after a public lecture we gave on the performance in Los Angeles last year, suggesting that our piece had "failed" if the public misread it. One young white woman filmmaker in Chicago who attended the performances showed up afterward at a class at the University of Illinois and yelled at Gómez-Peña for being "ungrateful" for all the benefits he had received thanks to multiculturalism. She claimed to have gone to the performance with an African-American man who was "equally disturbed" as she was by it. Gómez-Peña responded that multiculturalism was not a "gift" from whites, but the result of decades of struggle by people of color. Several feminist artists and intellectuals at performances in the U.S. have approached me in the cage to complain that my role is "too passive," to berate me for not speaking and only dancing, as if my activities should support their political agenda.

Whites outside the U.S. have been more ludic in their reactions than Americans, and they have appeared to be less self-conscious about expressing their enjoyment of our spectacle. For example, businessmen in London and Madrid had approached the cage to make stereotypical jungle animal sounds. However, not all the reactions have been lighthearted. A group of skinheads attacked Gómez-Peña in London and were pulled away by audience members. And scores of adolescents in Madrid stayed at the cage for hours each day, taunting us by offering beer cans filled with urine and other such delicacies. Some of those who understood that the cage piece was performance art have made a point of expressing their horror at others' reactions to us in private, perhaps as a way of disassociating themselves from their racial group. One Spanish businessman waited for me after the performance was over to congratulate me on the performance, introduced me to his son, and then insisted that I had to agree that the Spaniards had been less brutal with the Indians than the English. The overwhelming majority of whites who believed the piece, however, have not complained or expressed surprise at our condition in a manner that is apparent to us or the zoo guards. No American ever asked about the legitimacy of the map (though two Mexicans have to date), or the taxonomic information on the signs, or Gómez-Peña's made-up language. An older man at the Whitney told a zoo guard that he remembered our island from *National Geographic*. My dance, however, has been severely criticized for its inauthenticity. In fact, during the press review at the Whitney, several writers simply walked away just as I began.

6. *Two Undiscovered Amerindians visit the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis in September 1992. American art critics took Fusco to task for not dancing "authentically." Overall, American audiences tended to be less playful with Fusco and Gómez-Peña than their counterparts outside the U.S. (Photo by Robert Sanchez)*



The reactions among Latin Americans have differed in relation to class. Many upper-class Latin American tourists in Spain and Washington, D.C., voiced disgust that their part of the world should be represented in such a debased manner. Many other Latin Americans and Native Americans immediately recognized the symbolic significance of the piece, expressing solidarity with us, analyzing articles in the cage for other audience members, and showing their approval to us by holding our hands as they posed for photographs. Regardless of whether they have believed or not, Latinos and Native Americans have not criticized the hybridity of the cage environment and our costumes for being "unauthentic." One Pueblo elder from Arizona who saw us in the Smithsonian went so far as to say that our display was more "real" than any other statement about the condition of Native peoples in the museum. "I see the faces of my grandchildren in that cage," he told a museum representative. Two Mexicans who came to see us in England left a letter saying that they felt that they were living in a cage every day they spent in Europe. A Salvadoran man in Washington stayed with us for an extended period, pointing to the rubber heart suspended from the top of the cage, saying, "That heart is my heart." On the other hand, white Americans and Europeans have spent hours speculating in front of us about how we could possibly run a computer, own sunglasses and sneakers, and smoke cigarettes.

In Spain there were many complaints that our skin was not dark enough for us to be "real" primitives. The zoo guards responded by explaining that we live in a rain forest without much exposure to the sun. At the Whitney, a handful of older women also complained that we were too light-skinned, one saying that the piece would only be effective if we were "really dark." These doubts, however, did not stop many from taking advantage of our apparent inability to understand European languages; many men in Spain made highly charged sexual comments about my body, coaxing others to add more money to the donation box to see my breasts move as I danced. I was also asked out on dates a few times in London. Many other people chose a more discrete way of expressing their sexual curiosity, by asking the zoo guards if we mate in public in the cage. Gómez-Peña found the experience of being objectified continuously more difficult to tolerate than I did. By the end of our first three days in Madrid, we began to realize that not only were people's assumptions about us based upon gender stereotypes, but that my experiences as a woman had prepared me to shield myself psychologically from the violence of public objectification.

I may have been more prepared, but we both were faced with sexual challenges that transgress our physical and emotional boundaries during the performances. In the cage we are both objectified, or in a sense, feminized, inviting both male and female spectators to take on a voyeuristic relationship to us. This might explain why women as well as men acted upon what appear to be the erotic attraction of a caged primitive male. In Sydney, our sponsoring institution, the Australian Museum of Natural History, was approached by a female reporter from a soft-porn magazine who wanted to do a photo spread in which she would appear topless, feeding us bananas and watermelon. She was refused by the museum publicist. Interestingly, women have been consistently more physical in their reactions, while men have been more verbally abusive. In Irvine, a white woman asked for plastic gloves to be able to touch the male specimen, began to stroke his legs, and soon moved toward his crotch. He stepped back, and the woman stopped—but she returned that evening eager to discuss our feelings about her gesture. In Chicago, another woman came up to the

cage, grabbed his head and kissed him. Gómez-Peña's ex-wife had lawsuit papers delivered to him while we were in the cage at Irvine, and subsequently appeared in costume with a video camera and proceeded to tape us for over an hour. While men taunted me, talked dirty, asked me out, and even blew kisses, not one attempted physical contact in all our performances.

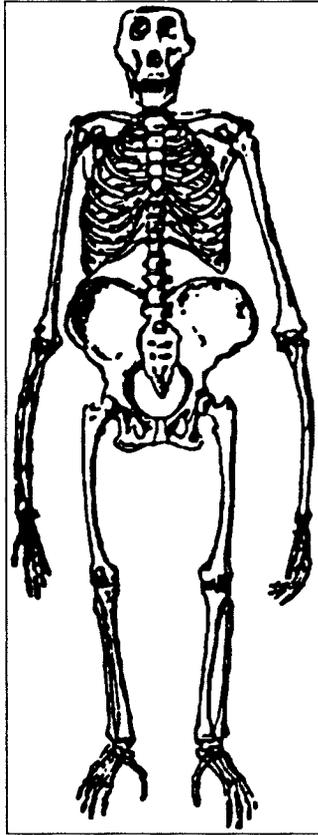
As I presented this "reverse ethnography" around the country, people invariably asked me how I felt inside the cage. I experienced a range of feelings from panic to boredom. I felt exhilarated, and even playful at times. I've also fallen asleep from the hot sun, and been irritable because of hunger or cold. I've been ill, and once had to be removed from the cage to avoid vomiting in front of the crowd. The presence of supportive friends was reassuring, but the more aggressive reactions became less and less surprising. The night before we began in Madrid, I lay awake in bed, overcome with fear that some demented Falangist might pull a gun on us and shoot before we could escape. When nothing of that sort happened, I calmed down and never worried about our safety again. I have to admit I like watching people on the other side of the bars. The more we have performed, the more I have concentrated on the audience, while trying to feign the complete bewilderment of an outsider. Although I love the intentional nontheatricality of this work, I have become increasingly aware of how engaging in certain activities can trigger audience reactions, and acted on that realization to test our spectators. Over the course of the year, I grew fond of the extremists who verbalized their feelings and interacted with us physically, regardless of whether they were hostile or friendly. It seems to me that they have a certain braveness, even courage, that I don't even know I would have in their place. When we came upon Tiny Teesha in Minnesota, I was dumbstruck at first—not even my own performance had prepared me for the sadness I saw in her eyes, or my own ensuing sense of shame.

One memory in particular has come to the forefront of my mind as we have traveled with this performance. It involves an encounter I had over a decade ago, when I was finishing college in Rhode Island, where I had studied film theory. I had met an internationally known French ethnographic filmmaker in his sixties at a seminar he was giving, and told him I planned to spend time in France after graduation. A year later, I received a phone call from him while I was in Paris. He had found me with the help of a student from my alma mater. He told me he was going to begin production on a feature, and might be able to offer me a job. After having spent part of the summer as a translator-salesgirl at a department store, I was excited by the prospect of film-related work. We arranged to meet to discuss his project.

Even though we were conversing in a language I had not mastered, it didn't take long for me to sense that the filmmaker's interests might be more than professional. I was not exactly prepared to deal with sexual advances from a man who could have been my grandfather. I thought I had protected myself by arranging to meet in a public place, but he soon explained that we had to leave the café to meet with the producers for a reading of the script. After 15 minutes in his car, I began to suspect that there was no meeting planned. We eventually arrived at what looked like an abandoned house in a rural area, without another soul in sight. He proudly announced that this was the house he had grown up in and that he wanted to show it to me. I was by this time in a mild state of shock, furiously trying to figure out where I was and how to get away safely.

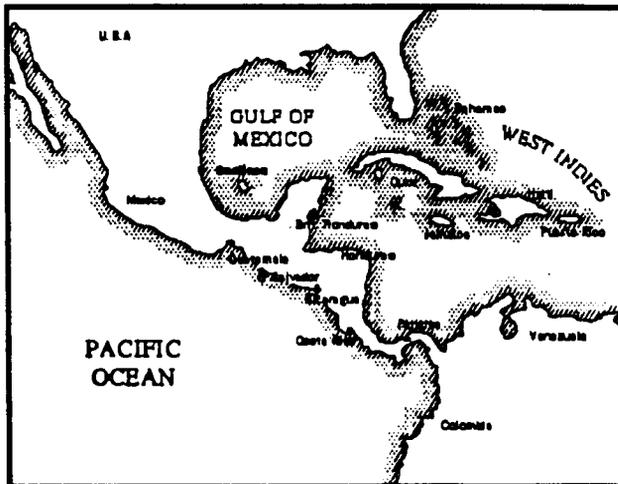
The filmmaker proceeded to go into a shed next to the house and re-

AMERINDIANS: 1) A mythical people of the Far East, connected in legendary history with Seneca and Amerigo Vespucci.



Although the term **AMERINDIAN** suggests that they were the original inhabitants of this continent, the oldest authorities (e.g., Christopher Columbus in his diaries, and more recently, Paul Rivette) regarded them as Asian immigrants, not Americans. Other explanations suggested are *arborindians*, “tree people,” and *amberindians*, “brown people.” The most that can be said is that *amerindians* may be the name of an indigenous American stock that the ancients knew no more about than ourselves.

AMERINDIANS: 2) One of the many English terms for the people of Guatinau. In their language, the Guatinai people’s word for themselves signifies “outrageously beautiful” or “fiercely independent.” They are a jovial and playful race, with a genuine affection for the debris of Western industrialized popular culture. In former times, however, they committed frequent raids on Spanish ships, disguised



as British pirates, whence comes their familiarity with European culture. Contemporary Guatinauis have only recently begun to travel outside their island.

The male and female specimens here on display are representatives of the dominant tribe from their island, having descended from the Mintomani stock. The male weighs 72 kilos, measure 1.77 meters, and is approximately 37 years of age. He likes spicy food, burritos, and Diet Coke, and his favorite cigarette brand is Marlboro. His frequent pacing in the cage leads experts to believe that he was a political leader on his island.

The female weighs 63 kilos and measures 1.74 meters, and appears to be in her early thirties. She is fond of sandwiches, pad thai, and herb tea. She is a versatile dancer, and also enjoys showing off her domestic talents by sewing voodoo dolls, serving cocktails and massaging her male partner. Her facial and body decorations indicate that she has married into the upper caste of her tribe.

Both of the Guatinauis are quite affectionate in the cage, seemingly uninhibited in their physical and sexual habits despite the presence of an audience. Their animist spirituality compels them to engage in periodic gestural prayers, which they do with great enthusiasm. They like to massage and scratch each other, enjoy occasional long embraces, and initiate sexual intercourse on the average of twice a day. Anthropologist at the Smithsonian observed (with the help of surveillance cameras) that the Guatinauis enjoy gender role playing together after dark, transforming many of their functional objects in the cage into makeshift sex toys by night. Visitors who get close to them will note that they often seek to fondle strangers while posing for photographs. They are extremely demonstrative with children.

move all his clothes except his underwear. He emerged with a manual lawn mower, and went to work on his garden. At one point he ran up to me and exclaimed that he wished he could film me naked there, to which I did not respond. At another point, he handed me a basket and told me to gather nuts and berries. While my anger mounted, my fears slowly subsided, as I realized that he was deeply immersed in his own fantasy world, so self-involved that it hardly needed my participation. I waited for him to finish his playacting, and then told him to take me to the closest train station, which he did, but not without grabbing me and ripping my shirt as I got out of his car.

I got back to my apartment safely. I was not physically harmed, but I was profoundly disturbed by what I had witnessed. The ethnographic filmmaker whose fame rested on his depictions of "traditional" African societies had projected his racist fantasies onto me for his own pleasure. What I thought I was, how I saw myself—that was irrelevant. Never had I seen so clearly what my physical presence could spark in the imagination of an aging colonialist pervert.

The memory of that ethnographic filmmaker's gaze haunted me for years, to the point that I began to wonder if I had become paranoid. But I, having watched behavior only slightly more discreet than his from behind the bars of our cage, can reassure myself that I am not. Those are the moments when I am glad that there are real bars there. Those are also the times when, even though I know I can get out of the cage, I can never quite escape.

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Coco Fusco is a Los Angeles-based writer and interdisciplinary artist. She recently completed a video documentary, co-produced with Paula Heredia, on her performances in a cage with Guillermo Gómez-Peña entitled *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinali Odyssey*. In collaboration with Gómez-Peña, she is currently preparing a book of essays, scripts, poems, and other texts about cultural relations between the North and the South that will be published by *The New Press* in 1994.

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The Ethnographic Burlesque

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

The Couple in the Cage restages repudiated modes of ethnographic knowledge and display. The flyer announcing the video explicitly positions the staging in tabloid terms by faking the front page of the fictional *Natural Enquirer*. Indeed, the "ghosts of history" that the piece unleashes are still palpable in tabloids and tourism, which can be said to be "museums" of repudiated anthropological knowledge, as is *The Couple in the Cage*. Rather than offering a critique of contemporary (or even modern) ethnographic theory and practice, *The Couple in the Cage* uses the ethnographic burlesque in the service of a shameful ethnology, practices associated with the early history of ethnographic writing and display and with popular entertainment.¹ Before the advent of public museums, such displays were largely in the hands of commercial showmen, who combined edification and amusement in various ratios (Altick 1978).

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In *The Couple in the Cage*, those on display have staged themselves. That they are not what they appear to be is also part of the history of such exhibits. The foreign villages at world's fairs included not only performers from Turkey, Egypt, Ireland, and Germany, among others, but also college students, immigrants, and other employees, who stood in for Turks, Egyptians, Irish, and Germans. Not always, but not infrequently, those who exhibited and those who were exhibited were one and the same. In other words, both *The Couple in the Cage* and recent writing on primitivism more generally (Marianna Torgovnik's *Gone Primitive* [1990] is a case in point) have tended to simplify, in the spirit of repudiation, such "othering" practices. Repudiation is, however, constitutive of these othering practices, right from the start. I would therefore identify the theatricality of *The Couple in the Cage* as a "rehearsal of culture," to cite Steven Mullaney, and suggest that it is a double rehearsal. While *The Couple in the Cage* purports to rehearse a putative ethnographic reality, what it actually rehearses is a mode of encounter. Audiences assuming the former get caught in the latter.

Like tourism, tabloids are a kind of "museum" of outmoded understandings, including anthropological ones. In their pages, an epistemological atavism converges with an historically formed iconography of the unconscious.

But first, an explanation of "rehearsal of culture." During the royal entry into Rouen of Henry II in 1550, Brazilian villages stocked with Native Americans for the occasion and supplemented with appropriately attired Frenchmen were the scene of a mock siege and French triumph. Mullaney's analysis of this event focuses not so much on its re-creation as on its erasure: "The ethnographic attention and knowledge displayed at Rouen was genuine, amazingly thorough, and richly detailed; the object, however, was not to understand Brazilian culture but to perform it, in a paradoxically self-consuming fashion" (Mullaney 1983:48). He argues further that the interest in Brazilian culture displayed at Rouen served "ritual rather than ethnological ends, and the rite involved is one ultimately organized around the elimination of its own pretext." Such performances, he continues, are rehearsals, in the legal sense of the term, and are to be understood within a dramaturgy of power that first exhibits what it "consigns to oblivion" (48, 49, 52). Not only culture, but also art is subject to this regime, as can be seen in the Nazi *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) exhibition in Munich in 1937.

As Mona Ozouf demonstrates in her landmark book, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (1988), the Revolution entailed not only the rejection of the old cultural order, but also the systematic creation of a new regime of social experience. This process produced what Ozouf calls a "shameful ethnology" (1988:218). An instrument of the Revolution's "repressive militancy" (223), negative accounts of traditional practices measured the success of the Revolution in eradicating what it repudiated and the rebellious potential of what persisted. The process of negating cultural practices reverses itself once it has succeeded in archaizing the "errors." The very term "folklore" marks a transformation of errors into archaisms and their transvaluation once they are safe for collection, preservation, exhibition, study, and even nostalgia and revival. The World-Folklore Park planned for Guangzhou, China, is clearly in this mode: visitors are invited to "enjoy the splendour of the world's folklore by

way of direct participation in the exotic life of people with outlandish customs and habits" (World-Folklore Theme Park 1996).

The notion of an exhibition foreclosing what it shows is a reason why such displays are sites of disidentification. For example, reformers of Judaism in the early 19th century wrote in the mode of shameful ethnology under the rubric "Gallery of Obnoxious Abuses, Shocking Customs, and Absurd Ceremonies of the Jews" in an effort to distance their Jewish readers from their current practices through admonishment that rehearsed what it consigned to oblivion. By the mid-19th century, the ethnographic burlesque in Yiddish literature assumed a reader who could identify with the author's satirical rendering of an outmoded way of life and, soon thereafter, a reader who would share the author's sense of loss (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1990).

What readers of such literature and visitors to such exhibits discover are the outtakes of colonization and absorption, reform and revolution, modernization and development. In this way, Catholic Europe became a source of fascination for Protestants eager to see what the Reformation had repudiated. Zones of repudiation, where the outtakes of a cultural editing process are to be found, form a *geniza* of sorts, a place for keeping what has been discarded. Such processes create a large domain of cultural trash, which returns as parody, "folklore," or even "heritage." Display enables playful participation in a zone of repudiation once it has been insulated from the possibility of anyone going native. I take this argument up at length in *Destination Culture* (1998).

The Couple in the Cage shifts the locus of repudiation and admonishment from the "other" to the practices of othering. It does so through a process of entrapment enabled by two principles: first, the suspension of disbelief, whereby the audience is licensed to "play along" with the act; and second, the pleasure of confusion, whereby audiences already familiar with performance art are prepared to enjoy what they do not understand. Some may be said to "buy in" to the staging without realizing it, while others protest, whether they align themselves with the artists or object to the violence of the piece on the audience. As Diana Taylor so nicely shows, the video completes the process by explicitly reframing the piece to include the audiences at the live events and to show the piece thus reframed to new video audiences. The video makes explicit what was implicit in the live event, namely that the installation staged the viewer in ways that were unstable and untenable, as Taylor so cogently argues.

The Couple in the Cage does not engage contemporary ethnography, but rather mines the popular "museums" of its repudiated ideas and procedures.

Were *The Couple in the Cage* purely didactic, an encounter group exercise in consciousness-raising, it would belong in the manuals for diversity workshops. An indictment of Western stereotypes of "primitive" peoples, the performance mode is closer to the *Natural Enquirer* than it is to ethnography, notwithstanding recent literary takes on primitivism in art and anthropology, which have dehistoricized ethnographic practices, a point to which I will return. As for the *Natural Enquirer*, it is an appropriate locus for uncertainty. Tabloids, particularly of the supermarket variety (some of them are actually send-ups too), operate at (and beyond) the threshold of credulity. They activate not only the "will to believe" but also the "suspension of disbelief." Like

tourism, tabloids are a kind of “museum” of outmoded understandings, including anthropological ones. In their pages, an epistemological atavism converges with a historically formed iconography of the unconscious. But with a critical difference—tabloids and tourism operate in relation to other kinds of knowledge, not in their absence, which is what makes *The Couple in the Cage* so disturbing. To buy into this performance at face value, when one should know better, is to fail dramatically. To “play along” with its subversiveness—to accept the donnée and act out the role of gullible viewer that is already scripted by the performance—is to test the moral limits of theatrical representation. What distinguishes *The Couple in the Cage* from a sermon is precisely, as Taylor points out, the impossibility of an appropriate reaction. There is no tenable audience position.

In staging repudiated forms of ethnographic interest, knowledge, and display, *The Couple in the Cage* is actually closer to contemporary anthropology, which also operates in a critical mode, examines its own past, deconstructs its practices, experiments with its theory and methods, questions the production and nature of anthropological knowledge, and insists that anthropologists be accountable to those they study. *The Couple in the Cage* does not engage contemporary ethnography, but rather mines the popular “museums” of its repudiated ideas and procedures. However, neither the artists nor their critics clearly articulate this point. It is 15 years since Johannes Fabian (1983) illuminated “how anthropology makes its object” through the peculiar temporalities of ethnographic writing. In that time, the possibilities and limits of “writing culture” and creating “objects of ethnography” have been set out repeatedly (Clifford 1988, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Marcus and Fischer 1986, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991). Anthropology’s colonial history has been thoroughly explicated and is firmly in the consciousness of scholars working today.

But, critiques from outside of the discipline have tended to reduce all of anthropology to a preoccupation with the primitive body. For example, Margaret Mead’s most ambitious project was not dedicated to the Balinese or the Samoans, but to immigrants in New York City, and to the study of personality and culture. The Columbia University Research in Contemporary Cultures project of the 1940s was funded by the Office of Naval Research at the end of World War II to the tune of about \$250,000. Hallmarks of the project included, first, the inclusion of members of the community under study on the research team; second, the requirement that the anthropologists also examine themselves and their relationship to their subject; and third, in the case of the Jewish research group, that they write a book which their subjects would read and in which they would recognize themselves, with pride, in the wake of the Holocaust (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995).

As for Claude Lévi-Strauss and for that matter Bronislaw Malinowski, their concerns were not the “‘primitive’ body as object,” but rather forms of social organization, worldview, values, personhood, and ways of being in the world. This is not to suggest that this work is without its problems or beyond critique but only that this and related work has been folded into a general critique of a repudiated anthropology of the primitive. Nor, as far as museums are concerned, are the shards and fragments they show restricted to the victims of colonial power. They also feature the “treasures” of antiquity—Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Chinese, Indian, Christian, etc.—which are also fragments, no less than the “objects of ethnography.” What distinguishes ancient fragments from ethnographic objects is how the fragments were formed, that is, the manner of detachment.

Because the terms of *The Couple in the Cage*—colonialism, primitivism, savagery, exoticism—are so overdetermined and the performance itself so over

the top, the challenge is to find a way of commenting on it (and on the reframing of it that includes the audience and the documentation of their response) without simply restating the critique it has already incorporated into itself. After all, *The Couple in the Cage* is not a sermon, and outmoded ethnographic understandings (alive and well in tabloids and tourism) are an easy target. Whatever its problems, the Museum of the American Indian also surprises the visitor—not through making viewers complicit in a retrograde colonial scenario staged by unruly “natives,” but by taking charge of the museum itself. A now largely Native American staff controls what is shown and how. In one show, labels were signed, and there was more than one label for each object. Those who wrote the labels identified themselves by name, profession, and tribe (in the case of Native Americans). Photographs were rarely if ever identified, a comment in itself about their status in the exhibition—they are about, but not by, those they represent. What visitors discovered in these galleries is what the objects on display mean to Native Americans today, and not what many were expecting and disappointed not to find, namely, a reconstruction of the lost contexts of extant objects. While not without its own problems, this is how this museum addressed the historic foreclosures of ethnographic exhibitions that the collection itself exemplifies.

The contrast is useful, not to rank the two cases, but rather to offer several contexts for considering *The Couple in the Cage*. First, this piece was part of a larger project, *Year of the White Bear*. This project included, among other elements, a museum installation, within which the video was shown. Second, besides the shameful list of ethnographic exhibits that Coco Fusco provides in “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” there are, as just suggested, serious efforts on the part of anthropologists and museums to address that history. Third, there is the legacy of ethnographic forgeries—the Guatinaui fiction is not the first. One of the most celebrated “crimes of writing” was George Psalmanazar’s totally invented ethnography of Formosa, written in the 18th century (Stewart 1991). In our period, Carlos Castenada comes to mind, to say nothing of Barnum’s tricks in his 19th-century museum. Fourth, there are contemporary artists who are engaged in similar interventions—the installations of Pepón Osorio and Renée Green, respectively, Fred Wilson’s *Mining the Museum* (an installation at the Maryland Historical Society in 1993), and the Akko Theatre Centre’s *Arbeit macht Frei* are some examples.

Finally, *The Couple in the Cage* is neither a serious ethnographic display nor a fake ethnographic display, however much it used dissimulation and “reverse ethnography,” as Fusco puts it. It is a provocation, and the genre, for want of a better term, is performance art. While Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña documented the responses of audiences to their “reverse ethnography,” it could be said that audiences that behaved “inappropriately” or offensively were responding to “performance art,” something new for many of them. They fell into two traps and mistook a provocation for an invitation. This is yet another indication that the power of the piece is in the many ways it staged its audiences. In the guise of ethnographic display, Fusco and Gómez-Peña have subjected (even abjected) themselves to induce a homeopathic cure for the colonial disease afflicting their viewers. For those who had not previously been exposed to performance art, this event also served as an inoculation.

Note

1. Coco Fusco provides a chronology that starts in 1493 with an Arawak brought back to Spain by Columbus and ends with the Ubangis at the Ringling Circus in 1931 and “a black woman midget” at the Minnesota State Fair in 1992 (1994:146–47).

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8

DELLA POLLOCK

Moving histories: performance and oral history

Oral history studies are fed by many research streams, including folklore, memory studies, trauma studies, anthropology, psychology, communication studies, critical cultural studies, and, increasingly, performance studies, raising the critical question: how do performance analytics change our understanding of and approach to experience narrative (oral history, life history, stories of collective experience)?

Performance and narrative

In the late 1970s, after the publication of Richard Bauman's landmark "Verbal Art as Performance," folklore/vernacular studies attended more vigorously to processes of transmission, shifting the focus of study from the re-presentation of verbal art as fact (or artifact) to the rehearsal of site-specific interaction identified as performance.¹ This shift relied on Bauman's four criteria: competency (demonstrable skill or status as a storyteller); intensity (the sense of a special time, space, and ways of seeing and knowing experience to which performance indicators "key" in audiences); emergence (the unpredictable and uncontrollable shape, affect, and outcomes of time-space aesthetics); and changing structures of social relations (immediate changes among participants heralding change on a larger scale "as if" by proxy). Bauman positioned performance as a critical frame that illuminated the authority, reflexivity, and transformative power of some art acts. Thus Bauman encouraged us to answer the persistent question, what *is* performance?, by asking instead: in what ways is it useful to call a particular act or set of interactions "performance"?

In his 1988 *Story, Performance, and Event*, Bauman built on his early work by distinguishing between the narrated event (what is *told* of the past) and the narrating event (the *telling* of it in the present). Reading this as a conventional distinction between content and form, text and performance, however, tends to misidentify performance with "event" and fails to

appreciate the tripartite configuration of story, performance, event. To the contrary, Bauman offers a nominal heuristic that advances the inextricability of the *saying* and the *said* and favors performance as the living tissue that connects story and event in tenuous processes of meaning-making.

Barbara Myerhoff made a comparably significant intervention in anthropology, also in the late 1970s, with the publication of *Number Our Days*. Conducting fieldwork at “home,” bringing the anthropological quest to the threshold of her own identity, Myerhoff found herself in the midst of shifting subject-subject relations. As a result, the book attends not only to cultural performances – the enactment in rites, rituals, and ceremonies of normative values and selves – but also to embedded performances of culture: the processes by which normative values and selves are made, even minutely crafted. Focusing on the power of life review and narration to draw an element of coherence (if not exactly order) out of chaos, and to establish a personal and social ethos, Myerhoff concludes with a claim for *homo narrans*, defining humanity by a need to narrate as keen as the need to eat or sleep.² For Myerhoff, narrative-making is self-making. In his preface to the book, the anthropologist Victor Turner hails Myerhoff’s insistence on *homo narrans*, later substituting for it a resounding claim for *homo performans*.³

Performance-centered culture

By the late 1980s, the confluence of Richard Bauman and Barbara Myerhoff with work in sociology (C. L. R. James, James Scott), anthropology (James Clifford, James Fernandez, Renato Rosaldo, Michael Taussig, Victor Turner), folklore (Dell Hymes, Dennis Tedlock), critical cultural studies/theory (Frantz Fanon, Mikhail Bakhtin, Jacques Derrida), linguistics (J. L. Austin), theatre studies (Richard Schechner), and performance studies (Dwight Conquergood, Kristin Langellier, and Eric Peterson) was making a crashing wave of what has been called a “performative turn.” Narrative trails through this turn as both a problem and a possibility. Bauman enlists the power of narrative transmission for social change. In Myerhoff the possibility of telling a story avails *being of becoming*. For both, narrative performance – telling the told, storying storied lives – is a pivotal practice of cultural crisis. Myerhoff, Bauman, and Turner anticipate and influence Conquergood’s claim on storied knowledge:

Knowledge is not stored in storytelling so much as it is enacted, reconfigured, tested, and engaged by imaginative summonings and interpretive replays of past events in the light of present situations and struggles. Active and emergent, instead of abstract and inert, narrative knowing recalls and recasts experience

into meaningful signposts and supports for ongoing action. The recountal is always an encounter, often full of risk. The storyteller struggling for contingent truths – “situated knowledges” – is more exposed and vulnerable than the scientist in pursuit of covering laws and grand theory.⁴

Conquergood largely abandons expressivist and realist models of narrative. Stories do not *reveal* or *refer to* a given world or body of knowledge. They subsume their referents in a re-creative, spatio/temporal “encounter.” Accordingly, they are as powerful as they are precarious; knowledge per se is dissolved into contested rhetorics of narrative knowing.

Conquergood draws on and contributes to a performance-centered approach to culture more broadly, an approach that emphasizes core patterns of *repetition* enacted in re-presentation, re-creation, and re-cognition. As Homi Bhabha has famously noted, in its repetitions culture is “*almost the same but not quite*.”⁵ A performative culture is immanently on the edge of becoming otherwise. It relies for its vitality on the variable repetition that threatens its stability and disrupts the authority of origins – or first stories, foundational premises, original referents.⁶ Accordingly, not only does narrative knowledge become subject to narrative knowing but, as Allen Feldman argues, “the whole semiotic relation of legitimation to the concept of origination falls into crisis. Legitimation becomes performative and therefore contingent.”⁷ A performance-centered approach to culture displaces narrative into practice; defines practice by repetition; finds in the unstable aesthetics of repetition an ethics and politics of possibility; and ultimately then shifts culture itself into the subjunctive register of *what if, as if, could be*.

Oral history performance

How does oral history figure in such a scenario? Oral history began primarily as a method, enabled by the technological innovation and popularization of the tape recorder. Historical researchers first introduced the tape recorder in the 1930s, seeking to supplement archives with otherwise unrecorded materials. In the early 1960s scholars such as Paul Thompson began to discern the radically democratizing potential of oral history, and the possibility not only of filling gaps in official records but also expanding those records to include the stories of people and experiences (labor, strikes, race relations, gendered work, immigration) buried under or excluded from histories of conquest: histories of people who, in effect, lacked papers.⁸ Lacking such records, historians were at a loss to verify memory-based claims. The “new” oral history consequently presented political and methodological challenges,

requiring historians largely to forgo validation by prior, textual remains; to shift from a text- to subject-centric history; and to give unprecedented favor to perspective and perception.

The terms of historical understanding changed in turn from *validity* to *value*, from *demonstrative* (or evidentiary) to the kind of *narrative* truth that Trinh T. Minh-ha proclaims:

Literature and history once were/still are stories: this does not necessarily mean that the space they form is undifferentiated, but that this space can articulate on a different set of principles, one which may be said to stand outside the hierarchical realm of facts. On the one hand, each society has its own politics of truth; on the other hand, being truthful is being in the in-between of all regimes of truth.⁹

This entailed investigating the nature of the subject, pursuing a question that concerns many poststructural theorists but that, in the context of oral history, has a peculiarly performative valence. *Who speaks? What difference does speaking make? To what extent is the much heralded agency of the speaker conditioned by prior speech acts? To whom does his or her story belong?* In turn, oral historians began to grapple with the power dynamics intrinsic to the ethnohistorical “encounter,” asking, for instance, *how does the performance of the past in the present shape and make historical subjectivity?*

As early as 1982, in his important inquiry into the social in oral history, Samuel Schragar displaced the foundational appeal of the “individual” story authorized and defined by relation to “experience,” locating oral history instead in an ongoing history of dialogic relations.¹⁰ According to Schragar, “personal narrative” is something of a misnomer, encouraging us not only to distinguish between the personal and the collective, but to consider the “personal” a kind of endzone of narrative creation. In his view the individual is a teller whose telling is part of a preexisting and unfolding narrative environment. For Feldman, the subject of oral history is always already a political subject. She is the subject of the histories she recounts:

In a political culture the self that narrates speaks from a position of having been narrated and edited by others – by political institutions, by concepts of historical causality, and possibly by violence. The narrator speaks because this agent is already the recipient of narratives in which he or she has been inserted as a political subject. The narrator writes himself into an oral history because the narrator has already been written and subjected to powerful inscriptions.¹¹

For both Schragar and Feldman, the narrator of oral histories is neither an authority-by-experience nor a free agent of historical construction but a

moving figure of dialogical (and violent) histories. The body of their narrative, and their embodiment of it, marks and is marked by a forcefield of relationality.

Accordingly, a performance-centered account of oral history understands the oral history as a critical repetition among repetitions; liminal truth – truth storied “in the in-between of all regimes of truth” – as at least complementary to “the hierarchical realm of facts” conventionally favored by the social sciences; the teller as authorized by prior tellings; and the interviewer as directly implicated in a narrative environment that precedes, surrounds, and defines his or her conversations.

In practice this means that the interviewer-as-audience member becomes the measure of the micropolitics and ethics enacted at the relational nadir of the interview process. His or her story is a reflexive account of tactical and sensuous dynamics that embody, in miniature, history working itself out in narrative interaction, *on*, *through*, and *by* interview participants. Already in a conversation begun long before they brought a microphone to the table, the interviewer shares authority with her interview partners, with all the weight of complicity that may entail.¹² Accordingly, the subjunctive quality of telling “true stories,” or discovering in dialogue connections between *what could have been* and *what could be*, slips into a normative framework in which possibility becomes potentiality, and what *should have been* becomes *what should be*. Being “in” dialogue thus means engaging in an ethics of thought and relation that may in turn mean intervening in cycles of repetition materialized in performance,¹³ and assuming response-ability¹⁴ for the ways in which the story the interviewer-become-narrator tells serves “the in-between of all regimes of truth.”

Kate Willink, for instance, reperforms the discourses of whiteness that are themselves replayed in stories told by Mr. Alder, the first white teacher in a previously all-black high school in an eastern North Carolina county after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision mandated school desegregation. In their conversation Mr. Alder eventually arrives at a story about how he “fit in” at the all-black high school: “I *guess I fit in* because I played *basketball*. And I brought my [adult] *team* to play the black high school one time.” The game proves to be of a magnitude no one could have predicted. Almost despite himself, Mr. Alder regales its explosive, erotic energy:

Black against white: we were *allllll white*. They were *allllll black*. We were all *older*. They were high school boys.

...

You *cannot believe this game*. If there has *ever been an outstanding game ever played in Camden County*, it was that night that we played them! . . .

Those boys were unbelievable that night. I had watched 'em play . . . I remember one time I think we went six minutes, **nobody missed a shot.** I kept on. I said, "*We're playing the best I've ever seen us play,*" but I said, "**These boys are . . .**" (*he doesn't complete his sentence*). They wanted to beat us so bad. We won the game on almost a half court shot at the end of the game . . . The score was a 150-149. . . . Those blacks came out and just *hugged us (pause)* because they *enjoyed the game.*¹⁵

Mr. Alder's story rehearses the larger-than-life athletic and cultural dramas in which, as Willink notes, "'communities engaged the tensions, possibilities, and contradictions of the world around them'." Willink is a captive witness:

Listening to Mr. Alder, I am captivated by the back and forth of the game, including six minutes during which "**nobody missed a shot.**" Mr. Alder remembers a powerful moment in which an historically divided community came together in a grand show of intimate contact: what was probably the first time some members of the white and black communities ever hugged each other in public.

Mr. Alder quickly cools the narrative heat. As Willink notes, his next comment initially seems a non sequitur: "But they're [black people] just as nice as they could be. I had a lady – I still think a lot of her today. She was a cafeteria manager – she always filled my plate up. I said, 'Miss Hall, you made me start gaining weight, you know that?' I joke – (*We laugh*)." As Willink observes,

At a second glance, Mr. Alder's humor does more than calm the emotional volatility of the basketball game. It completely puts aside all the radicalness of the scene – a voluntary desegregation of blacks and whites in intimate physical contact, sharing a common passion for the game of basketball. With Mr. Alder's joke about the cafeteria manager and his gaining weight, he separates blacks and whites again – literally by a cafeteria line – into their "proper" places. Thus the joke releases the tension of the moment and its transgressive possibility dissipates. He returns us with laughter to a normative place where "they" are "nice," perform menial labor, are safely divided by service and consumption roles, and literally serve the white man exceedingly well.¹⁶

In the course of telling "his" story of desegregation, Mr. Alder relies on conventional narrative structures, such as the joke, and customary discourse, such as the cafeteria-line banter, to secure white privilege, even as he challenges its preeminence in the school structure. Playing this out, among other

elemental contradictions, Willink discerns the controlling performativities of race – the recurrence of racial privilege in a narrative performance otherwise dedicated to dramatizing its collapse – that govern Mr. Alder’s performances of masculinity, authority, and “fit” in the high school, the community at large, and the interview schema.

Mr. Alder performs the tactical, narrative work of exercising agency over histories of raced embodiment. In Rivka Eisner’s encounter with co Dinh, a former political prisoner in Vietnam during the Vietnam War, the complexities of embodiment overwhelm narrative structure and agency. Eisner relates a scene of interaction in co Dinh’s home in Ho Chi Minh City in which co Dinh was reluctant to speak. Co Dinh had previously, insistently referred Eisner to other women she felt were more appropriate bearers of war and revolutionary history – until she apparently could no longer resist the compulsion to tell. Eisner recounts an eruption of words that, even as they poured forth, fell away against co Dinh’s re-presentation of a bullet wound – a scarred gouge in her upper thigh. The first words recorded are Eisner’s, as she speaks the scene to which she is now subject:

RIVKA: Scars, scars . . . oh!
 She is pulling up her pant leg,
 Oh!
 Oh!
 Oh, my god.
 How did she get *that*?
 It’s on the inside of her left leg.
 Oh my –
 Oh –

Co Dinh continues through the translator, Nhina:

CO DINH/NHINA: This leg is a bit shorter.
 At that moment,
 The, the ladies were on the street.
 And they fire –
 They shot –
 And without doctor –
 And they sent her to prison,
 And it got worse.

Soon the three voices overlap. Co Dinh clutches her pant leg, now raised to expose the upper thigh.

RIVKA: Oh.
 CO DINH/NHINA: It got worse.
 RIVKA: Oh –

Eisner repeats the performance in an elaborated description of the primary relations of which it is comprised:

Before Nhina and I can process what is happening, we are overtaken. My conversations with the other veterans earlier today were not like this at all. The women told carefully controlled narratives of daring missions, sorrowful losses, patriotic resilience, defiant protests, leading to eventual success. One by one, wearing pastel colored poly-blend pantsuits and sitting properly on the couch, the women let me in on the presence of secrets without fully revealing their substance. Co Dinh's explosion could not be more different. This is bloody. Violent. Emotionally volatile. This is a firestorm, not a story . . .

Trying to keep up with co Dinh's rapid-fire pace, Nhina's translation echoes co Dinh's urgency with compounding, additive phrases, "*And they fire – and without doctor – and they sent her to prison, and it got worse, it got worse*" . . . Co Dinh walks out of the kitchen toward me and Nhina. Hurriedly taking up her pant leg, she reveals first a bony knee and then the pale skin of her thigh . . . Her fingers rest on the edge of a purplish gouge, about five inches below her pubic bone . . . "Oh my –. Oh –." What is *that*? "How did she get *that*?" There was no warning. I am stunned . . . now there is no stopping, no turning back. "Oh, my god," I whisper . . . "They fire – they shot." "Oh. Oh –." I stammer, caught off-guard by what is suddenly happening. Co Dinh's memories, dramatized in the place where bullets pierced her, are piercing me.¹⁷

Broken, shattered, even astructural, but powerful beyond control, co Dinh's words hijack Eisner's subjectivity in a blast of co-performative reckoning.

In each of these instances, what is said is inseparable from the saying of it. Indeed, understanding "what is said" would be sorely compromised without understanding the complexities and complicities entailed in saying it. Co Dinh's memory act, and Eisner's reiteration of it, suggests moreover that performance may exceed story and event in meaning, affect, and political implication. Similarly, even as Mr. Alder reiterates master codes, he not only reveals their effect on the past but renews their defining arc in the present.

In the saying, the teller is told. The teller enacts a historical self. The past asserts itself through him or her in narrative. The stories each tells are replete with master codes and cultural histories of mastery. While each articulates past and present in the relational drama of teller and listener, each also reiterates the claims of the past on his or her embodied subjectivity. Co Dinh is seized by history; Mr. Alder tries to settle himself – and his listeners – into its provisional comforts.

In each case, the interview is as much a scene of repetition as it is of potential rupture. The listener compels the teller's re-creative agency. The teller recruits the listener into affirmation and reciprocal investment. The negotiation of the past and present – and concomitant possibilities for continuity

and change – are embodied in the interaction of the teller and listener as correspondent subjects paradoxically connected by gendered, raced, class, and national difference.

Witnessing

What happens when the intersubjection of the listener becomes a performance in its own right? When the listener becomes a witness to what she has heard? In the turn toward what Conquergood has called “co-performative witnessing,”¹⁸ the listener enacts her dialogical transformation ideally not by “becoming” the teller mimetically but by doubling the teller’s subjectivity in the performance of her own. Understood in this way, the performance of oral history becomes a *critique* of defining discourses; a *poesis* of mutual change; a reparative *intervention*; and a *translation* of the relationship between the teller and listener into that between multiple listeners across boundaries of time and place, such that all are induced into performing a new/renewed ethic of imagination and action.

The performance of oral history is a repetition. Any given performance therefore will/must be “*almost the same but not quite.*” While some repetitions of “what is told” enlist tellers in staged retellings of their histories,¹⁹ most shift the burden of account to primary and secondary listeners (those who heard a teller’s account “firsthand” – body-to-body, and those who heard it from or by means of a primary listener). Accordingly, the possibilities for variation increase and the dangers of appropriation, assimilation, even annihilation of the primary teller become acute. In the performance of oral history, repetition belongs to an “other,” raising the critical questions: what does it mean to “own” a story and who has the right to tell it? Does repetition in performance by another *take away* the teller’s history and betray his or her trust?

Within the frame of a performative culture, the oral history is itself a repetition without stable origins. It is a form of cultural currency that flows among participants. As such, it does not “belong” to any one teller. Its vitality lies in exchange, at the dialogical intersection of teller and listener. This is not to diminish the risks of even unintentionally exploiting the vulnerability of a teller. It is to emphasize a *horizontal* rather than *vertical* economy of performance. In a horizontal economy, a performance of oral history is a tale told *alongside* another.²⁰ It enacts the intersubjection of interview partners, and their mutual becoming in the fraught negotiation of subjectivity, temporality, memory, imagination, and history. It does not disown the “original” teller, though it does elaborate the displacement of what is ostensibly his or her story into the co-relation of multiple others. The

teller is thus doubly burdened – and enabled – by the teller’s and an other’s histories.

This doubleness defines Emily Mann’s project. Various based on oral histories, court transcripts, news accounts, and conversations, Mann insists that her plays – among them *Still Life* (1981), *Execution of Justice* (1986), and *Greensboro – a Requiem* (1996) – are documentaries. With regard to the documentary style of *Still Life*, a dramatization of conversations with a Vietnam veteran, his wife, and his lover, Mann has said, “Perhaps one could argue about the accuracy of the people’s interpretations of events, but one cannot deny that these are actual people describing actual events as they saw and understood them.” The play is a documentary in that, as representation, it paradoxically certifies the reality of a prior performance – “actual people describing actual events.” It is also a documentary because it transfers Mann’s listening experience to audience members: “The play is also a personal document . . . Each character struggles with his traumatic memory of events and the play as a whole is my traumatic memory of their accounts. The characters speak directly to the audience so that the audience can hear what I heard, experience what I experienced.”²¹ Mann conveys both the violence her interviewees witnessed and the violence committed by witnessing: she was cut through by her interview partners’ accounts. She relays a version of that wounding to audiences.²²

It is important to distinguish here between what might be called *event-based* and *performance-based* trauma. The latter emerges in repetition. Mann describes herself as having been traumatized by her interviewees’ memory acts. Hearing about the violence they suffered, what she knew or did not know about the war, violence, and their impact on the intimacies of daily life was thrown into crisis. Doubling their traumatic memories in the performance of her own, she transfers an affective correlate to the *narrative truth* embodied by “actual people describing actual events” – what might be called *narrative pain* – to audience members.

In this case, the circulation of trauma comes with the hope that it will prompt “examination and self-examination,” or critique and reflexivity, and lead to the kind of understanding that will allow us to “come out the other side.”²³ Mann projects traumatic recovery. Rather than repetition of the same or recursive wounding, the play performs co-witnessing. It redoubles her interviewees’ memory acts in her own, testifying at once to “actual people describing *actual* events as they saw and understood them,” and the possibility for recreating the conditions of historical trauma.

More recent, popular reckonings with witnessing feature the interviewer in a kind of *mise en scène* of listening. The interviewer is not implied in the relation between “characters” and audience members but enacted in,

for instance, the restless co-habitation of multiple interviewees in Anna Deavere Smith's own body (*Fires in the Mirror, Twilight – Los Angeles*) or the staged encounters between investigating members of the Tectonic Theater Company and the residents of Laramie, Wyoming, in *The Laramie Project*.²⁴ Rather than receiving a report of "what happened," audiences are engaged in the preconditions of critical witness: the shared reflexivity and performative, peculiarly subjunctive ethic characterized by wondering *how could this have happened? how does it happen? could it happen again? how could things be otherwise?* For witness/practitioners, the question then becomes: can staging oral histories bring performativity and performance into such intense collision that comfortable, discursive repetitions burn up in repetition-*beyond*-the-same? And how does or might the performance of witness mobilize this *beyond*?

Performing into the beyond

To the extent that a given performance of oral history performances involves rigorous doubling, it shifts and expands Bauman's primary terms of verbal art as performance with which we began:

1. The authority of the performer rests in his or her display of competency or management of performance skills, typically the special property of designated storytellers or performer historians. In oral history as/in performance, competency as cultural authority to tell is not determined by cultural role, class, or virtuosity but rather is achieved as a matter of "ordinary" relational investment and risk. No account is singular. Exercising multiply-shared authority thus mobilizes an ethical relation "essential to the determination of agency and the possibility of hope."²⁵
2. For Bauman, it was the particular prerogative of performance to offer to its participants "a special . . . heightened intensity of communicative interaction which binds the audience to the performer in a way that is specific to performance as a mode of communication." When this happens, "the performer gains a measure of prestige and control over the audience."²⁶ In recent oral history practice (epitomized in such broadcast/digital innovations as NPR's StoryCorps and the lesser known www.voicethread.com) agency is ordinary; hierarchical "control" is dispersed into widespread possibilities for *enhancing* experience by *knowing* it through *telling* it, or through the vernacular aesthetics of historical re-creation.
3. Bauman claimed that in verbal art, performance meanings or messages do not preexist performance but flow from it in contingent, contextual concert, including, as Cheryl Mattingly argues, that between a patient and

a clinician. For Mattingly, the disconsolate liminality of the patient in life trauma is a stage for co-producing at least barely imaginable narrative futures. In contrast to Myerhoff, Mattingly insists that “coherence is not, perhaps, the most significant thing narrative offers to the afflicted or their healers.”²⁷ For Mattingly, the work of co-creating a compelling therapeutic plot has less to do with coherence than with desire. She thus displaces narrative into a tentative play of dialogue between patient and healer that promises, she argues, “powerful therapeutic plots [that] may foster hope by pointing toward some new telos when old directions are no longer intelligible.” Still, resolved to the continually emerging and radically contingent qualities of any one performance among many, Mattingly notes that “this new telos is always in suspense.”²⁸

4. Considering the qualities of competency, intensity, and emergence, Bauman argues for the power of performance to change structures of social relations. Many scholars and practitioners have relied on the performance of oral history to achieve social change by “breaking silence,” amplifying previously unheard voices, and/or entering new stories into the historical record.

But what happens when “behind” the silence is a regressive history of more silence? Or when narrative memory has been stalled by historical trauma?

As Sonja Kuflinec’s work in Mostar, a city in an “area now referred to as an absence: ‘the former Yugoslavia,’” suggests, the objects of witness may be so haunted by absence that testimony loses direct reference. Bearing witness folds into spectral performativity. Mostar is a ghost town, a figment of “ethnic cleansing”: “The spectre of destruction haunts reconstruction, just as the ghost of presence haunts the absences in the urban space. These absences, ‘empty’ spaces within the city, remain shadowed by spectres of what-was-before and possible-futures-to-come, both engaging in the politics of divisiveness within the city.”²⁹ In this context, what remains to the representational field is to remap the city, to regard the city itself as a performance – a forbidding play of appearance and disappearance – in order to create/recreate a *habitus*, a habitable space, a home. Working with the community-based Cornerstone Theater Company, Kuflinec proceeds to develop a performance based on anecdotes of youth living in the city, a performance that refuses (impossible) nostalgia – that does not try to install memory in the face of devastation but embodies everyday hauntings and the constant, banal work of “negotiating meanings across divisions and through fragments.”³⁰

Kuflinec’s work raises the question of reparation, which Grace Cho puts this way:

How . . . does one seek reparations for something that is not remembered, indeed is articulated in terms of a repeated failure to remember it? What is being demanded, and of whom, when no party recognizes its offenses? What can be repaired or restored when the violence of which reparations are being sought has not yet come to an end?³¹

These questions drive Peru's leading performance ensemble, Yuyachkani. Yuyachkani rehearses broad-scale, collective trauma and transgenerational memory, repeating history *against* denial and disappearance, *for* survival and change. As Diana Taylor observes, "For Yuyachkani, performance is not about going back, but about keeping alive. Its mode of transmission is the repeat, the reiteration, the yet again of 'performance' . . . The remembering was always past, present, and seemingly future."³² Performances of reparation and survival suggest a shift from oral history performance as documentary or testimonial to oral history performance as *ethnokinesis*.³³ For Victor Turner, reembodying cultural performances became a quintessential mode of understanding their significance in the field.³⁴ The work to which Kuflinec, Cho, and Yuyachkani, among so many others, put their performances, moreover, insists on going beyond either study or certification of a referential real toward embracing the representational real of performance – and the power of performance to sustain, survive, compel, install, and craft memory; not only to write culture (ethnography) but to make and to move it beyond, especially, the spinning wheels of reiterative violence.

This may happen at a local level, with the intent of instigating dialogue about broadly contextual issues such as urban/natural disaster (for example, Danielle Sears Vignes, *Hang It Out to Dry: Katrina Spun Tales*), mass incarceration (Ashley Lucas, *Doin' Time: Through the Looking Glass*), lesbians in the military (Mercilee Jenkins, *A Credit to Her Country*) and justice by execution (Deb Royals, *Still . . . Life, An Exploration of a Killing State*). It may take the form of legal advocacy.³⁵ It may also be community-based, inviting community members to contribute primary materials and artistry to the reimagination of collective and contested histories (for example, Shannon Flattery, *Touchable Stories*;³⁶ Robbie McCauley, *Sugar*). In each case, these performances invoke what D. Soyini Madison calls a "politics of the near,"³⁷ the intimacies entailed in bringing politics home to and through the body, in remembering, art, and action.

In all these ways the performance of oral history rejects pity and fear, the privatization of public concerns, and/or spectacular dramatization in favor of *critique*, *poesis*, *intervention*, and *translation*. In each of these cases (very selectively cited here), performance goes beyond representation

into transformation, beyond mirroring into witnessing and the translation of response-ability. In each case, the shift in oral history that has made it so troublesome to so many – the shift in emphasis from validity to value – is elaborated in a shift in performance from certitude to ethics, from documentation of, for example, histories of violence to performance as the thing itself, the site of inter/multisubjective relays of political concerns from which we can no more avert our eyes than we can refuse our bodies. In sometimes astoundingly beautiful forms, performers of the performance of oral history double its force in their/our bodies, transferring narrative pain with narrative truth, including audience members in a circuitry of affect and power which may be built from ephemeral, fugitive memory but which will not disappear. In the end, all that may remain to remembering is survival. It may be deprived of all objects and even illusions of coherent events. But as Shmuel, Myerhoff's most despondent and reluctant participant, taught her, a life, a whole people, may be wiped out as easily as one might erase a line of writing. Even to the extent that writing "fixes," it ends – it finishes off the life lived, constituting for Shmuel a second death. So he lives, in between inscription and erasure, struggling daily, hourly, not against his own death but the death of memories, memories of others pierced through with irreparable senselessness. So, against every desire and reason, he remembers. So performance persists beyond the archive and the recorded life into the necessary, public reckonings of *ethnokinesis*.

Notes

1. Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1977).
2. Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 272.
3. Victor Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 167.
4. Dwight Conquergood, "Storied Worlds and the Work of Teaching," *Communication Education* 42.4 (1993), 337, citing Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," in Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 183–201.
5. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 89.
6. See Rebecca Schneider, "Hello Dolly Well Hello Dolly: The Double and Its Theatre," in Patrick Campbell and Adrian Kear, eds., *Psychoanalysis and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 94–114, and "Never, Again," in D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera, eds., *The Sage Handbook of Performance Studies* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005).
7. Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 4.

8. Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
9. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 121.
10. Samuel Schrager, "What is Social in Oral History?," in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 285.
11. Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, 13.
12. Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: Syracuse University of New York Press, 1990).
13. See Elin Diamond, "Introduction," in Diamond, *Performance and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 4–5.
14. See Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
15. Kate Willink, "Domesticating Difference: Performing Memories of School Desegregation," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 27.1 (2007), 33.
16. Kate Willink, *ibid.*, quoting Pamela Grundy, *Learning to Win: Sports, Education, and Social Change in Twentieth-Century North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 5, 33, 33–44.
17. Rivka Eisner, chapter 3, "Re-Staging Revolution and Remembering Toward Change: National Liberation Front Women Perform Prospective Memory in Vietnam" (PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2008).
18. Dwight Conquergood, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," *TDR: The Drama Review* 46.2 (2002), 145–56.
19. See Pam Schweitzer, "Many Happy Retirements: An Interactive Theatre Project with Older People," in Mady Schutzman and Jan Cohen-Cruz, eds., *Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 64–80; Rena Fraden, *Imagining Medea: Rhodessa Jones and Theater for Incarcerated Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); and Alicia Rouverol, "Trying to Be Good: Lessons in Oral History and Performance," in Della Pollock, ed., *Remembering: Oral History Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 19–44.
20. See Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson, *Listening for a Change: Oral Testimony and Community Development* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1995), 9–10.
21. Emily Mann, *Testimonies: Four Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1997), 35.
22. See Rivka Eisner, "Remembering Toward Loss: Performing *And so there are pieces . . .*," in Pollock, ed., *Remembering: Oral History Performance*, 123ff.
23. Mann, *Testimonies*, 35.
24. Anna Deavere Smith, *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and Other Identities* (New York: Anchor Books, 1993), and *Twilight – Los Angeles, 1992 on the Road: A Search for American Character* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994); and Moisés Kaufman, *The Laramie Project* (New York: Vintage, 2001).
25. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 21.
26. Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance*, 434.
27. Cheryl Mattingly, *Healing Dramas and Clinical Plots: The Narrative Structure of Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 107.
28. *Ibid.*, 108.

29. Sonja Kuflinec, "[Walking Through A] Ghost Town: Cultural Hauntologie in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina or Mostar: A Performance Review," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 18.2 (1998), 83. See also Kuflinec, *Staging America: Cornerstone and Community-Based Theater* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003).
30. *Ibid.*, 89.
31. Grace Cho, "Performing an Ethics of Entanglement in Still Present Pasts: Korean Americans and the 'Forgotten War,'" *Women and Performance* Special Issue, "Reparations," ed. Joshua Chambers-Letson and Robert G. Diaz, 16.2 (2006), 305.
32. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 208.
33. With debt to Dwight Conquergood's projection of the movement of performance from mimesis to poesis to kinesis in "Beyond the Text: Toward a Performative Cultural Politics," in Sharon Dailey, ed., *The Future of Performance Studies: Visions and Revisions* (Washington, DC: National Communication Association, 1998), 25-36.
34. Victor Turner, with Edie Turner, "Performing Ethnography," in *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), 139-55.
35. Note Conquergood's interventions into trials of Hmong refugees living in Albany Park in the late 1980s, reported in, for example, Terry Wilson, "Judge Tells Tribesmen to Study U.S.," *Chicago Tribune*, 30 June 1988, "Chicagoland" section, and Conquergood, unpublished MS., prepared for the Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University, May 23, 1988.
36. Shannon Jackson, "Touchable Stories and the Performance of Infrastructural Memory," in Pollock, ed., *Remembering: Oral History Performance*, 45-66. See also www.touchablestories.org.
37. D. Soyini Madison, "My Desire is for the Poor to Speak Well of Me," in Pollock, ed., *Remembering: Oral History Performance*, 149.

Chapter 3

Going Home Ain't Always Easy: Ethnography and the Politics of Black Respectability

E. Patrick Johnson

There is a well-known cliché that suggests, “Home is where the heart is.” For me, this could not be truer, for although I currently live in the Midwest, my southern roots are constantly showing. Since my move to Chicago from Durham, NC in 2000, I have had the good fortune to meet and make many good friends. Indeed, many of the friends that my partner and I have met over the past few years are also transplanted southerners who came “up South” because of a new job opportunity as I did, to try out “city” life besides Atlanta, to attend college, or to “escape” the South. Whatever our reasons for leaving the South, the South never left us. Whether it’s that alien accent that emerges when talking to our parents over the phone, those small “country ways” that we hang on to no matter how “citified” we become, or that longing for the soft spoken gentility whispered from the lips of elders that can take the edge off of any stressful day, we are our region’s children. No amount of migration will change that. I was reminded of this when I returned to the South to conduct interviews with black gay men who were born, raised, and continue to live in the South for my book, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South – An Oral History* (2008).

Listening to those men’s stories not only grounded me, but it also took me back to divinely remembered places in my own history. They were telling *my* story while narrating their own – stories that remind me of summertime in the foothills of western North Carolina, when folks in my neighborhood sat on their porches and spun stories for hours on end.

But going home ain’t always easy, especially if you are an openly gay, black southern academic returning to do research on a population that, in some ways, wishes to remain “hidden in plain sight.” Navigating the vast terrain of identity politics within the context of a place like the South proved to be tricky, even though (or perhaps especially because) I am a southerner. There were times when I betrayed the codes of southern civility I had been brought up to believe were the proper way to carry one’s self. At other times, however, my own politics and preconceived notions

about what it means to be “out” forced me to confront the complexities of how one’s “public” face is always already implicated in one’s private space.

The point here is that the social mores of the South dictate a passive aggressive stance toward any transgressive behavior, especially the activities, behaviors, and indulgences that undermine its religious philosophies – e.g., drinking, gambling, adultery, and homosexuality, to name a few. So rather than “disrespect” the women of the house, men who gather to drink will do so outside on the back porch and have the alcohol concealed in a paper bag or disguised in a soft drink can or bottle; instead of doing “hard core” gambling like poker or the slot machine, many southerners, especially women, will go to bingo night or surreptitiously buy a lotto ticket; men and women who have a “friend” on the side are careful not to bring any offspring from such extra-marital affairs around the “legitimate” children so as not to “embarrass” the family; and homosexual liaisons between supposedly “straight” men and known gay ones are handled similarly to any extra-marital affair: it’s allowable as long as the indiscretion is not “flaunted.” For example, during one of my visits to Tuscaloosa, Ann McCarthy, one of the people who helped me find men to interview, actually called one of her neighbors who has been married to the same woman for close to forty years and who has four sons, to inquire if he would be interviewed for the book. His protestations (I could hear his raised voice through the phone while I sat three feet away at Ann’s kitchen table eating her fried chicken) that he is not gay did not faze Ann as she nonchalantly reminded him, “Robert, why are you acting like you ain’t gay? Everybody know that you and June Bug been carryin’ on for years, including Betty Sue.¹ You know you need to come on over here and talk to this child. He’s writin’ a book on gay men in the South.” The “click” on the other end of the line did not faze her either, as she continued to go through the phone book to find men whom she, and apparently the entire community, “knew” were “that way.”

Ann “outing” Robert transgresses the boundaries set between him, his lover, his wife, and the community that established a complicity of silence about him and June Bug “carryin’ on.” The gentility, acts of politesse, and complicity of silence around taboo issues in southern tradition often takes precedence over one’s individual need to *name* that identity or *flaunt* that transgression. On the one hand, this kind of willful denial upholds institutionalized forms of oppression. On the other, it provides a space to peacefully co-exist and/or sometimes, in a paradoxical way, affirm one’s identity or relationship. In other words, gays may transform those codes of gentility into queer codes of desire, gender and class performance, or creative expression. This is particularly true for black gay men who are involved in the church where their “silence” about their sexuality actually opens a space to “speak in tongues” about their identity in more nuanced ways. As James T. Sears reminds us, “Southern history is never simple and seldom straight” (Sears 2001:4). Indeed, as the stories I collected detail, the South is always already queer.

In this essay I offer a methodological and political meditation on the issues that arise when conducting ethnographic research on a population of which the researcher is a part and for whom the researcher wishes to advocate. By drawing

on my experiences in the field conducting oral histories of black gay men of the South, I raise questions about how lesbian/gay ethnographers confront issues of positionality in the face of disciplinary pressures to be self-reflexive about one's place in the field on the one hand, and the researcher's own desire not to privilege her own story on the other. Further, I ruminate on how the move from the page to the stage (from private reading to public performance) might offer a way to navigate the politics of whose story is actually being privileged and for what purpose. Ultimately, I see this research as a "living archive" that will serve as a resource not only for other researchers, but for a general public that may never have been exposed to the life histories of sexual dissidents. In this way, this public history project is very much a project in public anthropology, one that does more than just disclose events in people's lives, but encourages them to think about how these life narratives intersect with the histories, experiences, and events in their own lives. Hopefully, such a history will open up spaces for public reflection on the way that race, class, gender, sexuality, and region affect our relationships to "home."

Advocating History: Writing *Sweet Tea*

The idea for a book on black gay men of the South came to me in the summer of 1995 while attending a summer picnic hosted by the black gay organization US HELPING US, People Into Living, INC, in Washington, DC. This organization "specializes in HIV/AIDS prevention and support services for black gay and bisexual men." Seated at a picnic table under a tent just a few feet from me were a group of "old timers" – black gay men whose average age was around sixty-five – who were talking about their gay lives "back in the day." Between the laughs and lies, grins and guffaws, tears and testimonies, were glimpses into remarkable lives: these were living archives of faces, places, events, deaths, births, past sins, and sex. I became spellbound and captivated by these stories in the same manner I did when I was a child listening to the stories of my grandmother. The difference, however, was that unlike my grandmother's stories, which validated my family and *black* history, the stories that these men told validated my black and *queer* history. At that moment, I knew that I would some day write a book that documented these stories. Unfortunately, none of the men who were present at that picnic are still alive, except in my mind's eye. The echoes of their withered voices and the image of their shiny gold teeth, colorful clothing, and weathered faces are embroidered across the landscape of the history gathered between the pages of the book. Now, 12 years later, I have been afforded the opportunity to document this part of history while other men are still here to tell their stories.

Moreover, the research arose both out of my interest in valorizing the voices of a demographic of men who seldom get a chance to speak about their experiences as southerners in relation to their sexuality and race and, I suppose, out of my

longing for validation of my own story of being a black queer southerner. Over the course of 18 months, I collected the narratives of over seventy black gay southerners, from ages 19–93. On the occasion of each of these interviews, which were mostly conducted in these men's homes, I found my own life story in dialogic tension with their stories. Their story was and was not my story. The stories about growing up poor, being brought up in the church, trying to pray my gayness away, singing in the choir, and being called a "sissy" rang true to my experience. The stories about molestation, living a transgendered life, being put out of the house, being homeless, and being sexually promiscuous were not as close to my experience, however. And yet those stories, too, were familiar – and certainly ones in which I was implicated. They were indeed what Richard Schechner refers to as the "not me" and the "*not not me*" (Schechner 1988).

Many of the stories of black queer life have gone undocumented. Partly due to the neglect of historians of the South, black sexual dissidents' complicity of silence around issues of sexuality, and a ubiquitous taciturnity on the part of southerners about things of a "private nature," these omissions and silences all collude to keep the stories of southern black gay men's lives, like most taboo things in the South, hidden in plain sight. With few exceptions, until recently most histories of gay life in the USA have focused on urban spaces on the east and west coasts – places like New York and San Francisco.² I agree with Brett Beemyn's assessment that "a subtle elitism that views all but a few major metropolises as backward and entirely inhospitable to gays also contributes to this oversight" (Beemyn 1997:1). Moreover, the general perception of the South as inhospitable has kept some scholars of gay history from excavating what, to my mind, is a more complicated space in which to negotiate one's (homo) sexuality. I argue, like Robert McRuer in another context, for a reexamination of the queer possibilities in the South, and am "interested in what (perhaps more radical) cultural work can be done when . . . 'everywhere' includes such an apparently marginal and inhospitable place" (McRuer 1993:222).

Rather than approach this project employing a traditional text-based historiography, I felt it was important to employ oral histories as the key methodology. As a southerner, I have the gift of the gab and that of graciousness, to say nothing of the southern Baptist Christian ethos that guides my every move – despite my desire to have it otherwise. Therefore, I knew that not only would I be comfortable actually interacting with these men, but I also knew that I could get them to open up to me in a way that they might not open up to a non-southerner, a non-black person, or even a self-identified non-Christian. Like Zora Neale Hurston, I knew that "[black gay men] are most reluctant at times to reveal that which the soul lives by" (Hurston 1990:2). Moreover, oral histories, as John Howard has noted, in some way provide an easier route into the lives of sexual dissidents, especially in the face of archivists, families of deceased queers, and other holders of queer history who are reluctant or unwilling to allow access to materials. Referring specifically to doing research on gay life in the South post-World War II, Howard writes:

Difficulties in researching and uncovering the history of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals in the United States are compounded when the inquiry is focused on a section that has been particularly hostile to sexual difference – the American South. Archivists and university administrators often express reservations about the validity of the field; families seeking to preserve the “good name” of their relatives routinely deny access to materials; and, as in any other part of the country, traditional historical sources remain largely silent with regard to homosexuality prior to the 1960s. Thus, oral history serves a vital role in reclaiming the lesbian, gay, and bisexual past, especially in the South. (Howard 1997:213)

Howard’s commentary reinforced my instinct to approach the living – to interact with these men in their own environs to provide a fuller picture of the lives they performatively narrated.

Unlike Howard, I am not a historian by training and therefore I was not interested in asking the same questions that a historian might ask. Nell Painter suggests, “Making sense of the past is the work of historians, who create *historical narrative*” (2005:iv, emphasis in original). But rather than creating such an historical narrative as the researcher and placing a priority on my interpretations, I was more interested in the meanings and symbols embedded in the act of storytelling – of bearing witness to one’s life.

In his seminal 1985 essay entitled “Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance,” Dwight Conquergood (1985) not only outlines the contours of what constitutes an ethical methodological approach to the ethnography of performance, he also presents a moral imperative for ethnographers to engage in what he coined as “dialogic performance.” Disavowing the various pitfalls of performative stances toward the Other – including the custodian’s rip-off, the enthusiast’s infatuation, the skeptic’s cop-out, and the curator’s exhibitionism³ – Conquergood advocates that performance ethnographers performatively engage the Other “as a way of having intimate conversation with other people and cultures. Instead of speaking about them, one speaks to and with them” (Conquergood 1985). Supplanting his apt and oft cited quote that “opening and interpreting lives is very different from opening and closing books,” Conquergood was committed to an ethical stance toward ethnographic methods as well as performance praxis – that is, a call to action in the pursuit of social justice for the disenfranchised.

Ethnography, cultural studies, and performance studies have all experienced many shifts and turns since Conquergood’s incisive essay. Indeed, Conquergood himself began to recast the notion of dialogism, suggesting that “conversation” and “dialogue” were not sufficient tropes to describe the differential power relations between researcher and the researched – indeed, that the ethnographic encounter is a site of contestation and negotiation – leading him to coin the term “co-performative witnessing” to describe the ways in which the researcher and the researched are co-actors who are invested in the meaning-making process, but whose goals and line of vision are rife with social, cultural, and political investments. What remains in Conquergood’s work, however, is a commitment to performance as a

critical method for mining the ways in which the disenfranchised make meaning of their lives.

To construe this research as co-performance means not only acknowledging that both the researcher and the narrators are performing for one another; it also entails “paying attention” in a way that engages the bodily presence of both the researcher and the researched in the moment of the narrative event. This methodology, according to D. Soyini Madison, requires that “You not only do what the subject does, but you are intellectually, relationally, and emotionally invested in their symbol making practices and social strategies as you experience with them a range of yearnings and desires – copformance is a doing with deep attention to and with others” (Madison 2006:323). Thus, it was also important to me that I conduct an *oral* history project that would take advantage of my training in performance studies and ethnography, for the sensuousness of performance ethnography – the smell, taste, touch, sight, and sounds of the cultural space of the Other – is also a part of the southern way. Critical performance ethnography alters the traditional relationship between researcher and subject, demanding an ethical response from the researcher in witnessing and validating the narrative of the interviewee. Their relationship becomes reciprocal, and the importance of dialogue cannot be overestimated. Instead of the traditional hierarchical positions, the encounter is analogous to an invitation to dinner at a southern home in which the researcher is the guest and is asked to help by shelling peas, chopping onions, or setting the table. I was the invited dinner guest (in some instances I mean this quite literally) of these black gay male southerners who wished to share their life histories. I did more than attentively listen to their narrative performances – my presence actually validated and affirmed their stories. This was not a one-way exchange, however. It was a conversation, which is why, unlike other oral histories in which the interviewer’s voice has been excised to create a sense of an uninterrupted story, I, in many instances, retain the questions I asked that prompted these narratives. I also retain many of the narrators’ stutters, pauses, and tangents to capture their voices in a way that did not render their speech “sterile” and to capture the performative nature of southern speech in general, and black gay vernacular speech, specifically. Their stories also validated my own life story as a southern born and raised black gay man. These stories filled the air of living rooms, dining rooms, sun rooms, hotels, bars, and coffee shops, the pregnant pauses filled only by the sounds of clocks, turned down television sets or stereos as the anticipation of what words to say next or what question to ask was stifled by a previous indelible reverie. To be sure, not all of our communions were romantic expeditions. Tears, contempt, condescension and indifference were also very real emotions in that space we call performance. But it is the dialogic experience of co-performative critical ethnography that makes it such a valuable tool in engaging the lives of the Other, the self, and the self and Other in each other’s eyes.

Employing oral histories and critical performance ethnography as methods for this particular project also seemed apropos given the importance of the oral tradition in African American culture, and especially of African American culture in the

South. As classic ethnographies of black folks like Hurston's *Mules and Men* and Gwaltney's *Drylongso* demonstrate, the interaction between the researcher and informants is crucial to providing a multi-textured perspective (Gwaltney 1993; Hurston 1990). For example, many of my contacts for this book were black women who solicited men to talk to me. My conversations with them were invaluable. Indeed, their recollections of black gay men in their communities helped contextualize many of the narratives in the book. Therefore, it's not just the words of the narrators that are important, but also the words and performances of those around them as well. These women's stories as well as the "gossip" about others imparted by the narrators are what John Howard refers to as "twice-told stories" or "hearsay." He writes: "This hearsay evidence – inadmissible in court, unacceptable to some historians – is essential to the recuperation of queer histories. The age-old squelching of our words and desires can be replicated over time when we adhere to ill-suited and unbending standards of historical methodology" (Howard 1997:5). As an ethnographer, I wanted to capture the fullest picture of the lives I am portraying – part of that process was being observant not just with the five senses, but also with my own intuition and what southerners refer to as "motherwit."

An ethnographic approach to these oral histories allowed for a more honest "self-reflexive" rendering of these stories. While self-reflexivity within performance ethnography seems, at this point, commonplace or taken for granted, it is important to note that there are still ethnographic studies in which the researcher upholds a colonial gaze. My conducting this research, however, was not motivated by a need to exploit or imperially gaze upon the lives of these men. Indeed, a critical performative ethnographic approach demands that the researcher not only be conscious of one's privilege (in my case, class and institutional affiliation), but that she also uphold an ethos of social responsibility toward the advocacy for the people about whom she is researching.⁴ I want to validate these men's stories by sharing them with a wider audience, but I also had an ethical responsibility to assist those who desired my help. Self-reflexivity also means putting my own body on the line – that is, sharing my own history as a black gay man born in the South. Where appropriate then, I share parts of my own queer southern history alongside that of the narrators.

Finally, framing these narratives and the ethnographic process as performance destabilized notions of *the* truth and focused more on "truth" as experienced in the moment of the storytelling event. In this way, the narrator's "experience" of his life is acknowledged and validated, but also corroborated by the presence of the ethnographer. Both are aware, however, that they are performing for the Other – that this social interaction, however "real," is nonetheless a "fragile fiction."⁵ Walter Benjamin captures this process when he writes: "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (Benjamin 1969:87). Here again, we are pointed to the co-performative witnessing inherent in critical ethnography that disavows a static representation of the Other or the self, as both journey on a collaboration toward making meaning of the social and cultural world around

them. As such, these narrative performances, according to Kristin Langellier and Eric E. Peterson, have “the potential to disrupt material constraints and discourse conventions. . . .” (2004:4). For the men I interviewed and for me, those material constraints were multiple and in some cases include poverty, lack of education, lack of access to health care, and social and racial inequality – material constraints not easily disrupted through storytelling. But, as de Certeau aptly reminds us: “What the map cuts up, the story cuts across” (1984:129).

When I began to do research for the book, my thought was to seek men out over the internet, especially in chat rooms. I thought better of this idea for two reasons. Firstly, I did not want people to mistake my intentions. When I was single, I frequented chat rooms often and was familiar with any number of pick up lines – seeking out someone for “research” was one of them. Better to not give someone the wrong impression or have to work my way out of an awkward situation. The second reason I decided not to go that route concerned my own safety. I was going to be meeting most of these men for the first time and I had no idea what situation I would stumble upon. Thus, I thought it better to be no more than one person removed from those I interviewed. The word of mouth method was effective because it kept at bay fears I may have had about approaching strangers, while it also eased the anxieties of the narrators because at least we had someone in common whom they trusted, and therefore they trusted me.⁶

Many of the men welcomed the invitation to be interviewed and were eager to tell their stories, especially older men or transgendered people – perhaps because they were at an age or so flamboyant that they were less concerned about what others thought. A few of them even welcomed me into their homes overnight or at the very least prepared me a meal. Others agreed to be interviewed, but never showed up for the meeting. I can only imagine that they were afraid of exposing their identity to a stranger. As a researcher, this was frustrating not only because of the expense of travel, but also because many of those who stood me up communicated that they had interesting stories to tell. In a few cases, I rescheduled, which, on one occasion, was prompted by Ann McCarthy chastising one of her neighbors for not showing up. She was particularly peeved because she had prepared Sunday dinner for all of us, as the interview was to take place at her home. After waiting 30 minutes for this interviewee to show up, Ann called him and read him the riot act. While he gave an excuse about why he couldn't make it, it later turned out that he had gotten cold feet and had to “pray on it [agreeing to do the interview].” After a subsequent phone conversation with me, however, he agreed to reschedule and I made yet another trip to Tuscaloosa to speak with him.

To be fair, I understand some of these men's reluctance to share their stories given the current political and social climate not only in the South, but also around the country. The queer community is experiencing a backlash across the country because of the conservative Bush administration and because states are passing or have passed more and more anti-gay laws. Black religious leaders in particular are siding with white anti-gay conservatives in a way heretofore unseen by the institution of the black church – an institution that would, as one of my informants put

it, “shut down if all of the sissies exited.”⁷ The extreme of this anti-gay sentiment and alignment with political conservatives is exemplified in the following quote in the February 2004 *New York Times* article by the Reverend Gregory Daniels of Chicago: “If the KKK opposes gay marriage, I would ride with them” (Phillips and Lewis 2004). In addition, on December 11, 2004, a group of southern black ministers, led by Bishop Eddie Long of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta and the Rev. Bernice King, eldest daughter of Martin Luther King, Jr., led a “Re-Ignite the Legacy” march in front of the King Center in protest of gay marriage, hiding behind a “sheet” of a different kind.⁸

Naturally, these incidents and the corresponding rhetoric of hate don’t inspire those who might be struggling with their sexual identity to trust that a stranger can “protect” them from retaliation. John Howard had a similar experience when trying to secure black Mississippian oral history narrators for his project. According to Howard, however, it was his whiteness and class status that seemed to be a deterrent for blacks talking to or trusting him: “Generally speaking, African Americans seemed reluctant to participate in my project, cautious about revealing the names of other persons (regardless of assurances of anonymity), less likely to invite me into their homes, less likely to speak to me at length. For reasons well exemplified by the historical events chronicled here . . . many African Americans rightly are wary of white middle- and upper-class interlocutors” (Howard 2001:299). In my experience it was true that the men in *Sweet Tea* expressed relief or felt more comfortable when they discovered that I was black and myself a southerner; however, my being so “openly” gay sometimes mitigated this “comfort” in similar ways to how Howard’s whiteness denied him access to people and information. Thus, it was important for some that we meet on “neutral” territory for the interview, like my hotel room or a mutual friend’s home, but not at their place of residence. It appeared that my presence could be explained – to family members, to non-gay friends, etc. – because of my blackness (in a way that Howard’s whiteness could not), but at the same time, my perceived gayness – vis-à-vis my effeminacy and my openness about my sexuality – could implicate the men by association.

As someone born in a black community in the rural South, I know first hand the ways in which one internalizes the notion that “it’s harder to be queer in the South than in the rest of the nation” (Smith 1997:381). I don’t mean to suggest that there is no merit to this myth, for many of the stories these men narrate speak to the difficulty of being gay in the South. But, for as many “horror” stories, there are an equal number of encouraging and inspiring ones. Nonetheless, for all of my “openness” about my sexuality, I did have one experience in the field that reminded me of the ways in which notions of black respectability manifest internalized homophobia.

The experience happened when I traveled home to Hickory, North Carolina to interview “Chaz,” a pre-operative transgendered person who lives “her” life as a woman Monday through Saturday night and “his” life as a man on Sunday in order to sing tenor in the mass choir at my home church. My experience of Chaz in the field exemplifies my own culpability in the code of silence around my homosexuality in

the context of my hometown and engages the politics of (black) respectability. It also speaks of the ways in which being “out” is a contextual state of being rather than an impervious one.

While I suspect that most of the people in my hometown have figured out that I am gay, the topic has never come up in any discussions I have had with the townspeople. And for all of my progressive politics, not once have I ever mentioned my (white) partner of ten years, even though he has accompanied me home on several occasions. I am not being self-aggrandizing when I say that my story represents the model black ascension narrative in the eyes of both the black and white folks in my hometown, especially given my single parent, public housing background. “See what happens if you work hard and get good grades?” they tell the younger black kids. “You too can get a PhD.” To reinforce this belief, my hometown gave me my own day and celebration for being the first African American born in Hickory to receive a PhD. To buttress this bootstrap narrative, the wording on the cake at the celebration read: “From Zero to Hero.” What the townspeople and probably even my own family don’t know is that it was partly my queerness that motivated my overachievement. It was the sense that, if I could only deflect attention away from my “high” butt, soprano voice, noticeable lisp, penchant for dolls and my Mama’s wigs – the things a homophobic bully’s wet dreams are made of – if I could focus attention away from some of the fundamental parts of who I was coming to know as “me,” by working extra hard for the “A” in school; by joining every possible high school club; by running for and winning senior class president; by working my soprano voice to out-sing all of the girls in the soprano section in the church choir; by becoming a class clown and using my own overweight body as the “butt” of jokes; by being the “good” son who sends money home to help out when none of my other siblings come through; by agreeing to give speeches and lectures for the community to inspire young kids to stay in school and off drugs; then and only then, perhaps, when the unspoken yet devastating news finally came that I am queer, it wouldn’t be so damn disappointing or matter at all. I do not mean to suggest here that all of the achievements over the course of my life have been motivated by my trying to circumvent my family and community’s disappointment about my being gay. But I would be lying to them and to myself if I did not acknowledge that the “fact” has been a large part of my overachievement. It soon became part of the reason that when I went home I only stayed long enough to guarantee that I only ran into a few people, despite my mother’s insistence that I call a hundred “play” aunts and godmamas to let them “holla at me.” Not having to lie about “when I’m getting married” (*I would have a long time ago if you hadn’t voted for Bush, Sir*) or “when I’m going to have children” (*Well, most states have made it illegal, Ma’am*). But these rebuttals never pass my lips. Instead, I smile the polite, gracious smile that many of us queer southerners have learned to perfect, and ease some variation of the lie from my lips to their ears the subtext of which says, “Kiss my ass, you lowdown heifer. You know good and well that I’m a fag. How dare you ask me questions that you already know the answers to in an attempt to embarrass me in front of my Mama?” without anyone in the room flinching, but also understanding the signifying that has

just transpired. Indeed, I was, and to some degree still am, invested in the façade of black respectability undergirded by a southern Christian ethos. It's my Achilles heel, even after all of this time and living in a big city in a house with my partner. Like Joseph Beam laments, "I cannot go home as who I am" (Beam 1986:231). And so, the upshot of this story is, I was embarrassed to be seen in public with Chaz because "she" undermined the "reputation" that I had established as the "perfect" native (heterosexual) son. Hair coiffed, face beat back into her temples,⁹ French manicured toenails, donning black leather pants and an off-the-shoulder pink mohair sweater, Chaz was fierce and I was envious of her audacity to embody her "ass splitting truth" (Hemphill 2000). As we sat in Chili's restaurant catching up on church and community gossip, Chaz challenged all of my progressive politics by just being who she is in the world. As with Chaz, many of the narrators in *Sweet Tea* reminded me and those of us who have traveled "the dirt-road-cum-boulevard to gay self-actualization – to identity, community, and political movement – [and who began] in the dark hinterlands of naïveté and deprivation, and [ended], happily, in the bustling corridors of wisdom and illumination" (Howard 2001:27), that if we think we have cornered the market on "liberation," then we are sadly mistaken.

And yet, the story is complicated even more when one thinks about the politics of being out in the South. While I understood Chaz's audacity to be true to who he/she is – and all of the flamboyant accoutrements that that entails – perhaps I was also still smarting from the death of my dear friend and former student, Curt, who was responsible for me finding many of the men that I interviewed for the book. Just two months after I began the research for *Sweet Tea*, Curt was found in his apartment in Durham, NC, naked, bound and gagged in the hallway outside his bedroom, and had been stabbed over 22 times – three of the stab wounds proving fatal. The suspect, an "acquaintance" according to the newspapers (Swift 2004a), had stolen the van that Curt had rented to transport items to an event at Duke University where he worked as a minority graduate student recruiter. They found the van not too far from town and eventually arrested the assailant after a co-worker at a Burger King tipped the police off that he had been holding several electronic items in his locker and was selling them at a local pawn shop. None of Curt's friends wanted to believe that Curt had lost his life over a television set and a DVD player. What we all thought, but never voiced, was that it was a trick gone bad. That's the only thing that could ever explain the *how* of it – but not the *why* of it.

My interview with Chaz took place just five months after Curt's death. Although I understood the circumstances of Curt's murder to be specific to the life decisions that he had made about how to express his sexuality, perhaps subconsciously my being embarrassed to be "out" in public with Chaz inspired fear that what happened to Curt could happen to me – and to Chaz. This subconscious fear, however, was guided not by a general awareness of the potential homophobic violence to which any LGBT person is exposed; rather, it was specific fear of such violence occurring in the South, and more specifically, in my hometown. Chaz, then, became the catalyst for me to confront not only my internalized homophobia, but also my own internalized prejudice about the region I called home. In other words, I bought into

the prevalent discourse regarding the South as inhospitable to queers – something that belied my motivation for me conducting this research in the first place. My position as an “out” researcher, in this particular instance, was called into question because of the tension between my public reputation in my hometown, my personal politics about LGBT rights, my desire to debunk public perceptions about what it means to be black and gay in the South, and my personal pain of having just lost a friend to homophobic violence.

From Page to Stage: Performing Sweet Tea

I always knew that this research would eventually become a staged performance. Initially, I considered adapting a script from the oral histories and casting a show of eight to twelve actors. After more thought, however, I decided not to turn the performance into a full stage production with multiple cast members and instead make the show a solo piece with me performing excerpts from various narratives. Pragmatically, I knew the show would be more mobile if it were only me and I also felt that I had a closer understanding of the circumstances and context of each of the interviews and the non-verbal cues that accompanied each interview. I also made this decision because I saw it as an opportunity to use performance to ask larger questions about how to stage ethnographic fieldwork. For instance, how does moving the narratives from the printed page and the mostly private space of a reader to the stage with a public audience alter their meaning? What does the dramatization of the researcher’s relationship to the researched and to the audience reveal that the book version only implies? What are the ethics of performing these narratives in the absence of the narrators? How does the researcher keep the focus on the men and their stories rather than the researcher and his talents as performer?

While working through these questions I began to think about some of these contemporary issues in performance ethnography and how my particular research and ethical conundrum is not an anomaly, but one that other performance ethnographers have grappled with over the years. Nonetheless, in this reflexive, “temperature taking” moment, I want to use the occasion of my own research to revisit once again the relationship between self and Other in performance ethnography. While we have, for the most part, moved beyond the positivistic ethnographic models of modernity and contemporarily take for granted a “self-reflexive” mode of inquiry, what are the “trouble spots” of self-reflexivity? In other words, when does reflexivity threaten the “critical” in the term “critical performance ethnography” by colonizing the space of the Other for which the research is supposed to account? In speaking on this subject, D. Soyini Madison writes: “We understand that our subjectivity is an inherent part of research, but in critical ethnography it is not my *exclusive* experience – that is autobiography, travel writing, or memoir (or what some people call *autoethnography*). I contend that critical ethnography is always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among the Other(s),

one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in the Other's world" (Madison 2005:9). Here, Madison makes a distinction between what she sees as "critical ethnography" and "autoethnography," by linking critical ethnographic practice with political and social advocacy for, and a steady focus on, the Other. I wonder then, in a case such as mine, if there is a way to conjoin critical ethnography and autoethnography in a way that adheres to Madison's call to "make a difference in the Other's world."

In her short but deftly crafted 2006 essay, "Marking New Directions in Performance Ethnography," Della Pollock outlines what she believes are five productive directions for performance ethnography research: international, immersive, incorporative, integrative, and interventionist (Pollock 2006). For the sake of my discussion here, I want to focus on two of these directions – immersive and integrative – as they relate to my current oral history project on black gay men of the South and in order to demonstrate both the uses and limits of performance ethnography.

Pollock describes "immersive ethnography" as an ethnography in which "the self-subject of the researcher is immersed in the cosubject, entangled with, even ravished by the cocreative process such that the subjectivity of the researcher is diffused within, even to the point of disappearing into, the field's body. Accordingly, we no longer see the scholar 'I' at work but we certainly feel her passion, his grace" (Pollock 2006:326). Pollock's mission here encouraged me to think more critically about my engagement with the men I interviewed in relation to the politics of representation in the site of performance – that is, when I made the conscious choice to move these narratives from the page to the stage, how the "cocreative process" might be foregrounded such that my subjectivity is diffused, and yet the audience might feel my passion and grace. The move I make to incorporate, as best I can, this immersive stance, is to play clips of part of the interview during the performance. In this way, the audience gets to hear the men's voices in relation to mine. The other performance choice I made actually draws on the aesthetics of oral interpretation,¹⁰ whereby the other is not fully embodied, but rather suggested through voice and small gesture and the presence of the text. In the performance, for instance, I never allow the audience to fully suspend disbelief: the script is ever present and I include the questions I asked of the interviewee. I find that this performance method allows for a new way of documenting ethnographic material that doesn't fully accommodate the aestheticization of cultural performance in ways that undermine the complexity of the intersubjective experience shared between researcher and researched.

On the other hand, I am not fully convinced that my performance accomplishes Pollock's call for an interventionist ethnography. Her formulation of interventionist ethnography revolves around the notion of empathy as a taken-for-granted objective of performance studies. She writes: "To the extent that empathy in any way reflects desire for unmediated identification, it may be implicated in the rank nativism it, hermeneutically, hopes to combat. It may in turn foreclose on critique by holding the researcher and his/her audience close, or as close as desire for unmediated knowledge will permit. Whether because of the possibility of perpetuating racisms,

limiting critique, or generating more productive relationships between ethnographer, field, subjects, and reader/viewers/participants, it seems worthwhile to investigate and potentially to intervene on the presumed value of empathy in performance ethnography” (Pollock 2006:327). Here, Pollock’s point is well taken, for while it is true that, as one of the goals of many of us engaged in ethnographic research, we desire the audience with whom we share this work to be moved to act, to speak, or to critically reflect on the representation of the lives presented before them. I would hope, however, that empathy as avowed through unmediated identification would be mitigated through the very process of performativity. That is, the fact that a performance is always already mediated through the lens of the spectator’s own social location may interfere with an uncritical empathetic leap from self to other – if indeed we want to disavow empathy as Pollock suggests, or if I’m reading her suggestion wrong and what she’s asking for is merely that we complicate how we theorize empathy.

Examining my performance of these men’s narrative more closely, I believe that my performance does steer clear of the “unmediated” empathetic leap to which Pollock refers. Rather than eschew empathy, I desire to cull. Namely, I want to humanize these men and their lives so that the bigot that may not otherwise be predisposed to engage the story of a black gay man from the South might, in some instances, be moved to think differently about homosexuality and/or about race and region. Here is where my position as an out academic might actually be put into service in a productive way – as a way to advocate on behalf of this marginalized group. For some of these men, for instance, being open about their sexuality is not an option – not because they are necessarily closeted in the ways that are often theorized in simplistic readings of the “closet,” but because their sexuality is mitigated by other identity markers such as class and race that disavow privileging sexuality in a visibility/invisibility, out/in binary. My role as performance ethnographer, then, serves as a mediator between the audience and other in the other’s “absence,” yet still communicates the substance of their lives in ways that alter others’ perceptions and belief systems about homosexuality – and especially in the South.

One way to begin to work through this conundrum might be to think of ethnographic research on subjects whose subject position is closely aligned with but not exactly the same as the researcher in the same way that Mae G. Henderson theorizes the role of the black woman teacher in the black women’s literature classroom. Henderson poses the question: “What does it mean to teach the Other when the Other is the self?” In the specific instance of my research on black gay men of the South, reframing Henderson’s formulation of how to teach the Other when the Other is the self to how to research the Other when the Other is the self might prove productive. Henderson suggests that one move toward answering this question is “to locate oneself in the body – that is for the teacher [researcher] to represent herself as embodied text – produced by certain personal and historical experiences.” For Henderson, achieving embodiment requires more than “re-figuring the traditional and stereotypical” or “privileging the personal at the risk of the socio-political as a primary category of analysis”; rather, she suggests that the teacher [researcher]

must “listen to the otherness within – that otherness which is defined not in its relation to the Self as Same, but in its relation to Self as Other” (Henderson 1994:436). Henderson’s call is not that different from Conquergood’s notion of dialogic performance, except that Henderson locates the dialogic process within the self as an Other rather than *between* the self and the Other. Employing Henderson’s formulation might help us discover yet more productive ways to invigorate our sometimes overdetermined methodological strategies of engaging the Other.

As the proliferation of ethnographies of LGBT communities conducted by those who are a part of those communities persists – which I think is a good thing – we need to be ever mindful of how we represent ourselves in relation to our “kin.” In other words, how do we negotiate the *terrain* of the self without getting mired down *in* the self – a solipsistic exercise of intellectual and apolitical masturbation? How do we highlight the Other and implicate ourselves in the work/performance of ethnographic research? How do we negotiate the space of the Other without condescension and imperialist impulses? Again, while these issues are not new, I believe that we have embarked upon a contemporary moment when the taken-for-grantedness of self-reflexivity has lulled us into a quietism surrounding the ethics of the ethnographic process. The fever of solipsism has run amuck; another temperature taking is long overdue.

Marlon Riggs (1989) critiqued the homophobia of the black community in much of his work. One memorable line from his film *Tongues Untied* is “I cannot go home as who I am.” After the experience I had conducting research and writing *Sweet Tea*, I would have to alter Riggs’ slogan slightly to suggest that “I cannot go home as who I *was*,” for I was undeniably changed by the experience of conducting this research. I do not wish to idealize the men I interviewed or to romanticize my experience because they are not innocent subjects and all of my experiences in the field were not easy or pleasant. But the exchange that occurred between us was more than just about me pulling out a tape recorder and gathering stories. Rather, it was about the preservation of the undocumented lives of men who have and continue to contribute to the maintenance of black southern life. *Sweet Tea* only begins to mine the multiple and rich histories waiting to be let loose and shared with the rest of the world. Indeed, they are the stories that make going home a little bit easier.

Notes

1. All names used here are pseudonyms.
2. A few southern gay historians have attempted to correct this oversight by producing a number of very important texts on southern queer history. Chief among them are James T. Sears, John Howard, Carlos L. Dews, and Carolyn Leste Law, to name but a few. These scholars’ texts fill a critical gap in the historical record by documenting the lives of the LGBT community in southern and rural communities. They have also been invaluable resources for the research for *Sweet Tea*, paving the way for scholars like me to contribute to this growing body of knowledge. While these books are

crucial to the understanding of the queer South, none of them focus exclusively on race or document histories from the entire South, including states that were a part of the confederacy, such as Oklahoma and Missouri. *Sweet Tea* also covers a broad range of age, class, gender, and educational demographics that have heretofore never been discussed in histories of queer southerners.

3. Conquergood (1985) characterizes these stances accordingly: The Custodian's Rip-Off is marked by "selfishness and plagiarism"; The Enthusiast's Infatuation is marked by "superficiality and singles' bar cruising"; The Skeptic's Cop-Out is marked by "cynicism and stony silence"; and The Curator's Exhibitionism is marked by "sensationalism and tourists' stare." In the center is Dialogic Performance, which is marked by "genuine conversation."
4. For more on the ethics and responsibility of the ethnographer, see Madison 2005: 5–8.
5. See Geertz 1968.
6. I do not wish to imply here that there is "inherent" danger in meeting men on the internet. Indeed, I met my current partner online. I also do not wish to appear prudish about sexual "hookups" or "tricks" garnered through chat rooms. For the purpose of this research, however, I believe that contacting subjects online would not have been the most productive way to obtain subjects for this book. One downside to this, however, is that the sample of narrators is skewed toward those with a college education.
7. In his latest novel, E. Lynn Harris actually dramatizes what happens when all of the gays of a church in Atlanta decide to walk out. See Harris 2006.
8. Indeed, Freddie Styles, one of the narrators in *Sweet Tea*, suggests that Bishop Eddie Long himself is gay and discloses alleged "inappropriate" behavior between Long and his (Freddie's) nephew. While this is only speculation, it does point to the hypocrisy of individual ministers and the black church in general.
9. This is a vernacular phrase among black gay men that means that a person's makeup is applied very well and very heavily.
10. Here, I am referring to the oral interpretation of literature, which emerged from the discipline of elocution. At some institutions, like Northwestern University, oral interpretation eventually became "performance studies." For more on the history of oral interpretation see Bacon 1979.

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some bitter and some sweet growing up black and gay in the south

1

In many ways, southern black gay men's lives are no different from other black southerners' lives. They are full of memories, both good and bad, that speak to the region's fraught history and its relation to the rest of the country. The narrators in this book speak with candor about being children of the South—of the joy of having open fields to run and play in; the comfort of southern food, family gatherings, and church functions; the onerous task of family chores and the strain of witnessing family dramas; dealing with homophobia and experiencing racism and segregation. The chapter title was suggested by the summation of his childhood offered by one narrator, Jerome, who seemed to be speaking for most of them: "When I stop now and look back at it . . . it's like some bitter and some sweet."

Among the most striking things recounted in these stories are the overwhelming recollections of racism. Nearly all of the narrators have a story about attending segregated schools or living in segregated neighborhoods or witnessing racial violence. One would not be surprised by such stories from men who were born before, say, 1970; but some of the younger men, born in the 1980s, also share such tales. While their responses to their experiences with racism vary widely, they were all affected by them in some way.

But those bitter experiences are paired with sweeter stories of childhood. In fact, some of the most humorous stories in *Sweet Tea* are found in these early childhood memories. From stories about getting in trouble and getting "whoopings," to tales of flamboyant queers in the neighborhood who served as role models, these narratives paint a vivid picture of how southern life accommodated what it wanted to while it policed and sometimes silenced other things.

The stories are presented in four groups, focusing on parenting and family dramas, education, racism and segregation, and gay members of the community. These categories are not rigid, however; they merely provide a general organiza-

tion to themes that arose across stories when I asked men to talk about their early childhood memories.

PARENTING AND FAMILY DRAMAS

One of the most commonly held stereotypes about black families is that they are generally headed by single parents, and typically by the mother. This pathological view of the black family is belied by the men of *Sweet Tea*, whose family situations run the gamut. Many grew up in single-parent homes or with divorce. Others, however, were raised by two parents in one household, in addition to grandparents and extended family. For me, what is most compelling in these stories is how the men reacted to their parenting situation—whatever it might have been. Men who were reared in single-parent homes are very articulate in disavowing the notion that a “missing father” contributed to their being gay. Children of divorce describe the effects of being split between parents and in some instances how it made them more independent or distrustful or how it created abandonment issues in their adult relationships. Men raised by two parents who remain together to this day recall how their parents’ relationship taught them lessons about love, life, and commitment. Not surprisingly, perhaps, no narrator’s childhood was without contradictions, conflict, and complications.

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“C.C.”

There’s no way to describe C.C. but as a “character.” He was born in 1961, one of six children, in Greenville, Mississippi. Greenville is a river port city that sits at the heart of the Lower Mississippi River, where Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi come together. Of its 50,000 residents, roughly 70 percent are African American. C.C. now lives in Alabama and teaches dance at a large university. Outspoken and charming, C.C. is unorthodox in his approach to dealing with racism and homophobia, an approach that speaks to his unapologetic defiance of social norms and values. Eschewing identity politics, especially as they relate to “blackness” and “gayness,” C.C. believes that we are all a part of what he calls a struggle in the “human condition.” We met through a mutual friend who teaches at his university; since then, we have become fast friends. He serves as a mentor for many young gay men at his university who are struggling with their sexual identity. Two of those young men are narrators in this book. His mentoring style, like his philosophy of life, is direct and no holds barred.

Part of his doggedness, unfortunately, stems from his parents' constant fighting when he was young. The interview took place on November 4, 2004, in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

My childhood was quite interesting. Wonderful, beautiful and dark, you know, that very Tennessee Williams or Chekhov. My grandparents owned their own grocery store. So being black and in the South where your grandparents own their own grocery store and property, that experience was a quite wonderful experience because you knew you were different. [. . .] The darker side was that my parents were very smart people but just had lots of problems. I mean, in terms of like my mother and father had their share of fights. My mother divorced my father, which was great for her. And I admit, at the moment when she divorced him, for some strange reason I thought, "I have to stay with him." And here I am a young man in like fourth grade or something like that. "Somebody's got to take care of him." You know. Because my father's also legally blind. So I can remember like staying at the house for a while and going from neighborhood to neighborhood, you know, all the neighborhood people, who was really taking care of me. And that just was the South. So it wasn't like I wasn't with many mothers. But of course my mother and my grandmother caught wind that that's what I was doing. And she's like, "You come down here and get this boy," 'cause my mom then had moved to Memphis.

So, yeah my childhood, when I think about it, was sort of like mixed up. I'd been exposed from like eight. What I mean by exposed [is] my mother was one of those people who really believed early on that you were going to get out of the house to go to tennis lessons or to band lessons, to go to theater lessons. She was a firm believer in that. She would wake us up on the weekend at a young age and say, "You're getting on the bus 'cause you're getting out of here. I'm not training people. You must learn to see what's available for you." So, my childhood was spent being very exposed to a lot of things right away.

My mother's first job I remember was at . . . What do you call those schools for young kids? Head Start. She was like the director of a lot of the Head Start programs, which now in retrospect I think affected me a lot. 'Cause that's when they were starting young kids, before preschool . . . You were being exposed and educated. And my father was one of those men who . . . I always tell people, it's interesting to watch a man who is legally blind be an incredible realtor. Yes, he took that test by tape and could walk in a house and tell you anything. He'd hit on those walls or walk around and say, "Yeah, okay." And he was good at it. Uhm hmm. 'Til the day he died.

It's really interesting to look back. Like when you hear all these catch phrases, like "It takes a village." You know, it was just like anybody who lived by you really took care of you. But I particularly remember these two families that were really poor, had huge, huge number of people living in their house. But those were the people I always wanted to be with. And so to this day, I feel indebted to them because they all remained in Greenwood, Mississippi, and pretty much probably [have] the same lives. But it's amazing how you can remember how instrumental those people were because they really weren't striving for nothing. And sometimes when you're not striving for anything. What I mean by not striving for anything, they didn't have any kind of like career goals. So, those people have so much love it's incredible that that's something that can just heal all wounds. And I felt very safe with those people because, early on they all knew I was gay. And in some ways some of the boys in those families began to protect me early on. And sort of growing up with that experience kind of altered my childhood, where there was this incredible need for some reason for men who really protected me. I even remember one of my brother's close friends who recently was telling funny stories how he remembered . . . "When you were in grade school, I was making sure that nobody was gonna mess with you." So I've always had that kind of protection.

But my parents fighting . . . When you start watching that stuff early . . . you get up out of that. It's like, ohhh! That domestic violence, down here, you might as well pop you some popcorn 'cause everybody's doing it. I mean it wasn't like you could leave. You'd go to the next house, it was just as common. People would just be like, "I'm gonna kick your bitch ass." And you'd go to your friend's house and their mama's getting her ass kicked, too. So it'd just become sort of like, "Oh. Okay." So that part was probably worst. Which I still think has a big problem. I didn't realize that until later. That really has a big problem with me and my issues with intimacy. 'Cause from that moment on, you start to protect yourself. So even when people was trying to be all nice to me, I was like, "Child." I ain't trying to hear that. I was protecting myself. [. . .] I started to protect myself in a way.

From day one when I got suspended from school . . . I always go back to that fourth-grade [experience] 'cause that was a pivotal point in my life. I decided, "No, unh unh. We're not gonna hear 'fag' every day." I remember picking up like a two-by-four, went down and just was like beating the children, Honey. Like, no, we ain't hearing this. So, I get home and police are there and they're knocking at the door and calling my father. And I'm sitting there, still feisty like, "No, no, I'm not hearing this no more. I'm not hearing this ever again." And I didn't because I was clearing this up. I'm not doing

this every day. And that's one thing, you know, about the old school, they said, "You better go and kick that ass. 'Cause you kick that ass, it puts an end to it." [. . .] You just earn your props. So, there again, I just learned when you decide, "Unh unh. Unh unh." And when you live like that from that moment on, your life is different because, from the moment you walk in any door, people know, "Unh unh." There is no apology. And people pick up on that on count one. And it's the most frightening thing in the world. Like they still can't believe . . . I'm celebrating with my Bush-Cheney pin. I wear it everyday up there to say, "Now if you think you're going to steal my joy, then I'm joining your party." 'Cause you think I'm going to spend four years hating George Bush? No, I'm not. I've got too much creativity and energy that I need to be using some. If this is where the country is going, [whispering] we're going with them. [Chuckle]

And part of that is just I'm just a provocateur. It's like, "Oh no, you met the wrong one. I'm going with you on this one." I'm just going with you. Because if you don't, you wouldn't be able to get out of the bed if you really dealt with the shit that's thrown at you. The kind of hate and daily whatever. So you just have to find a way to say no. And that's that moment of going back to childhood where I've never apologized for anything.

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ED

Ed was born in 1952 in New Orleans. Before the devastation of Katrina, he lived in the Ninth Ward and worked as a librarian at the New Orleans Historical Society. Ed is a gentle soul who is also very gracious. It is he who put me in touch with Countess Vivian, the oldest narrator in this book (see Chapter 7). On the day of the interview, I drove Ed to his favorite sandwich shop, where we both got catfish po' boys—a staple in New Orleans. The interview took place on January 22, 2005, at his home, after we finished our sandwiches. Since Katrina, I have not been able to contact him.

I think I had a well-balanced childhood. I had a mother and a father. They both lived in the home. I had one sister and I had two brothers that lived in the home with me. My father worked and my mother worked. I went to school at the normal age. Although I grew up in, from the age of three onward, we lived in a housing development, a housing project. But we never thought we were poor. We never visualized ourselves as being poor, even though [. . .] if you lived in a housing project, you were considered to be poor.

But my father and my mother both had values that they instilled in us, and one of the values was education. My mother only finished high school

and my father [. . .] dropped out in his junior year in college, but he was fairly bright because both of his parents were educators, and he was skipped in his early years and he was only sixteen when he was in college. And his father was one of eight black CPAs in the country at that time. And he used to tell me that, and I kind of just didn't believe it. I used to say, "Oh yeah, you're right." But actually, when I did do my family genealogy, I looked on the 1920 census records for Louisiana, for New Orleans, and I found him and his two sisters, my aunts . . . one of them is deceased . . . and his brother, my uncle, who is also deceased, and his father and his mother. And it gave the occupation of my grandfather, my father's father, as being an accountant at an insurance company in 1920. So that is a CPA, all day long. So my daddy has been vindicated.

And my mom, although she only finished high school [. . .] she used to recite poetry to us, verbatim, by memory. And one of her favorite poems was "When Malindy Sings" by Paul Lawrence Dunbar, which is, you know, very difficult to recite, let alone remember, because it's in dialect. She would just chime it off like it was nothing, with proper voice inflection. Plus, she wrote poems herself and she wrote a song when she was a girl, about thirteen years old. And I'm still working on the research for this. She grew up in Mississippi, and she actually went to school part of her life with Richard Wright. She knew Richard Wright.

And my mother's still alive. My father's deceased. My mother is eighty-eight years old. [. . .] Unfortunately, because of her Alzheimer's, she doesn't remember anything now. But before that, she was quite lucid in terms of telling about family history. She wrote this poem one day when she was in school. She called it the "Happy Work Song," and there were these guys that used to come from town to town, buying poetry and lyrics for songs. And they bought her song. And I actually know that this is true because when I was a child she kept a scrapbook and she had the actual newspaper clipping of her winning a hundred dollar prize. . . . This would have been like in 1930 or something or so, because she was born in 1916. May 13th, 1916. They paid her a hundred dollars for her song, and it was written up in, I think, *The Jackson Daily News*, which was the black newspaper. And I haven't been able to find a copy yet. I'm still looking. And her song was renamed, kept the same lyrics, "Whistle While You Work," which unfortunately is the song used in the Disney movie, *Snow White*. And they've made millions off of it and my mother got a hundred bucks. But that's my mother's story altogether. But that's to just give you an idea what kind of parents I had. They encouraged me, you know, to be the best that I could be. And my father, at one point, worked three jobs I can recall. And my mother, when she did work, she

worked mostly domestic work and food service work in cafeterias. But after the children came, she didn't work. My dad used to get all the work. But I don't know if I'm really explaining what my childhood was like through that.

Did you have chores?

Oh absolutely. All of us had chores. We had to wash dishes. We had to clean the floors. We had to keep our rooms clean. And we were disciplined mostly by my mother. We weren't disobedient children. And I don't feel as though we were ever abused. But my mother was the disciplinarian. She was somewhat of a drill sergeant-type. [Chuckle] When she said do something and you didn't answer her or do it, you might find a shoe or a pot flying past your head or something, you know, because she was gonna get you. And she may have not got you at that moment, but she would wait sometimes until you were asleep and surprise you with an attack. [Laughter]

And the only room that we could go in that had a lock on the door was the bathroom. But if you went in the bathroom, it was like going to a prison because you couldn't do anything in the bathroom but run the water, take a bath, you know. It's very boring in there. And she would tell you, "Okay you can stay in there, but the longer you stay in there, the worse your punishment's going to be when you get out. So you better come out now." [. . .] My brother, who is a year younger than I am, we shared a room so we had bunk beds. And when she used to get behind us with a belt, the first one under the bunk bed was sheltered because the bed was against the wall. So you had one and then the one that got second was sticking out. So she would grab the leg or arm and whip the arm or the leg or the part of the butt, whatever part she could reach. And you would just breathe a sigh of relief that, you know, she didn't get you. And you were safe to live another day. But it was never abusive because when she disciplined us, we were pretty bad at times and we deserved it. [Chuckle] And she laid down the law. My father seemed to be comfortable with that arrangement. After all, he was working all the time.

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FREDDIE

Among the men I met while collecting these stories, Freddie is one of the most memorable. He is a wonderful storyteller—being almost as talented at that art form as at his profession of painting. Although quite soft-spoken, Freddie has a captivating storytelling style that draws the listener in. One has to pay close attention to his use of words to catch the subtle humor and deft critiques of society and other characters in his stories. Freddie and his partner of over forty years (see Chapter 6) live in Atlanta in a home full of antiques. The house is also filled with Freddie's artwork. Although semi-

retired, he still takes commissions for paintings and works part-time at a gallery in downtown Atlanta. He also likes to garden. The interview took place at Freddie's home in Atlanta on October 30, 2004.

Freddie was born in 1944 in Madison, Georgia. Regionally referred to as "the town that Sherman refused to burn," Madison is located about sixty miles southeast of Atlanta. It is known for its beautifully preserved antebellum homes. Below Freddie recalls the painful story of learning that he was the product of a mother and father who did not want him.

How would you describe your childhood?

Oh, God. It was awful. I was an unwanted child—an unexpected child and an unwanted child. After four children, I think the doctors told [my mother] she couldn't conceive any more children. And then I came along, so I was sort of a surprise in that regard. But my father's mother was a very strong figure in my father's life. You saw the movie *Roots*? You know how they held the baby up? I kind of use that analogy. My grandmother held me up and declared that none of her blood was in me, which meant that her son was not my father. So my father, being the weakling that he was, I think, believed her. My mother's mother, my grandmother, lived here in Atlanta. And my mother would visit my grandmother in Atlanta. So my father's mother proclaimed that I was some—I won't use the "N" word—but some man in Atlanta's child—that I was not, in fact, his child. So that caused my grandmother and my father to treat me differently. My sister is just three years older than me. One of the more painful examples I can remember is us being on the school grounds at Bernie Street Elementary School. It's no longer there, but it was the colored school in Madison, Georgia. And us running out to the edge of the schoolyard, to my father and asking him for a nickel. And he pulled out a handful of change and would give my sister a nickel and wouldn't give me one, saying he didn't have any more. And I remember crying and that kind of thing.

And I think the most painful memory I have is my father's cousin A.C. and his wife, whose name was Maja [. . .] said to my mother one day, she said, "Bea, why don't you give Freddie to me since Aunt Evie and W.S. don't want him?" with me standing there.

And I remember starting to cry and hugging my mother around the legs. And I must have been very young because my mother was only five feet, two inches and I remember my head was about at her knee. So I was a very small child. And I remember crying and saying, "Mama, you gonna to give me away?" and she said, "No." There were other kinds of things, but those are the more painful memories I have of early childhood in Madison, Georgia.



Freddie smelling flowers in his garden. Photo by the author.

I do think that I was molested as a little kid in Madison, Georgia, possibly by more than one person. And I've been in counseling and cried through all of this stuff. But I think a part of that had to do with the fact that it was commonly known that I did not have kind of the protection of my fraternal grandmother and my father. Because my grandmother was a larger-than-life figure, and I think people respected her and some people might have even feared her because she was a *big* woman and she was very outspoken and just kind of a strong personality. I think that they knew that "It's open season on him because they don't want him so it's okay to do pretty much anything to him."

What did your parents do for work?

My father, in Madison, Georgia, worked for the planer mill, which was a processing mill for lumber. They would cut the lumber, and I guess they planed it into planks or boards or whatever. But my mother was always a domestic worker.

In 1952, when we left Madison, Georgia, my mother and my sister and I came to Atlanta. First of all, my mother came. My grandmother was ill so my mother came . . . probably in March or April of that year because it was before school was out . . . to take care of her mother who was ill. And she came back probably late April, early May and she said to my father . . . I heard her tell him this many times, that the two of them could not make it in Madison, Georgia, because there were too many external influences. She kept warning him that she would leave him. So when she came back, this was in 1952, she said to him that she was thinking of leaving him and she was going to move to Atlanta. She was going to take us and move to Atlanta, and she wanted him to join us because she had decided that they just could not have a life in Madison, Georgia, because there were too many external influences. And so it was about the time of my birthday, May 12th, we moved to Atlanta and my father was supposed to join us. [. . .] You're so young you wouldn't remember this, but there was a time when, if your father worked at a place, he could go to the boss man and say, "Oh, I've got a friend who needs a job," in many instances. And the man would say, "Bring him on." So, some of the men in the neighborhood here in Atlanta that my grandmother knew, had lined up a job for my father. And on the day he was supposed to come, he didn't come. I remember sitting out on the front steps, waiting kind of for him, much of the day. I knew the direction he would come from, and several times I saw a man who kind of looked like him and I got happy thinking that was him coming and it wasn't. So I remember how disappointed I was that he didn't come. And he never came. Instead, he moved to New Jersey with Lily Mae, one of the *problems* my mother had in Madison, Georgia. He moved

to New Jersey with Lily Mae, and they have I'd say ten or eleven children. I had all these half siblings. They were in Jamesburg, New Jersey, and now I think some of them are in Jamesburg, and my father lives in Somerset with one of his daughters. And so my parents were never reunited. They never got back together. [. . .] You know, 'cause even though my father wasn't all he should have been, he's still my father. [. . .] And I keep saying that I'm going to ask him at which moment did he decide that he was, in fact, my father. Because I think he has, at some point, accepted that. I've been told many times by family members that I look a lot like my father's father. I didn't meet him. My grandfather died in February of the year that I was born, so he died in February and I was born in May. And I've had people tell me that, if he had been alive, my life would have been very different because he would have protected me from *them*. He would have been a kind of a more calming influence. And at some point, my father's mother changed her mind as well. I never did ask her before she died when she changed her mind, but I think at some point they could see some resemblances to people in the family and they changed their minds then. And certainly, here I am, sixty years old. I forgave them many years ago. I did. I don't know if you know this or not, but counseling is a scary process. You have to really be able to, I think, open those doors. And you also have to be able to, I think, admit or to give up on what I call a prevalent myth in the black community, this sainted mother myth. You have to kind of maybe see her for who she is, that just because she's your mother, she's not a saint. You can still love her, but you have to kind of see her for who she is—or either of your parents. Because in many instances, both the mother and the father, where they can do no wrong, you know. Well, I keep saying, “you know.” But when I was in school, if you wanted to get a fight out of somebody, you'd say something about their mama. [Laughter] And I don't know if that's true today or not. I suspect that it probably is. And everything you could say . . . you might say might be true, but just the fact that you're saying something unpleasant about somebody's mama would get you a real fight. But if you're going into counseling, you have to kind of see all of these people for who they are and deal with the experiences you had with them.

[. . .] But at some point, I cut off all communications with my mother for several years. I didn't call her. If she called me, I was kind and gracious, but I didn't go to see her. I didn't call her. And this was a decision I made. My counselors were . . . thought I was very brave in making that decision. And my . . . I was in a group of ten other people in counseling. They were all just kind of amazed by the fact that I could do that. But I made the decision after years and years and years. Because the other part of the story is that my

father and grandmother didn't want me, but neither did my mother. Well, she was determined to keep me because her mother didn't keep her. You see? It didn't matter how badly she abused us, her saving grace was always, "At least I didn't give you away." Because my mother was given away as an infant. The story I've heard is that my grandmother was very young when my mother was born, and her father gave my mother to some other people when my grandmother wasn't at home one day. And so my mother never forgave her mother for giving her away. But she was very angry and tormented and very abusive of my sister and I. And her saving grace . . . her defense always was, "At least I didn't give you away."

So, that was why she was determined to keep us, no matter what. But it didn't matter if she treated us like dirt. [Chuckle] So, that's the other part of the story. So I, for much of my life, have felt very much alone because in Madison, Georgia, I thought I had my mother. But once we moved here . . . Have you seen *The Exorcist*? I tell people that once she got us in Atlanta, her head did a 360 degree turn. And one of her favorite things to say was, "If it wasn't for you, my life would be wonderful." So, hearing that as a kid, I think, was why . . . I started to have thoughts of suicide. Because just think of it. If you're a little kid and your mother says, "If it wasn't for you, my life would be wonderful," you're going to think, "Well I hate making her life awful." And you start thinking about not being here. And for many years, I was suicidal and that was one of the issues I dealt with in counseling. And I think that those thoughts of suicide were kind of planted by my mother making that statement.

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JAIME

Jaime is another great storyteller. That he has had such a colorful life, especially his years in the military (see Chapter 4), makes his stories that much more compelling. He is the older brother of Phil, another narrator in this book. The eighth of eleven children, Jaime was born in Covington, Kentucky, in 1961. Covington, the fifth-largest city in Kentucky, is separated from Cincinnati, Ohio, by the Ohio River. Jaime lives with his partner not far from the home where he grew up. The interview took place in Cincinnati at a mutual friend's home on July 24, 2005.

We used to laugh and joke that we kind of grew up in Mayberry. Because, you know, growing up in Covington, being this close to Cincinnati where, you know, there seemed to always be a lot going on. But over there it's a little bit slower, so we were kind of sheltered from a lot of the goings-on. Even

now, the way things are, it's a lot different over there than over here. I would say I had a, you know, an average childhood. Normal, you know.

[. . .] There were eleven of us kids between my mother and father. And although my father he didn't complete his education, he wanted to make sure that we all had that option. Of the eleven kids, I think all of us went through Catholic schools throughout our whole, you know, from first to twelfth grade—those of us that wanted to. But the other side of that was we had to all go to work and help pay for it. As kids we, you know, we didn't really think we were poor I guess because we were not really denied anything basic that we needed. But, I mean you look back on it now you think, had your parents been born in a different time they probably could have been CEOs of a company, you know, being able to manage and run our family the way that they did. I think as opposed to the people, from my experience of the people that grew up around me, and as adults and talking to some of the people that I grew up with, we actually had it pretty good for our, you know, for that time and for that area.

Did you have chores when you were growing up?

Oh yeah. Oh yes. Our family pretty much . . . was like a company. My father, his saying was, "I don't care what you hear out there, there's no democracy in my house, what I say goes and if you can't abide by that, you have to leave. I've got too many kids to raise and I don't have time for any messing." He also managed one of those little tidbits like, like you have ingrained in your head like if you ever get in trouble or do something stupid that calls for you to have to go downtown and go to jail, then you might want to use that one phone call to call somebody that's going to help you, because there will be no help for you here at this house. And we all knew that right up front and everybody made it through without having to test that little rule, because my father was not one to say something and not mean it.

Did you and your siblings have a lot of friends in your neighborhood where you all played together and did things like that?

Yeah. We were that one neighborhood house that everybody hung at, you know, with there being so many kids, there was always a bunch of people there. And, especially dinnertime, there was always a couple of extra people at the table for whatever reason. And even, as I said, we weren't rich, but my mother just had a policy if someone is there and wanting to eat, then she'd find a way to feed them. You know, that's just the way it worked. Everybody pretty much hung at our house. A lot of, at that time a lot of people's parents didn't allow them to have company or hang at the house or that type—or we grew up in the era of plastic furniture, plastic covered furniture, so you

know. It was kind of a whole street full of that. In our house it was too many of us for our parents to even be trying to worry about anything like that pretty much.

My mother took care of us. My father, his primary job he was an auto detailer. But we, as I said, from probably as far back as I can remember, probably at about five or six years old, my father always had anywhere from three to four part-time jobs in the evening cleaning different businesses around the city [with which we helped], and that was pretty much our life. We would come home from school; we would wait for him to get home from work, you know, [from] his primary job. We'd have dinner, and by that point, you made sure your homework and all that was done because he didn't want to hear you had to do homework after we come back from cleaning because it was usually pretty late in the evening. So, you know, other kids went out and played, we piled up in the station wagon and went and paid for our tuition. So that's basically, you know, that's how it worked. Everybody had a job at the different places that we went to, to clean or what have you, and everybody had a job at home. Well, it was pretty much you went by "the list," as we called it, on the refrigerator—the schedule—where, you know, if it was your week for dishes or help with the laundry or taking out the garbage, or whatever it was. Pretty much is how it worked.

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“LARRY J.”

Larry J. is one of the few narrators who barely came up for air during the interview. One question, and perhaps thirty minutes later I would be able to get in the next one! He is like many a southerner in that he just loves to story spin; he's a person who, in the middle of telling one story, has to tell several other stories as "context" for the main one. The result is sometimes something that resembles free associative speaking. A college friend of mine who knew that Larry J. had led an interesting life put me in touch with him. From the times we spoke on the phone before the interview, I realized that I was in for a treat.

Larry J. is a business professional and has a very successful career. He is also a poet who has self-published two books of verse, both volumes dealing with his painful childhood and his longing for romantic love. Regarding the former, he survived several abusive men in his mother's life. Regarding the latter, he's still looking for love, but has had lots of sexual escapades during that search (see Chapter 4). He was born in Camden, South Carolina, in 1959. The oldest inland town in South Carolina, Camden is located just

thirty-five miles northeast of Columbia, the state capital. Larry J. is one of four children. The interview took place at his home in Charlotte, North Carolina, on January 7, 2004.

How would describe your childhood?

Probably a childhood of survival, because my mom and my dad were separated when I was very, very small. It's hard for me to remember exactly when, but I was not even in the first grade, so I would say I was probably three, four years old when my mom and my dad separated. At the time, when they separated, I had two other brothers. My mom was the person who pretty much raised me, for the most part. So I pretty much grew up in a single-parent home. But because my mom worked a lot, I ended up being pretty much raised by my grandmother. So think about Camden, which is a very rural area. My mom had another baby, probably before I was six. And I do remember that. And he got killed by her boyfriend who had shaken him to death. And I think they call it some kind of syndrome [. . .] today. So as a result of that, we ended up moving in . . . my grandmamma was pretty much, you know, "You all need to come stay with me." So we ended up staying with my grandmother in probably a six-room house, and there was probably twenty people in that house. I say twenty—and I may be exaggerating just a little bit—but I have a set of twin uncles . . . who are a year older than me. Then there was these other two males there, then my brothers. . . . I had two brothers at the time. And then my grandmother had another son of hers, plus at least two more daughters. She had ten kids. My grandma had ten kids, and the last two were, like I said, twins. So it was a houseful. Yeah, all of us in about a six-room house. So there was no such thing as a bedroom—I mean, a living room. Every room was a bedroom except for, you know, maybe the kitchen.

[. . .] I do remember having a paper route probably when I was in the fifth grade. Because my mom pretty much worked to try to maintain, 'cause my daddy did not provide child support, which continues to be a bone of contention. And I might be editorializing a little bit here, but I sort of wish I could go back and retroactively deposit those payments. Because you know now I don't understand why women didn't [demand child support], but back then they didn't. They didn't press the issue of child support, so look at the money we might have gotten from dear dad. But back then, you know, the Department of Social Services was certainly not enough to survive off of. I don't even know whether my mom even had the know-how to do that. She had like a ninth-grade education. You know back then folks didn't finish school. [. . .] As the years went by, my mom had a couple more kids. I now have three

brothers and one sister. The sister's the youngest and she's thirty-five. My mom is sixty-four, so that kind of like gives you an idea.

So I pretty much raised my younger brother and my younger sister because, number one, I was, for lack of a better word, smart, I guess. Book smart. My oldest brother was always getting into trouble which, you know, that didn't pay off for him later on because he's still struggling a little bit. So it was pretty much between me and my brother who's like a year younger than me, who pretty much did everything. I was the one that pretty much was stuck with the raising of my younger brother and my sister. Because my brother that was a year younger than me, my granddaddy always took him hunting with him. So . . . they used to call me, way back then, "Professor" because I always was studying and all that. I think at a very early age I realized I wanted to make something of myself. And somehow I must have known that that was the way to do it. And so by raising my brother and my sister, I stayed home. I mean I was the one that was left to clean the diapers, you know, and to do all of that. Do all those chores. And as a result, I guess that it all paid off because I learned how to cook and everything. So, I'm pretty self-sufficient, even from the standpoint of just your basic day-to-day survival. Very self-sufficient at an early age, very independent.

You could walk to the country club in like fifteen minutes from my house. And I would do various chores over there, as they related to landscaping, you know, helping out. And I remember getting paid I think it was like two dollars an hour back then, during that time, to do that. And then on Sundays they used to have polo games, and we used to walk the horses after they would play a match or an inning. I think it's like six innings to a whole match, but after an inning, the horses had to be walked. I initially didn't do that. I ended up being the scorekeeper. [Chuckle] Because I was smart enough, I got to keep the score. And I also would set the ball up for the next time they got ready to play. So that was double pay. So instead of getting two dollars for that polo match, I was getting four dollars because I was really doing double duty. But yet my uncles and my brothers [. . .] we did the jobs that nobody else would do because we were not privileged as far as being schoolteachers' kids. Back then, if your mom or dad taught school, you know you were considered privileged and you didn't have to worry about going out to survive. But of course that money, you know, I was bringing in also helped with whatever household needs, so we'd give my mom probably half of what we made, you know. And so that's sort of like how that came up. And you know I worked at the country club for years. I think I worked there really pretty much until I got ready to go off to college, which was in 1977. They used to have a driving range, and I got to run that like one week out of the

month because they could trust me. I worked there for a long, long, long time doing various odd jobs, and during the summer, I worked there. So in a roundabout way, I'd say a life of . . . a childhood of learning how to survive and becoming self-sufficient at a very, very early age.

[. . .] Our little neighborhood was sort of sandwiched . . . between the country club and a pretty . . . well the houses were brick homes, so pretty well-to-do back then, white neighborhood. So we were sort of like down in the valley. And so of course we used to go to those neighborhoods and rake yards and pick strawberries . . . not strawberries, blackberries, off those little sticky things and go and sell them. You could sell, my goodness, you could sell like a pint of blackberries for like a dollar. That was a lot back then 'cause the white folks would buy. So it wasn't just me who was trying to survive; we were all entrepreneurs at an early, early, early age. Except I think of all my cousins and uncles and brothers. I went on to school and got my bachelors and my MBA. My oldest brother is married, and he still stays in a little town outside of Camden called Lugoff, married to this minister. They have no kids. He pretty much has had a . . . for lack of a better word, a drinking problem all of his life. He's doing better, but it's still not . . . he left at an early age. I'll never forget. I was in the eighth grade, and he stayed back a year so he was in eighth grade too. But I remember him going up north to Jamaica [Queens, New York], which is where my dad stayed. He went up north for that summer so he could . . . you know, be with my daddy. And when he came back, he was corrupted. He already was smoking reefer. He was doing all this . . . and already started messing with women. And, you know, all that stuff, you know. And he's been corrupted ever since.

My brother who's a year younger than me now is retired from the Army. He stays in New Mexico. He's married, got three kids. The interesting thing about that is that they both married two sisters.

I've got my younger brother [who] stays in trouble. He's thirty-seven, thirty-eight now. He's constantly been in trouble. He doesn't have any kids that I know of, but he's in Camden, has lived off my mama for you know . . . just will not do right. I've tried to get him to do right and help him out as much as I can. But him and his girlfriend, they kind of stay from pillar to post. And they're still doing it. So you know, some people have to come to their own time, and it's just not his time. But then my younger sister, who's my one and only sister, is married and stays in Camden, has three kids. And she's been married like three . . . no, more than that. Her youngest son is fourteen. And she's thirty-five. And she just finished her associate's degree in pharmacy assistant, like a year or two ago. She was in medical technology and got pregnant in between that. And it's hard to get in that program once

you get out. So that's what she's doing, but she's doing fine. Married to a man who was in the military, and he's out and he's working, and so she seems to be able to handle her own.

What did your mother do for work?

She did domestic work, and then she worked later in the factory for the last two years . . . two, three, four . . . no, for the last five years, she has not done anything, and a matter of fact, she is now staying with my sister because she has an apartment and all of that in government housing, but what had happened was she's developed early signs of Alzheimer's because she was physically abused, and which I saw some of that. And when you read some of my poetry, in some parts you'll see . . . you can see that in some of the poetry. Because as a small child, I remember we were not staying with my grandma at the time. She had moved in with this man and we were staying there. Again, I'm small so I don't really know what happened other than that I surmised that she was not at home and he was waiting on her to come home. She didn't come home or came home later than what was expected, and so when she walked in the door, you know, he started physically abusing her. And we were all standing there and didn't know what to do. And of course I remember, quite vividly, I picked up a chair and threw it. And I was probably like four, five, six years old. I may have been seven or eight at that time. And I remember throwing a chair and then, of course, running. And then somehow I ran down to the landlord's . . . wherever the landlord's place was, and told them what was happening.

Is this the same one that shook that baby to death?

No, no, no. That's my brother Stevie. He died when I was like four, and I think I was seven or eight when this happened. But my mama's been through a series of physical abuse . . . and back then, and that was a *common* occurrence, that men used to physically . . . and they still do it now, but I'm saying they used to *physically* abuse women. Now women are more standing up to it. But I recall vividly how he had beat her with . . . I remember it was like an orange hose, like a water hose. I remember so vividly 'cause my brother, the one who always stays in trouble, he was still a baby. I mean he was a baby. He was not even walking. But I remember, after he had beat her, I remember her holding him in her arms. I'll never forget that. And so you know, when you see stuff like that. My mom just had a life of abuse, so we think that's now coming back to haunt her. And it's through no fault of her own. So right now she's staying with my sister, so that has presented a lot of challenges for us, to try to deal with that. So we're still working through all of that. And the process, I'll tell you, of getting assistance . . . 'cause she's on Medicaid and so forth, but the process is . . . even for an educated person,

which I consider me to be, it is a process. That is a process that will wear you down quickly. And so we're going through that. So that kind of like gives you probably more than what you were asking for, but . . .

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“ALEX”

Alex was introduced to me several years ago at my friend Ian Barrett's home in Atlanta. When I first met him—and every time since—he had me in stitches. He has a sharp wit and a quick tongue that will keep you entertained for hours. Although he is a business professional, he has a real talent as an events planner. Many of his friends in Atlanta ask him to plan their parties. So, not only is he the life of the party, he's its planner also! His narrative below reveals how his precociousness as a child shaped his personality today. He was born in Greenwood, South Carolina, in 1967. Greenwood is located in upstate South Carolina, about sixty miles southeast of Greenville. It is known for its annual Festival of Flowers in June. The interview took place in Atlanta on January 6, 2005.

Actually, I had a very emotional childhood, coming up in a single-parent home. I knew who my father was, as the efforts of my mother trying to make sure that I knew who my family was and that kind of stuff, to ensure that I had a well-balanced type of life. But I chose later on to distance myself from that side of the family at that particular time because it just wasn't working for me. The values, the views, weren't the same. And my mother was one to teach me to always go above and beyond. And every time I went down there to visit them, I felt like I was taking a step backwards. Not necessarily in time, but just in my mindset, you know? You know, she was, you know, instilling education. You know, go for, you know, the gusto. Do your best at whatever you do. And you get down there and, you know, they're drinking and . . . just a whole different type of environment. And so as a thirteen-year-old I decided that I didn't want to go back down there at that particular time. My mother didn't like the idea. And I can tell you a story about it.

[. . .] I had gone down there, and once again I was in this environment that I really didn't feel comfortable in. It wasn't, in my opinion, clean. I didn't feel safe. And I just didn't like the liquor and the drinking and the card playing and then the attitudes that come along with the effects of alcohol, which, of course, I didn't really understand what that meant. But I understood it enough to know that it made me uncomfortable.

Well, one particular night I was down there and I got into a huge altercation with one of my aunts who actually lived with my grandmother or grand-

parents. And she was just . . . oh, she had the filthiest mouth that any woman could ever have, or any person could ever have. And I mean she was just evil! And in conjunction with her being evil, I had an evil stepmother, who really resented me for being the firstborn child, firstborn grandchild. And I was named after my father. And then of course my older brother of the two half brothers that I have was also named after my father in an effort for her to, you know . . . try to make that connection, I guess, to him or whatever the case may be. So I woke up one morning about 5:30. I had my mother's little makeup kit. [Laughter] Ironically. [Laughter] This little red suitcase that's used for the makeup. And that's what I put my stuff in, you know, when I went down there. And it had the little mirror in the cover and what have you. And then there was this little red suitcase that went along with it. And I packed up my little bag. Didn't say a word to anyone. My mother worked about eight miles, nine miles from where my grandparents lived. It was pitch dark. And I got up before the crack of dawn and I broke out to where my mother was working because I was ready to go home. And my grandparents I guess woke up and they discovered that I was gone. They called my father. He lived right around the corner. Called my aunts. They all lived in the same like little neighborhood. Walking distance, pretty much, from everybody. And you know I was nowhere to be found, so they called my mother in a panic. And so she gets in the car and she drives, you know, to the location and meets me. I've been walking about two and a half hours now. So I was walking. My mother was very upset and threatened to whip my butt and all that kind of stuff, and took me back down there, took me back to my grandparents.

How far had you gotten?

I had been walking about two and a half hours, so I guess at least halfway. At least halfway. Just determined. [. . .] And so my great aunt was who I called Granny, she heard about the situation. Of course, I had gone back down to my grandparents to stay the rest of that weekend. And she called my mother and told her, she said, "You know, you've done the best that you can do. You've exposed him to his father's side of the family. Every time he goes down there, he doesn't want to go. He doesn't want to go. You know, you've done your part. Don't make him go back again. You know, he's made his decision. And when he's ready to bring them back into his life, he'll go bring them back in. But don't make him go because that's going to have more of a traumatic impact on him than him making the decision on his own that, you know, 'I want to include them in my life.' "

And your mother listened?

Yes. She didn't like it. But she listened. She did. [. . .] And I would always push the extra button just to see, you know. And I mean like for example, I

was about maybe ten or eleven years old and my [. . .] family had a booth at the fair, the County Fair, you know. I can't remember exactly what the game was, but you know it was a balloon tossing and all that kind of stuff and whatever. And they had the bears and all that stuff for the prizes. And you know, on Tuesday was the night that all the students would go to the fair. And you had your discount and you got your tickets and what have you. Well, with us running the booth, I was at the fair maybe three or four days during the five or six days that it was there. Well, I'm a kid, so while I'm there I want to ride. I didn't want to sit behind the booth. And so my mother told me, you know, "You can't ride because I don't have any money." And I said, "Okay, fine." [Chuckle] You know, so I sat back there for a little bit and I thought about it. And I sat there, and they was taking in . . . they were taking in the money from the booth and they were setting it back there by me. [Chuckle] And I was just looking at it. I said, "Why shoot. Well, it won't hurt to take a couple of dollars [laughter] and go and buy me some tickets to ride a couple of rides, and then I'll come on back. It's no big deal." So I took a couple dollars and I went and I bought tickets and I was riding. Well, the fairgrounds were only so big and everybody knows everybody pretty much. Well, somebody came back and said, "Well [Alex] is . . . I just saw [Alex]. He's riding so and so and so and so." Well, they knew I was, you know, kind of roaming around and they knew I wasn't going to go out of the place. But my mother was trying to figure out, "Well how is he riding? He's got no money." And so she gave me the opportunity to tell her. I got back over there and she said, "Well how did you get tickets to ride?" And I said, "What are you talking about?" [Laughter] I can't remember who told her. One of her friends or one of my cousins or somebody said it. And she said, "Well where'd you get money to ride?" And I was like, "Well I don't know what you're talking about." And then she finally got me to admit that I was riding. And I said, "Oh well, I ran across one of my other, you know, friends and their parents bought the tickets because they didn't want them to ride by themselves so they asked me if I would ride with them. So they bought me the tickets too." And she didn't believe that. [Laughter] So she asked the person that I was talking about. I didn't think she'd go ask, but she did. Didn't say one word to me the rest of the evening about the situation. [Laughter] Not one word. [I] went on, you know. I was just as happy-go-lucky, having got my ride on, and I was back there, you know, with them, playing and doing what I do. The fair closed I think ten, ten-thirty. We got to the house. We got in the house. I guess they had counted the money. Back then, you know, you don't think they have an account . . . checks and balances. I don't know what they were selling, but anyway, they sold so much and they were taking in so much, so it

should have balanced out. Well, they were short whatever those dollars were that I had taken. [Laughter] And I don't even remember how much it was. Maybe it was more like six or seven dollars. But she got me back to the house. She had me strip down, and she tore my behind up. [Laughter] Butt naked, with a belt. And actually, she started with a switch and the switch broke. And I had gotten into the hamper . . . trying to cover [laughter] . . . trying to protect myself under the clothes. And that just made her even madder. And she got that belt and oh she went . . . oh, she went to *town*. And I tell you, to this day, I betcha I'll never take anything again. And never have. Because it wasn't right. And I'll remember that whipping to this day.

EDUCATION

Most people outside of the South think of the region as undereducated. Never mind that some of this country's premier universities are located there—Duke, the University of North Carolina, and Emory, just to name a few. And for many folks, especially those of an older generation, riots over the integration of public schools—something many narrators will discuss later—also come to mind when they think about education in the South. What often isn't thought about, the stories that have not been told, are the stories about whites who, for good or naught, tried to help black students succeed in the midst of blatant racism and homophobia. Indeed, many of the men I spoke with shared stories about white teachers who saw something in them and went on to encourage them academically and who also sometimes supported them financially. This is one thing I have in common with these narrators, as I was the beneficiary of my first-grade teacher's philanthropy, though ours was a conflicted relationship, especially as I got older.¹ Like The Lady Chablis, who had a white teacher who “was the first person to open the door to the white world” to her, some of the men in *Sweet Tea* and I were, thanks to educators, afforded opportunities that, given our racial and economic status, we might otherwise not have had.²

Some of these narratives about the early years of education suggest that there is something about being queer that makes one more fastidious about learning. I realize that this statement is borderline essentialist (perhaps it *is* essentialist), but the theme of being “different,” “artistic,” “creative,” “having a drive,” and being a “bookworm” comes up too many times for it to be a mere coincidence. As with any totalizing argument, however, there are always exceptions that trouble these preconceived notions. For as many narrators as talk about being “loners” or not being interested in sports, there are

an equal number who discuss playing football and basketball, dropping out of school, getting into trouble, or having a general disinterest in school. The contradictions among these narratives are what make them, collectively, so fascinating, and so human.

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CHARLES

Charles is a young activist and creative writer. At twenty-four, he had already garnered a reputation as an outspoken leader for the young black LGBT community in Atlanta and had published some of his nonfiction. Interestingly, Charles still dates women and considers himself to be “queer” more than “gay.” At the time of the interview, he was a student at Georgia State University. An only child, he was born in Atlanta in 1980. The interview took place at my friend Ian Barrett’s house in Atlanta on November 9, 2004.

Were your schools integrated?

Well, they were all-black schools. They might have had a few white people here and there but [. . .] it wasn’t like, you know, we have to go there because you’re black. We went there because that was the school you’re zoned to. [. . .] We had what was called the magnet program, where you basically applied to the high school you wanted to go to. [. . .] And I chose Therrel because, well for a few reasons. You know, mostly because I didn’t want to go to my zone high school. This is where it gets complicated. I didn’t want to go to my zone high school because the kids that lived in my neighborhood were just, like, ruthless, like, I knew that it would have just been a really horrendous experience. [. . .] I didn’t want to go to the feeder high schools because the middle school experience I had was really, really bad, too. Like, a lot of kids would pick on me and stuff, and I just didn’t really have a pleasant middle school experience. Not so much because of the gay thing. Like that wasn’t really it; it was more because, I mean I didn’t talk like everyone else, you know. They said I sounded white, and I didn’t really conform to the notions of masculinity that were really the most acceptable, just in terms of being kind of bookish, and speaking the way I spoke. [. . .] I think it’s also in the, like, early ’90s, when you started to see hip-hop culture defining black masculinity in a more rigid way. And I didn’t really do a lot around hip-hop either. I mean, I did a lot around it to the extent that I listened to it, and I kind of knew what was going on, but it didn’t define me. Like I didn’t really use it as an identity marker. Like I didn’t really dress that way, or really speak that way, not really—I didn’t really use it to define me, like a lot of the other males in my

school. I was just kind of into my own thing. And I paid a price for it, you know? I stood out. I was very different in terms of the way I spoke, the way I dressed, the way I kinda carried myself. And so I said all that to say, that I didn't want to go to the theater high school or the middle school because I was like, I want to go somewhere completely different and start over anew. And I went to Therrel, and even though Therrel still had a lot of the same stuff . . . I just didn't really get as much shit in high school. Well, for one thing, I was in the magnet program. And I think the magnet program is really about trying to like, concentrate. It was really about, like, okay, we're going to try to do the best we can to make sure you get the most out of this high school experience. And we're going to try to keep you, not so much keep you away from, but keep you sheltered from the rest of the high school environment, from the rest of the kids in the high school, because, you know, we're going to define you as kids that have potential, and kids that are probably going to go on to college. And so, you know, it was terribly sheltered, for like ninth and tenth grade. And then my junior year I started taking AP [i.e., advance placement] classes. [. . .] I'm very critical of tracking in schools, typical black kids. But I mean in a weird kind of way it was also something that kind of, I don't want to say saved me, but I think had I been around the other kids in school I would have continued to get a lot of shit, for being how I was. That isn't to say I didn't really get any shit in the magnet program, but [. . .] there was a way in the magnet program where you could be smart. When I was in middle school it was not okay to be a smart boy. Like, I also find interesting for like, conventional feminist arguments [. . .] second-wave feminists are arguing like, girls can't be smart in class, blah blah blah. My experience was one where, it was not okay for a boy to be smart, like you could be athletic, you can dance, you can dress well, but you can't be too smart. And, and certainly not be precocious. I was terribly precocious, you know, and so when I got to high school, I think there are ways in which, particularly in the magnet program, you can be smart and you weren't necessarily punished for it. [. . .] And it wasn't like, you know there's one peer group that's going to make everyone else's lives, everyone else's life hell; it was more like, everyone kind of find where they fit in, and you just kind of do the best you can. So, that was a very elaborate explanation as to my, my school experience.

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DUNCAN TEAGUE

My interview with Duncan was one of the most memorable because he has a wicked sense of humor. He is one of the few narrators in Sweet Tea who insisted that I use his first and last name. He's just that fierce!

Duncan, who lives in Atlanta, is a member of the black gay performance art/spoken word group, Adodi Muse. They've performed around the country and have produced a CD. Prominent themes in their work include black gay pride and self-respect, relationship dramas, and HIV/AIDS. Duncan is very much an activist, and most everyone in Atlanta's gay community knows him. Indeed, he helped me find men to be interviewed.

Duncan was born "sometime in the early '60s" in Kansas City, Missouri. The interview took place on November 1, 2004, at his home in Atlanta.

We went to Mary Harmon Weeks, which was a brand-new grade school. And it was in a black community and had a resource center instead of a library because it had more than books. I mean it was brand spanking new, and that's where I went for second grade through fourth grade. No. I'm sorry. I went there through fifth grade. Wow, yeah. I get confused because the school had a fire and they took the high-B students and the good readers who had excellent social skills because we had overcrowding and they took about a classroom of like ten of us and they put us back in the fourth-grade classroom, but we were doing fifth-grade work. And what I surmise is that it was one of those social educational experiments because you can't mess with your A students because they don't like change and they're spoiled brats. Yes I said it. [Chuckle] And you know they have to have everything just so. And you know the other students, you don't want to mess with their socialization or whatever because they're challenged enough. So they took the kids who they knew could handle being separated from their peer group and still do the work. And so we got our own teacher and we were in the fourth-grade classroom but we were a fifth-grade class. Because that was where there was room for us. So I get confused. But when we came home from the summer of the fifth grade and what was my brother's fourth-grade year, the school sent a letter home to my mother, saying that my brother was not really up to par to go to fifth grade. And I would have been going to sixth grade. And that they were going to allow him to pass so that he could stay with his social group, but he wasn't really doing the work. And my mother . . . I can still hear her yelling and screaming. Because she wanted to know that Phillip wasn't doing the work during the school year because she'd have gotten on him. And education was everything to my mother and my father. And when she called up there and she said, "Well if he isn't able to do fifth-grade work, he isn't going to the fifth grade. You put him back in the fourth grade." And they wouldn't do it back then. *Now* they would probably do it. But even at my mother's request, they weren't going to do it. So she said, "Y'all aren't going there no more." And my parents sacrificed. From that point through the end

of high school, we went to private schools. Yeah. So some of those early neighborhood friends I sort of left in the early adolescence and went to private schools. And I went to the Lutheran grade school and then the Catholic high school. And my parents did not want me to go to the Catholic high school because we're Baptists. But there was no such thing as a Baptist high school. And I did not want to go to public high school. I just didn't. My mother thought that we would, but unh unh. I wanted to go with my friends to Bishop Hogan, and so I did. And I was . . . actually I think I was quite a success at high school.

There was a moment when my father was trying to butch me up . . . or get rid of the gayness. And so the Lord told him to send me to Tri-City Christian Academy. And it was about maybe fifteen miles from our home. And it was one of these fundamentalist Christian schools, non-affiliated with a major denomination that was ninety-something percent white. And it was horrid. And I started developing a spasm in my back that felt like I was having heart trouble. See, I had become a class leader and was recognized and all this, but I was also becoming a very gay young man. I guess my father was at his wit's end because what had been cute was no longer cute. And at the end of the first semester, given the muscle spasms and how much I hated the school and how inferior the education was compared to Bishop Hogan, I stood up to my father and I told him that I really didn't care what he or the Lord thought. I was not going back there. I was going to Bishop Hogan High School for my second semester of my junior year, and he and the Lord needed to work it out. And I considered that like a sort of coming out, in a way, because . . . and it wasn't about me saying, "I'm gay." It was about me standing up for myself against everything I'd been taught. And I really didn't give a damn. And so I have to be careful now because I have to remind myself that everybody wasn't me in high school. And everybody didn't stand up to their parents. And so when I hear the stories about gay men who wait until they're thirty, forty, fifty, whenever to come out, I really have to work at understanding them and understanding their turmoil, because that stepping up to my father was just a beginning.

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FREDDIE (B. 1944, MADISON, GA.)

In high school, even in elementary school there was one teacher in particular who would assign a girl to tell her if anybody bothered me when she went out of the room. I later found out that she was, in fact, a lesbian. And was a married lesbian. She had a husband and some children, but she was, in fact, a lesbian. And she would assign a girl to tell her, so along the way I

was kind of protected by people. In high school, there was always a bigger boy or somebody who would kind of protect me. And the bigger boys, I never had sex with them, but they just kind of felt a sense that I needed protecting.

And something else happened. When I was in sixth grade, some boys were bothering me and the teacher kept us after school. And I would carry a single-edge razor blade in my pocket to sharpen my pencils, because if I went to the pencil sharpener they would bother me. Maybe somebody would put a tack in my seat or try to do something to me. Just little kid harassment. So after we were kept after school, the boys were going to line up to beat me up because they said it was my fault. So I would always say in the sweetest little voice—because you see I’m reasonably soft-spoken now—“Leave me alone. I’m minding my business. Don’t bother me.” So this boy ran up to hit me and I cut him across his shoulder with the razor blade. And by that time, the teacher came and said, “You boys better go home.” So the last thing I heard him say was, “You’re a mean sissy. I’m going to have your ass locked up.” So I went home. I didn’t say anything to my mother. And bravely the next day I went to school. And he came up to me and he had a hairline cut on his shoulder because I had cut through two or three layers of clothing. And he said, “You better be glad.” I said, “Listen. Do not bother me. I keep telling you to leave me alone. I want to be left alone. I’m not bothering you. Don’t bother me.” But what always happened if anybody attacked me, they always ended up seeing some of their blood. Because I would bite them. Or I would hit them with a sharp object or something. But they always ended up seeing some of their blood. So because I was so supple, there was no way that they could twist my arm or do anything that I couldn’t get out of. And I could run. I could outrun them if I had to run. So rumors spread. “Don’t bother him. He’s a mean little sissy and he’s stronger than he looks.” So that kind of followed me. Because I went to high school with a lot of the same kids, that kind of followed me. So I didn’t really have many situations where I had altercations. And there were teachers who would protect me. I didn’t take much physical education in high school because my homeroom teacher was the art teacher and she would get the physical education teacher to let me come to the art room. [Chuckle] And I would get, you know, a physical education grade. And I was always kind of treated like a girl, in a way. There was one teacher who only let girls ride in his car. And I always hung out mostly with girls, so one day my girlfriend said, “Come on, Freddie. Come on, you get a ride home with us.” So I said, “What will he say? What will Mr. Hood say?” So I came and got in the car. And Mr. Hood looked at me and said, “Oh, it’s you.” [Laughter] So even if the girls were not there, Mr. Hood

would give me a ride home. I later found out that he was having an inappropriate affair with one of the girls. But he would give me a ride home.

There were teachers . . . one teacher in particular . . . who was obviously trying to lure me into something, and even in front of people he was kind of inappropriate in a way. And everybody knew. My homeroom teacher would tell me, "I know who you're thinking about, Mister." And I'd say, "No I'm not." And she said, "Oh yes you are." He was a very handsome man. And had he approached me appropriately I would have probably . . . and probably not because I always had a sense that the teachers had power over me, that they were in a position of authority, that we were not equal. But like he would touch me kind of inappropriately. And there were a couple of others that would try to lure me to ballgames or what have you. But I always knew what they were up to, so I would never go. Because I always had a sense of their having authority over me, us not being equal. And so I didn't. I didn't. I had a rule that I didn't want to have sex with anybody at a place where I worked or went to school, at a place where I had to go. In case something happened and it went sour. Because I have observed relationships like that going sour because people didn't manage them well. And so I had a lot of these kind of wisdom and stuff at a young age. But the part of my life that was gay, basically was good. I was often protected by people and seen as special.

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KEVIN H.

Kevin H. teaches law, but he is also pursuing a Ph.D. at Duke University. We met in 2003 in Chicago while he was doing a visiting professor stint at Kent College of Law. Unlike most of the men in Sweet Tea, Kevin is desperately trying to relocate out of the South. As a fortysomething single man, he feels that a larger urban space will provide him more opportunities—professionally and socially.

Kevin H. was born in Texas City, Texas, in 1964. Texas City is located forty miles southeast of Houston and sits on the Gulf of Mexico. The United States's third-largest oil refinery, owned by BP, is located there. The interview took place on October 28, 2004, in Carrboro, North Carolina.

In elementary school, I don't really remember having friends so much. I mean I certainly remember people that I played with during recess and that sort of thing. But in terms of having, you know, sleepovers or stuff like that, no, not really very much. I mean there were kids in the neighborhood, you know, that I would consider myself having grown up with. But not really

close friends. I had a couple of friends, you know, from middle school, and they're people, one in particular, my friend Dennis and I are still friends, you know, good friends today. And maybe a couple of people from high school. In high school in particular, I always felt like I was very different from everyone for lots of different reasons. I mean less so in terms of sexuality, I think. Not thinking about that. Though I certainly think that was part of it. And more . . . but more because I was really smart and I was really . . . you know, all I wanted to do was read and do stuff like that. I wasn't particularly athletic. I was in the band, you know, and that was kind of . . . that was fun, it was an activity. But I was the kind of kid in high school and junior high too I guess, that where you know I was always elected class president or some student council officer. But I really didn't have friends. I mean I didn't go to the high school dances, I didn't do, you know, any of that stuff because I really just felt, you know, so different from everyone and not having any of their interests. So I was just really wanting to get away, you know, graduate, leave, go to college. And it was really college when I first felt myself, you know, surrounded by people who were like me. I really became this incredibly social person that I had never been before. [. . .] I was completely a sort of closed-off kind of person before.

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SHOMARI

Shomari is a graduate student at Georgia State University. I met him at OutWrite Bookstore in Atlanta in 2003 during a book signing. We reconnected when I started contacting men to be interviewed for this book. He and Charles are good friends.

Born in New Orleans in 1977, Shomari is the oldest child of three. The interview took place on November 10, 2004, in Atlanta.

New Orleans is a Catholic town, so I actually went to Saint Gabriel the Archangel Elementary School, and I went there from pre-K to half of fifth grade. At the end, and when my fifth-grade year started, they decided Saint Gabriel was closing because enrollment was down, and the archdiocese had to close a lot of the smaller schools because they were running out of money, you know. At one point, in New Orleans, a lot of people sent their kids to Catholic school. Like even black people, like blacks sent a lot of their children to Catholic schools. There were tons and tons of Catholic elementary schools, sort of all over the place. But my school, they decided to close, and I went from being in a school that was primarily black to going to Saint James Pager, which even though it was right up the street, it was primarily white.

And I transferred in the middle of the year, so I was the new kid, the new fat kid, the new fat sissy sometimes, it just depends what day of the week it was, they decided to pick on me, for half of fifth grade and all of sixth grade. And then from seventh through twelfth grade I went to McMain Magnet. And they went from seventh through twelfth grade, and actually, in my eleventh-grade year, I went to the performing arts school, but it's not situated like most. Like here, in North Atlanta and Tri-City are usually sort of where the performing arts schools are in Georgia, and I'm using all these Georgia metaphors assuming you know what I'm talking about, but maybe not. But like here, what I've experienced is that, the performing arts schools are all-inclusive. Like you go to school for math and science as well as your theater classes, or your music classes, or your dance classes. In New Orleans it wasn't like that. We had this place called NOCCA, which is an acronym for New Orleans Center of the Creative Arts, and you go to NOCCA for half of a day, where you take all of your performing arts classes, and you go to your second school for math, science, English, and social studies. So, your day is split. And it's actually pretty cool. So I did that for my eleventh- and twelfth-grade year.

Do you remember any of the friendships that you made in elementary, middle school, high school, and are you still in touch with some of them?

It was primarily girls . . . it was, oh my God, Christelle, Chantelle, Cassandra, Jeanine, Glenisha, yeah. They all went to St. Gabriel's with me and I ended up seeing them in McMain. And we all went from seventh to twelfth grade there. Am I still in touch with a lot of them? From the younger grades, the people who I like, actually, not really, I'm not really in touch with, a significant portion of the people, that I went to high school with. My best friend, who I actually I met when I was in eleventh grade, you know we've stayed in touch. He lives in New York now, but we've been in touch, from, you know this whole time. Like and I'm like, I actually realized, god you're like one of my oldest friends, because a lot of those other people, I either just, grew apart, or we just, never, was never really, that close. Like I didn't really develop, like a significant group of friends until I went to NOCCA, until I went to the creative arts school, and, you know, here I had these other, like, and initially I didn't think of myself as an artsy freak, before, I was always very much a character. My family thought of me as a character because I was always running around, doing shit. And, I was always very dramatic. My mother calls me a drama queen, just very dramatic. Like I actually just thought of this thing, it was funny because when I was, like seven or eight, you know, you know how kids watch TV, we had just finished watching *Soul Train*. I just *loved Soul Train*. You know, the whole music and dancing thing, I

just loved *Soul Train*. And I ran from in the other room, and it happened, I don't remember what group was on, but it was definitely a group that I was very into at the time, and I ran into the room and I was like, "Mama! Mama! Mama! Mama, my one ambition in life, is to dance in *Soul Train*." My mother had a fit. She had a fit, because she had just finished paying that Catholic school tuition. She was like, "If you're going to dance on *Soul Train*, I could send your ass to the free school," like, "you don't need to be able to read, to go," you know, "to dance on *Soul Train*." Yeah, I got whooped a lot as a child.

RACISM AND SEGREGATION

All of the narrators shared stories of racism and/or of living in segregated neighborhoods or attending segregated schools. In a few instances, some of the men witnessed or experienced racial violence firsthand, including visits from the Klan. While not all of the stories relate blatant acts of racial discrimination, many narrators detailed racial incidents that impacted their lives for years to come, such as being chased, being accused of stealing, or being treated differently in school. And not all of the men accuse whites of racism. Indeed, more than a few of them discuss racial prejudice among blacks—sometimes even within their own families.

On the topic of segregation, some narrators lament the integration of schools because, for them, it meant being bused across town away from their communities and into harm's way. Many are quick to note the racial tension and riots they witnessed or participated in during the slow integration of school systems in the South. Like my hometown of Hickory, North Carolina, many of these narrators' hometowns did not integrate their schools until fifteen to twenty years after *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Other narrators lament not only the integration of schools, but also the integration of society in general, which meant the end of an era when blacks supported and relied on one another. Integration, some argue, diluted the self-reliance fostered by all-black communities that had come to be taken for granted. With "white flight" to the suburbs in the wake of the civil rights movement, central cities declined, and many black communities were devastated by poverty, spiraling downward until recently, when they began to undergo gentrification, often, ironically, by white gay men.³

Roderick and "D.C.," in particular, note how certain black communities in their towns were named to reflect the value that whites placed on them—names like "The Bottom." Like the fictional town, The Bottom, in Toni Morrison's novel *Sula*, these black communities were the product of white

racism.⁴ These neighborhoods were anything but fictional, however, embodying real, institutionalized racism that affected not only these black men's lives, but black lives in general. The one thing more than a couple of the narrators note as transcending race in their communities is sports. Newly integrated high schools often meant blacks and whites playing side by side on a team. Although the venue may still have been segregated, with black fans and white fans seated in separate areas, as both Tim'm and Marlon note, people came together across racial lines in order to root for their team.

But not all of the men in *Sweet Tea* express negative feelings about integration. Some feel that integration was absolutely necessary and provided opportunities for blacks that would not have existed otherwise. Others believe that black communities have not done well because of black-on-black crime, a general sense of black apathy, or what Cornel West would call "black nihilism."⁵ For the most part, generational differences explain the varying attitudes about integration.

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HAROLD

Harold has become something of an uncle figure to me since we first met. Of all of the men in Sweet Tea, he is the only one who stays in touch on a regular basis. In fact, every time he sees a reference to my books, he'll copy it and send it to me.

At seventy, Harold shows no sign of slowing down. He and his partner, whose name is also Harold, have been together for over forty years (see Chapter 6). They live in Washington, D.C., in the upscale northeast section. Harold is an avid baseball fan and has promised me that he'll come to Chicago to visit me and see a Cubs or White Sox game.

Harold was a member of the Boy Scouts of America for most of his youth, an interesting fact given that organization's current stance on homosexuality. He went on to become an Eagle Scout, which is the highest advancement rank in the Boy Scouts, and, according to him, he is one of the few African Americans to achieve that status. He is also a veteran of the Army, which afforded him an opportunity to live in Korea and Japan. It was an experience, he says, that changed his life.

Harold was born in 1936 in St. Louis, Missouri, and is the elder of two children. The interview took place on May 4, 2005, at his home in Washington, D.C.

For summer vacations for a period of time, after school was out, we went with my grandmother back to her hometown, which was outside of Little



*Harold held by his maternal grandmother in St. Louis, ca. 1936.
Courtesy of the narrator.*

Rock, Arkansas. And my grandmother had relatives, and one of her relatives was a physician. But he practiced in this little small town. And when we visited, I had the opportunity of going with him on his rounds. And he provided the medical care to not just the poor African Americans, but even the poor white sharecroppers. Because he was the only doctor between this city and Little Rock. And I don't remember the miles, but it was quite some distance. And so we got a taste of rural American life. You had a little bit of a twist. We were still black in the American South, which was segregated. And one of the things that I have to tell you about is that two days a week, my grandmother and her cousin, who had married the doctor, would go into Little Rock to do shopping. And we would get dressed, and they'd put us into the car and they'd say, "Now you can't run and jump and scream and holler because it's not nice and blah, blah, blah." Because that's all we were doing for most of the week . . . was running and screaming out in this open country. And when we arrived in Little Rock, my cousin and my grandmother went to Pfeiffer's Department Store. And she parked and we got out and we rushed into the department store, and we were so excited to see the city again, and we ran to a water cooler and drank from it. Now mind you, St. Louis was not quite as segregated as Little Rock. They did not have water coolers for blacks and whites, but it was segregated. And before they could say, "No don't drink that water," we had jumped on a little stool and got up to the water fountain and we're drinking. And I guess the store personnel saw us. And then when they saw who we were with, it changed. It seems that my grandmother's cousin's husband was known in that area. She was known in that store. She could buy clothes, but she'd have to have them shipped to her because they had to be exact size, right size, because she couldn't try them on. So that was sort of a helpful thing. And that's when we started to learn the difference in races, really. Because we had been sort of kept away from it. Now on the trips to and from Little Rock . . . my grandfather was a Pullman porter, so we didn't pay too much attention to the fact that . . . because we did go into a Pullman car. But it would have to be the one that didn't have that many whites in it, or the whites would be at this end and you'd be at the other end. And they'd say, "Now don't go over into the middle of that car." Or in the chair cars on the railroads, they'd say, "Stay here." I don't know what was this attraction to water. Every time I found a water fountain, I was always heading for . . . and my grandma would tell me, "If you go back to that water fountain again, I'm gonna kill you." [Chuckle] Because I was constantly saying, "I want some water," you know. But those experiences were really . . . as a child, they could be frightening and then they're over with. And then later on, you get the full impact. But I did not get it until my aunt who worked

for a company and they had picketing to let the people know that they were not getting fair pay. And that's when I began to see the differences. Then comes integration of schools. By this time, I'm out of the public schools but my sister, who still had years left in there . . . and she did not want to go. The school districts were broken up by where you lived. And by this time, we lived in an area that was right adjacent to . . . or we had white neighbors. My sister did not want [to go to school]. Oh she cried. She claimed she was going to move to Chicago. She did everything. And finally, when . . . the semester began, and my mother goes with her. And except for a little skirmishes that you have when new kids appear . . . not new black kids . . . where they're just new kids . . . but she soon got over it. And I think that it probably, with the fact that my parents would say, "Yes there are people who don't like you because of your color, but you cannot hate them for that."

When we moved that one particular time into this area, there was a park nearby and we got our baseball bats and gloves and headed straight over there. And I don't know how frank I should be about it, but there were a group of guys playing baseball. And we stood around, hoping that they'd say, "Come on, you want to play?" And finally somebody said, "Hey can we play?" And they said, "No, we don't play with niggers." And then again, even though we had newspaper stories and we heard our parents talk about what it was like in the South, we still did not . . . until it happened to us, okay? [. . .]

Were they [civic organizations] segregated when you were in the Boy Scouts?

Yes it was. Now the segregation didn't seem so obvious because, remember, organizations sponsored Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. So your church or your school sponsored the Boy Scout unit that you were in, in your neighborhood. But there were times when you came together as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts from a whole city. That was not segregated. I went to summer camp with scouts from other parts. My last Boy Scout chum died two years ago. And we started off when we were fifteen, sixteen, seventeen in the Senior Scouting program. That's where we met. And we met again twenty years later when we went to a reunion. And that's how we sort of became friends again after. But I do wish that churches, synagogues, would promote Boy Scouting, especially in the urban settings. In this city, the evening news is so filled with awful happenings. It's getting younger and younger that these events are happening, and especially to African American males. And now you must include girls. And it seems odd that, when I grew up as an African American, there was not that much money in my family or in the African American community. But they pulled together. They would not just say, "Oh we're praying for you." They did something.

My grandmother's church had various organizations. And I'll never forget

it. They were called progressive circles. They helped the people in the community with anything that they possibly could. My grandmother would go back to visit her relatives, and she would take clothing that they had restyled, that were donated by her friends and her church, back to the poor people in that same city outside of Little Rock, and donate. They made quilts and they had care boxes before I guess it was CARE that they would ship back to these people in the hometowns of the church members who had migrated to the city of St. Louis and who had improved their status. Now improving the status was not that they went from perhaps a porter in their small town to the head of a company in St. Louis. But they did make more money and they shared. They took responsibility for the children in the neighborhood. If their parents were a little off about keeping an eye on them, somebody else saw it. And many a times we would slip to what would be kind of like the main boulevard area where the stores and whatnot . . . and they'd say, "Well I saw that boy run across the street the other day." And if I had not been sent there by my parents, then they'd want to know, "What were you doing over there?" And it would be only about five blocks. And I think that, when I hear of the horrible things that happen to boys and girls today by predators who are waiting for them . . . you know what I mean? If there were more eyes and ears. If there were more caring. And this idea of respect. I just realized it because about five weeks ago I turned sixty-nine. And I really have it in my mind now that I'm mature or older. But I have respect for youth at twenty-one, to begin with. Now I don't always get that same respect back, but I even get less of it now because nobody seems to pay any attention to who's next to them. I probably sound sort of cynical. But that's what unnerves me. And I think that each of us have a responsibility to ourselves and to our fellow man. And maybe, since we have equality to a degree, that we've lost some of the feeling for others. I don't mean others less fortunate. I mean all the others. I don't know how. When I was younger, when I first got out of school and I went to work, through the church I got involved with a youth program. And they were poor youth. They were youth from households with only one adult. And through the Boy Scout troop, which was what . . . by this time I was a Scout Master . . . we told them, "Okay you can't buy a brand-new uniform. But we can get a uniform for you. It will be used by another scout before you." But we would not give the uniform to him. He had to work for it. In other words, he had to join the unit and he had to stay in it and he had to do certain things. He had to attain a certain rank and then that uniform was actually his. And he had to take care of it. I went into homes in which there were eight to twelve children. And all of this, mind you, was in a neighborhood or a community. The last unit I had, I took twenty-seven Boy Scouts

from poor, underprivileged homes, who were members of this unit, to the New York World's Fair in 1964. They paid all of their individual ways, even though our sponsoring institution was a church and put up the basic money. But we didn't tell them that. And we didn't tell their parents that. And we went to the New York World's Fair for four days and four nights, by train, and we stayed in a YMCA hotel and we went back and forth to the fair. We took out money on the sly and bought cameras for them. But we only said they could borrow them. It was only after we got back that we gave them the cameras. And we used that camera and their picture taking to be more involved in a Boy Scout program, which was a merit badge in photography. So those are some of the things I feel really excited about the fact that I had some involvement in giving back to another generation, I guess you could say.

You said that St. Louis was segregated. Was it segregated by some physical barrier, like people talk about railroad tracks or a street . . .

No. It was segregated by street. Okay. St. Louis sits on the banks of the Mississippi River. The oldest part is closest to the river. Most of the African American population lived in the old part of St. Louis. And this would be up until about 1949 or 1950. And then there was a movement by African Americans into other neighborhoods.

And what were the racial politics of your hometown? Were there interactions between blacks and whites, or did they not get along?

Yes. There was interaction between . . . good interaction, okay? The schools were segregated. The black schools . . . say in high school, they played their own black schools, okay? Now, if they became state winners, then of course you couldn't determine who they would play. It'd be another school. It could be a white school from another part of the state. But they found some way to cancel, okay? A friend and myself ran track, and we were fortunate enough to win some championships. When they held the track championships, they were in the southern part of the state of Missouri. And that was very, very segregated. We could not stay overnight there because there were very few blacks who had places you could sleep. So we had to go there, run the track meets, and then come back. And then later, that changes. Okay? The whole idea of eating out and going to the movies, all of this was segregated. And I remember when the movies integrated. At that time, there was a film that was in giant . . . oh what was that? It was a new technique and it was a biblical film. And my grandmother, who was not much of a moviegoer, wanted to see this movie. I don't . . . Was it *Ben-Hur*? [. . .] Okay, I take her to see this. And we dress up. She had her hat and the gloves, and I had my sport jacket and whatnot. And we go to a matinee. The movie house is integrated.

What year was this?

About '58, '59. And it was the most wonderful experience that she had. She went to movies, but because of her religious beliefs, she figured movies were a little [weird noise], okay? But this was something that she really wanted to see. I think it was *King of Kings* or . . . It was a Cecil B. DeMille. *Sampson and Delilah* or one of . . . Okay? Restaurants were still segregated. These are ones that are privately owned. But places such as the counters in the five and dime store, that had at one time been segregated, where you would go up there and sit down or buy a hamburger or hot dog and eat it there, okay? The neighborhoods slowly were integrating, but there was a lot of friction between the first ones to move in. There was an area in a part of the city . . . South St. Louis, that was totally Italian. And they were awful about families moving in. They would hold property if it didn't sell, before they would sell it to a black family. You could not rent an apartment, okay? Finally, with the help of the Catholic Church and the Urban League and the NAACP, with picketing and appealing through the ministers and the priests, they were finally able to break down these kinds of segregation in public places.

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BOB

Although he does not describe himself this way, everyone I know refers to Bob as a self-made millionaire. He lives in one of the northwest suburbs of Atlanta in what is referred to in today's real estate parlance as a "McMansion." Bob is not pretentious, however. In fact, he is very generous with his home (there were guests staying there during our interview) and his possessions. During our interview, for example, he mentioned lending a friend his French crystal, Rosenthal china, and some family silver.

Bob is very clear about his views on most things, especially issues of race and religion. Those views have been clarified by time spent in therapy and by the life experiences of many years spent in the San Francisco Bay Area before moving back to Georgia after the death of his partner of twenty-seven years. "Alex" put me in contact with Bob because he said that he would be an "interesting case study" for my book. He was right.

*Bob was born in Baxley, Georgia, in 1940. Baxley is located in southeast Georgia and has a population just under 5,000. Although a small town, Baxley is birthplace to two notable authors: Caroline Miller, who was the first Georgia resident to win the Pulitzer Prize, for her book *Lamb in His Bosom* in 1934, and Janisse Ray, who won the American Book Award for her memoir, *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*. The interview took place at Bob's home on May 14, 2005.*

The worst memories are racism, you know, being—and I didn't know it at the time, why I was feeling the hatred for my father, until I went through therapy. And that's another whole story. But having people come to your house and give you food, oh, that was debasing. Especially during the holidays, it was like a festive time of the year, and people having this, you know, dah, dah, dah. And all of a sudden this white man shows up with a turkey and some potatoes and he says, "This is for you." What? And I refused to eat it. And my mother couldn't understand why I would refuse to eat it. And I didn't know why I was refusing to eat it at the time. But later on in life, I realized that it was a reaction to something deep down in was saying, you know, how dare a person belittle me and my family by having to give me something that my father ought to be able to provide for us. But then knowing that at the time he couldn't do it, he had done the best he could do, and that's what my therapist helped me realize it; he did the best he could with what he had. And how many other people did any better than he did, you know, where are you coming from, you know? So I'm going like, oh, wow, I guess he did, so I can let that go. So I let it go, yeah. I finally found peace with that and have found some comfort in the fact that he did the best he could. But it was the racism. And to tell you the truth, there were white men in the community who would go with black women, and we knew about it, everybody knew about it. And there were folk who had babies for white men. And I got a cousin who had a baby for a white man.

When you say for a white man, do you mean that there was some kind of payment or arrangement?

They had sexual relations, and they probably were not willing participants. But because the person was white in a dominant role and then they acquiesced to their sexual advances, and they got pregnant. And they opted to have the baby because black women back then did not have abortions; they had their babies. And so there were children who were born who were—looked blue eyes and, you know, strange hair, to black girls. And everybody knew it. And then there were white men who would come to the black neighborhoods by night and we'd see these women going out and stuff. And so everybody knew. And I hated that as a child, knowing that, you know, here you are a black person, allowing yourself to be.

[. . .]

Well, can you imagine the '40s and the Klan? And my father was very active—my father's brother was secretary of the NAACP back in 1951, I guess it was. No, 1948, because we had not moved from the rented property that we were occupying. And when the Klan came through and they had mistaken my father for my father's brother, who was a plumber and was middle class,

he was considered to be [an] uppity nigger because he had children in college and they had their own property and his wife's mother had property and he was the only plumber in this town, so he could call the shots of, you know, what he did, so he had money. And the Klan came looking for the [last name]s. They thought that my father was [his brother]—and so that was very scary, I remember that very vividly. My mother was horrified.

Did they come to your house?

They came—we lived on a dirt street, across from a tobacco warehouse. And they were on the main highway. And my mother had never seen them before, had never seen that parade. And so she thought it was a big night parade because they all got out of their cars and with their lights on and they were looking. And my mother said to the neighbor, “Oh, let's go look at the parade. And see all those people in those uniforms,” or whatever it was. And the lady next door said, “Oh, my goodness, those are the Klansmen.” And somebody came running down the street, said, “They're looking for York.” That's my father, who was not at home. So my mother took my sister and I and went to the railroad track. And we went down the railroad track to escape the Klan in 1948. Um hmm. So it was very scary. So that was very, very scary.

How many times did they come?

They only came once to us. But, of course, they were burning crosses in other people's yards. So that was—so you knew, you know.

And were most of the white people in town that way?

Well, there were—the Jews were not—there were Jews in that town who had, because of course now I look back on it, they were just as racist, I suppose, as the southern whites, but because their history was tied more closely to oppression, coming out of Germany, as our history, there was some kinship to our suffering. So they had a way of providing jobs and other kind of incentives to people of color. I had a cousin—not a cousin, it was—well, it was a cousin, but she's so distant I don't know if you'd call her a cousin or not, but who was away in college in 1950. I was ten. And she had come back to that small town and was actually given a job as a salesperson in a Jewish establishment. And all the other people who were not Jewish, all the Wasps, they stopped shopping at—the only stores in town that were dry goods stores, we called them then, where they sold clothing, were owned by Jews and the jewelry stores were owned by Jews. So they had no other recourse but to go to those stores. But my cousin was a salesperson for the summer. She came back and she worked there as a salesperson, so yeah.

Racially, I suppose in hindsight, we knew our place. And we were protected against the abuses because my mother worked for a family that for

years—this family, although they were racist and had racist attitudes, they took care of their coloreds. And so we were always—and now I hated it, as a child I hated it and I didn't know why I hated it, but now I know why I hated it. [Laughter] But they would give these little things to us and, you know, especially at the holiday times they would send these big packages and so. And then my father worked at this drug store for the most part. And they were benevolent and I don't like benevolence. I think it's a putdown. I mean, that's my own take on benevolence—maybe not in the sense of how I'm benevolent to the folk who are less fortunate, but I don't think that they're less than I am. I do it out of a sense of obligation and not out of a sense of you're less than and I have to do this. But I think in hindsight there were a lot of whites who were—except for the Jews, who gave us, who would give us books to read because we couldn't go to the library and they would slip us books and say, “Well, don't let anybody know that I've given you these books to read, you know,” and that kind of stuff so, because we didn't have a library to go to in elementary school. In high school we did.

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DAN

Dan was the first of his generation that I interviewed. He was born in Durham, North Carolina, in 1943. I have to admit that I found his willingness to speak to me surprising—mostly because I didn't know how willing older southern men would be to speak to me about being gay. Dan set a trend that would blow my theory about their reluctance out of the water. As I suggested in the Introduction, it was actually the older men who were most willing to speak about their lives as gay southerners.

Dan is of a generation of blacks who grew up in Durham during its heyday. Durham is the home of one of the first black-owned insurance companies in the country, North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, founded in 1898 by seven black business, education, and medical professionals. In general, the city was a prosperous place for African Americans from Reconstruction on, giving rise to a vibrant black district called Hayti, where, according to W. E. B. Du Bois in 1920, the “social and economic development is perhaps more striking than that of any similar group in the nation.”⁶ It is also home to North Carolina Central University, a historically black college. Dan was a beneficiary of this history before the black community's decline in the 1970s. He left Durham in 1961 to attend Morehouse College in Atlanta and then lived in New York, Puerto Rico, and Oakland before returning to Durham in 1992 with his partner of twenty-five years, who died in 1998.

Currently, he lives with his new partner in a historic neighborhood in Durham called Forest Park. He is a real estate agent and occasionally serves as a church organist. The day of our interview was a particularly warm August afternoon in 2004. After he showed me his collection of artifacts and paintings from around the world, we sat on his screened-in back porch and enjoyed a glass of—no, not sweetened iced tea—red wine.

When the neighborhood that you grew up in was segregated, was that reflective of the entire town?

I was born in the '40s, so I grew up in the '50s and '60s, and *Brown vs. Board* didn't happen until '54, and of course it didn't happen in the South until the '70s, you know, if it's happened yet. So I mean there was a major, there were black communities, you know. And there were white communities, and sometimes they would divide it by a street, I mean, on one side of the street could be black, and the other side of the street could be white, and so that was a sort of division, a dividing line between the communities.

How did that affect your racial identity?

This may sound crazy but it didn't affect it at all, you know? I mean, there were white people, there were black people. And we, I had everything I needed in my black community, and there was no reason for me to, I mean I never even thought about intermingling, or wanting to be with white people.

So you didn't feel like you were missing out on anything?

I didn't, you know. Because at that time Durham was probably the most progressive city in the South. You know, we had a fantastic educational system, we had a vibrant middle class and upper middle class of black community, and so we had our role models, we had vibrant churches, lots of social activities. . . . It was probably one of the few places where separate and equal actually coexisted. Because I mean, you know, like, we had, there were black swimming pools, there were black tennis courts, I mean you name it, we had it, you know. And so, you know, there was no looking over the other side of the fence, saying wow, wish we had this, wish we had that, you know, we had it, you know.

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FREDDIE (B. 1944, MADISON, GA.)

Certainly, I'm glad that things are integrated, but I think in a lot of ways . . . and this might sound awful putting this on tape . . . but looking back, I think in a lot of ways integration hurt the black community. Because what happened, a lot of black establishments dried up when there were options. I mean, in Atlanta, Auburn Avenue⁷ was a lovely place to go when I was a

teenager. And there were restaurants and there were kind of little clubs and things that were all black patronized. And many of those places just dried up. And something else happened. In my elementary and high school where there were all black people, until the day the superintendent or somebody white might have come, we could have kind of . . . Do you know that old saying that it takes a village? We kind of had that village, where the teachers were like parents and where the teachers could speak very frankly to you about the segregation and discrimination in the world and how you needed to be better, in many instances, than white people to get the same kind of jobs they got. And they could just speak very frankly about all kinds of things. That can't happen, I think, in an integrated setting. I think they taught us kind of a sense of pride in ourselves that I think is lacking. [. . .] My partner always argues that it's poverty. And I remind him they couldn't have been any worse off than we were. Because my mother could never get on Welfare because my father had an attorney in Madison write a letter to the Welfare Department here in Atlanta, that my mother left him on a farm to live . . . I don't know if he said the fast, hard, city life, but pretty much that she wanted to live the city life. So we could never get public assistance. And my mother was very sickly. She was ill a lot. And so we lived in some awful places. I don't know where I was going with this . . . Do you remember where I was? 'Cause I can get a little lost . . . I can ramble. [Chuckle]

You were talking about how integration . . .

Oh yeah. Integration hurt. I do think that. When I look around at how the black community was, in many instances, devastated in terms of businesses and organizations . . . certainly businesses are concerned.

Were living arrangements [in Madison] segregated as well?

They were segregated. I remember going to downtown Madison, Georgia, which is remarkably very much like it was then. I was a bright little kid, somewhere along the way . . . I guess I'm still bright, but somewhere along the way, I was not that interested in school. I didn't apply myself as much as I should have because I really had no goals. Like I just said, my goal was to finish high school and get a job washing dishes to help my mother. So I didn't do very well, but in Madison, Georgia, things were very segregated. And I remember as a little kid being good in arithmetic. We would go to the store and buy stuff; sometimes I would add up the merchandise and would tell the store clerk what the total was. And sometimes they would get angry. It was commonly practiced by white store clerks of overcharging black people. And because of the kind of segregation and other situations, you really kind of didn't speak out much against white folks. And sometimes the store clerks would overcharge black people and they would just accept it because

to protest could have meant . . . like I never saw a lynching, but I've heard about them. I've heard people talking about them as . . . one of my grandmother's brothers was found on a railroad track, dead, and they're sure that the train didn't kill him.

My mother's biological father had to leave the South as a very young man because he had an altercation with a white man, so he had to leave or be killed. And he was unfortunately killed by pneumonia in New York, because a lot of southern blacks who went north couldn't stand the cold and they just . . . they just couldn't stand it because the tenements were drafty in many instances and they were just not acclimated to such weather. And he died as a very young man from pneumonia, we were told, in New York. But he did something to somebody. I think he might have had a Napoleon complex. I don't know this for a fact, but my mother was only 5'2". Her mother was probably 5'10". And I remember my mother's mother being probably my height. And I think my mother's father was a short man, so he might have had a Napoleon complex. [Chuckle]

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"D.C."

D.C. is a retired high school teacher from the Baton Rouge, Louisiana, school system. From the time we first met, I knew that I would not have wanted to be a student who acted out in his class. Direct, brusque, and physically intimidating (he was a football star in college), D.C. has a serious edge, which is layered with a sweet gentleness.

On the day of our interview at his home in Baton Rouge, we were interrupted more than once by one of his neighbors, a young man who is the leader of a street gang in the neighborhood. Although this young man is married with kids, he also just happens to be D.C.'s occasional lover (see Chapter 4). D.C. revealed to me that he had forty-two of the "405" gang, a nickname he devised, in his home all at the same time. To say the least, this young man's presence and the backstory made my visit all the more interesting and provided more fodder for the interview.

After I heard about D.C.'s rocky childhood, his current personality began to make sense. According to him, his father beat his mother nearly to death and hit her in the head with a hatchet. This happened when he was seven months old. Later, he recalls: "When we became teenagers, he made an attempt to jump on my mother again but we were older. [. . .] I held him and my sisters beat the hell out of him. One of them stabbed the hell out of him with an ice pick, and the other one busted him in the head with some piece of iron or something, and left him for dead in the house. [. . .] And I feel they

got a chance to get him. And he died and I didn't. So I mean, I have no good feelings about my father. None." This unresolved anger toward his deceased father and the fact that he was a gang member as a child clarified for me the feelings of distrust that he expressed about other people in his life. It may also explain why he says, "I have a very bad temper, you know. I mean I can explode like that [finger snap]." Just underneath that anger, however, are flashes of tenderness, kindness, and a wicked sense of humor—all of which I experienced during our interview. D.C. was born in 1951 in Shreveport, Louisiana, the youngest of four. The interview took place on January 20, 2005.

Were the schools segregated?

They were. Yeah. Basically, all of my school years, all the way to high school. Like what I was saying is that at my senior year, they were beginning to attempt integration. 1969.

We had two white teachers at our school, and I thought that was the weirdest thing. I mean, the whole student body was black. You have to understand too, I went to school in what they considered one of the roughest areas, not just in Louisiana but in the country, period. It is bad to this day. So even when they did integrate, and they bused the whites in, the whites took them out of there. And the place is still basically predominantly black. [. . .] Even with integration. But there's one good thing about that, as far as I'm concerned. I'm more happy to have attended a segregated, all-black school situation than I would recommend for what I see today with kids. Because the teachers that we had wouldn't allow things that students get away with now. I mean I was a bad person. Okay I was. I was a gang member. I was a . . . I guess you'd call it like a thug. I used to have fights, basically every day. In junior high school, I jumped on at least thirteen teachers. I jumped on the principal, got kicked out of school for ten straight weeks. But at the same time, I was never dumb. So it did that to me. The predominantly black, segregated school is the best thing for black youth. And I believe that even today. Because I just retired as an educator myself in August. And it's pathetic how things are going in schools. And one reason I retired is because I got away with it for thirty years, and without repercussions. In other words, when kids do something out of line, I tell them at the beginning, "I'm not sending you to the office. This is the office, right here. And we're going to take care of that right here." And Mom and Daddy . . . I used to call them at the beginning of the school year to tell them exactly how I am, what I do. "And if you don't want this with your kid, you'll have to take them out of my classroom. Because it's only one grown person in the classroom." But now

you've got kids that sit up and cuss you out like a soldier, and Mom and Dad will come back and reinforce it, you know. And I'm glad I'm out of it because I probably would have wound up going to jail and doing some real damage to somebody's child. So that's about it in a nutshell.

What were the racial dynamics of your time growing up?

You know, in my time, there were only two races. [Chuckle] I'm serious. In fact, in Shreveport, we didn't have nothing but blacks and whites. [. . .] I mean, I didn't know other people but blacks and whites in Shreveport.

And how did the blacks and whites get along?

They didn't. Well, you gotta understand too now, in my time when I was coming up, they were still siccing dogs on black folks. I grew up when they had colored water fountains, white fountains. When you'd go to the bus station, you had the colored section back in the back and the white folks section in another part. And I remember walking home from school . . . and see another thing is they'd come on buses. They'd bus white kids miles and miles, past our school. They came miles and miles and they'd pass our school and went miles and miles to other schools just to go to a white school, you know. And I remember one day, walking, and those kids threw something off and hit me with something and hurt me. And I'd be afraid. Growing up, I didn't care nothing at all for a white person because they were considered the enemy. And in most any situation, they'd act like an enemy. There was not a lot of interaction in my town, with blacks and whites, especially not students. Not at all. There was also this little thing that was still going around that, as a black young man, you were not supposed to look up at a white lady in the face. That was enough to get you put in jail. Okay. And so I basically always saw the white person as the evil spirit.

Did blacks and whites live on different sides of town?

Yes. Blacks had a little section of town, and that was it. Now the areas where I grew up, well they say it's the largest black community in the United States. It's called Clip Road. [. . .] It is all black. You understand what I'm saying? There are no other ethnicities in there. No Spanish, no Mexicans, no nothing. It's all black, one hundred and one percent. And it's almost ten by ten miles. I mean, you know, that big. So it's a big area. It's in Shreveport. Well, Shreveport now has annexed it. When I was a kid, it was not in Shreveport. In fact, we were kind of like . . . kind of felt like country. [. . .] We were like about six, seven miles outside of the city. But not being in the city, not having any kind of revenue and all this, the streets were poor, drainage was poor. And before they built the high school there, all the kids had to go to school in the city and they had to catch the bus . . . when they walked . . . you had to have two pair of shoes because you had to walk in the mud from your

house, from the little muddy streets, to the bus. And when you get to the school, you take your muddy shoes off and put your good shoes on. You know. It was a lot of stuff like that. It was a lot of crazy things like that.

Was the black part of town separated by a railroad or any kind of marker or . . . ?

Not really. Now the Kansas City Southern Railroad is in the Clip Road area. And pretty much you could say on the other side of that part. But it's . . . well the lake is on one side, and then the homes around the lake, they were white homes. But it wasn't like, you know, in some cities, when you cross the tracks you're in the black neighborhood because the majority of Clip Road, there is not a railroad track. In fact, the Clip Road itself, there's no railroad track.

[. . .] We used to live in The Bottom. It's the bottom, where the worst part of the town is. It's adjacent to downtown Shreveport and it's downhill from it. It's down in the bottom, and it's The Bottom. That's where . . . on Friday and Saturday nights, you know, all the cutthroats, all the drinking and whores and prostitutes and everything like that, that was their territory. And we lived in an alley off The Bottom, one of the main streets of The Bottom. And it was horrible. I remember . . . I guess God takes care of fools, but we had to walk in that alley where there was all kinds of broken glass. We used to walk in there barefooted. And didn't cut our feet. [Chuckle] So I mean you know it was horrible.

Is it still there now?

They have renovated so much now. It's called Ledbetter, Led Belly, Ledbetter Square now down there. They fixed the houses up real well and it's a nice place to be now. But if you go in the archives and look at old Shreveport, you'll see what I'm talking about. Killings, murders, all that.

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ED (B. 1952, NEW ORLEANS, LA.)

We lived in an area of the city called "The Ninth Ward." The city is divided up into wards. [. . .] But the Ninth Ward was the largest of all the wards in the city. And at the time that I was growing up, there was the Desire housing project and it was separated from the Florida housing project. And the Florida housing project was all white. And the Desire was all black. And they were separated by train tracks, a railroad and a canal, an industrial canal. And the train would come at odd times and block us off if we had to, you know, in order for us to catch the bus to get to downtown, we had to cross this track and go across the bridge that went across the canal. So it was an inconve-

nience for us, you know, but it didn't inconvenience the people on the white side because the bus stop and the bus were already on their side. But I remember little things like that.

I remember when Hurricane Betsy came in 1965, in September, how devastating it was and how I found out later that the mayor who was the mayor at that time, Victor Schiro, made a decision to close the locks that led to the canal. And while doing this, he caused the side where our development was to flood. But Betsy was so devastating, everybody in the entire city . . . we had a lot of damage on our side because . . . it didn't damage my family too much because we lived upstairs. But I remember the water was all the way up to the stairs and you had to go up a flight of stairs to get to the first floor of the building. And I'd say the water was almost about six feet high. I mean anywhere from waist deep, depending on how tall you were. And I remember people going by in boats and makeshift boats and doors that they had taken off and floating on the water. And it was horrible. And then there were all kinds of things in the water. And you saw snakes swimming in the water, you know, turtles, fish jumping in the air. Your back street was a lake. Our car floated down the street and was completely submerged. It was horrible. And of course, people were taking advantage of other people. They were gouging and selling ice for ten dollars—just cheating people, you know? And some people lost their lives because they had to be rescued. They were on their rooftops; it was so bad. I think I was about thirteen. Yeah, in '65 I was thirteen.⁸

What were the racial politics back then? Did blacks and whites interact at all?

Well, this was in the mid-'60s, and blacks and whites, we still had separation on the buses, separation of facilities. Even though *Brown vs. Board of Education* had been passed, it wasn't implemented in the South, at least not in New Orleans. So there was no integration of facilities. I do remember that there was a black beach that was called "Lincoln Beach." Why they couldn't think of a black man's name . . . whenever the black people got something, it was named after a white person who was considered sympathetic to blacks, like Abraham Lincoln. So it was Lincoln Beach. And it was a beach that was located in the eastern part of New Orleans, and it was a bus ride that took you about twenty to thirty minutes to get to it. It was about twenty miles away from the city. And it was a nice beach. It had a midway and a Ferris wheel, a roller coaster and everything. And the strange thing is that the beach was managed by the same family that managed the white beach, which was located on the lakefront, which is now where the University of New Orleans has property on the lakefront. And it was called "Pontchartrain Beach." But

blacks were not able to go there until after 1964. But it didn't matter that much to me because I remember going to our beach. It was fine. We had rides. We had concessions. There were shows. James Brown, the Ink Spots, people like that would come and entertain. And dance contests, beauty contests, you know, all kinds of things were going on. There was a midway, and there were bumper cars and cotton candy. Everything kids liked when they went out to the beach. You know, Ferris wheel, roller coaster, haunted houses, all of that. And there were two pools. There was a large, Olympic size swimming pool and then there was a smaller size pool. And there was also a little kiddie pool for the children . . . for the toddlers. And then, beyond the beach was the sand and the lake. So if you didn't want to swim in the pool, you could go in the lake. On the way to the beach, they would have these fishing camps, these houses that were on stilts, and the people would live in them and fish and they would throw their waste right into the river. So after a certain amount of time, it was deemed unsafe to swim in the lake because of the fecal count in the water. And that was because the people in those houses were throwing their waste directly into the . . . they didn't care anyway because they knew it was right by the black beach. But I remember those times as good times. And I remember Lincoln Beach only stayed open ten years, from '54 until '64. It actually was dedicated in 1954, but blacks had been going on the site since 1939. It's one of my research projects. I'm trying to write something about the history of this beach. And it's just difficult to get information because a lot of the information has been obscured and the white press didn't give fair coverage to it. And you have to rely on black newspapers, and some of those things are sorely lacking. But I'm finding that, once it did integrate, all the blacks abandoned it and went to a white beach and it closed down because of the lack of business. But the strange thing is that the same family that managed the white beach also managed the black beach. And I think black people felt it was intrinsically better to go to the "white" beach because it was denied them. When something is denied you, and you can't have it and you finally get the opportunity to get it, you want it just because it's been denied you. It was found out that actually they spent as much or more money building the black beach than they did on the white beach. And I found the architectural plans for the beach, as well as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' aerial shot of what the beach looked like at that time. The pool alone was valued at a million dollars. And this would have been back in the '50s, and that's a lot of money. So I don't mean to keep harping on that one topic, but a lot of my growing up centered around that at the time [. . .].

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“G.C.”

Marlon introduced me to G.C. and his partner during a visit to Charlottesville, Virginia, in the spring of 2005. We hit it off immediately, and G.C. promised that on my next trip he would not only allow me to interview him, but he would also give me a tour of Charlottesville—and particularly the historic black parts of town.

G.C. knows quite a bit about the history of black Charlottesville and the surrounding areas. Part of this history has been passed down to him from his parents, and part of it he has made a concerted effort to learn on his own. For the most part, however, G.C. just enjoys storytelling—especially tales about growing up in the South. G.C. was born in 1958 in Albemarle County, Virginia (of which Charlottesville is the county seat), the youngest of five children. The interview took place on August 11, 2005, in Charlottesville, at the home of Marlon and his partner, Ian.

Do you remember some of the friends that you made in elementary, high school? Have you stayed in touch with them?

I remember them. I remember them quite well. In fact, I remember one of the first white kids I met in second [grade]. In fact I saw his mother last week at a neighborhood watch program. The county police office had a big grand opening for everybody to see what they've done, and this woman was there, and I looked up and I was like, oh, that's Steve's mother. It was kind of interesting how all that happened because I can remember in second grade when I first met Steve, it was sort of like, oh good, kid, you want to play, you're kind of skittish about it at first. Then the first remarks that came out of his mouth is like, hey I can play with you, but we can't play at each other's houses. My dad will not allow this to happen. Fine. But we played at school. And that was the beginning of the friendship in second grade and we were friends throughout high school, college, after college. And we still stay in contact. Not as much, but we see each other, and we still laugh and talk about those days. In fact his mother, who I saw the other week, we were talking about it as well; she since has divorced this guy and remarried as well. There were a series of events with this guy; not only was he a bigot, he was an abusive father and wife beater.

How would you describe the racial politics of the town that you grew up in?

It was very mixed. There were certain areas where it was accepted, the mixture of blacks and whites, and I have to say blacks and whites because that's predominantly what they looked at at that time. It was accepted. And

then there were other areas where you knew your place. You knew your place. You just did not go there. You just did not acknowledge, you didn't, you knew your place.

Were they physically segregated as well?

Physically segregated as well. And then there were areas such as the rural areas where there were blacks and whites who lived in houses, you know, up the street from each other. They weren't like gated communities, or neighborhoods like we see today. But then again there were neighborhoods, but those were just all whites and you knew that, like the Laurel Hills and the Park Road, that sort of thing, which was all white.

Railroad tracks always have played a major factor. In Crozet, the town that I grew up in, there was a railroad track that divided on one side, which was predominantly black, which was on the main highway. On the opposite side of the tracks, which got into the rural areas, if you were to drive through that area you would see all the homes that were pretty much right on the road, those were the black families. The homes that were further away with nice big yards, those were white families that had been there for a while. As you go out further area of rural, the farmlands, you didn't notice it as much. You didn't see it. A farm is a farm is a farm. The only way you would notice if you looked at the condition of the barns. The big red barns that you would see in catalogs and magazines with the nice silos, those were the white farmers. The nice big white picket fence. The old split rail fence and barbed wire and the barns with the flat tenders, those were pretty much your poor black families or the poor white.

What was your family's attitude about people who were different from you?

It was mixed. My grandparents, because of their upbringing, were not as liberal, I should say. They were accustomed to things being just that way. I can remember my great-grandmother fondly and her way, I guess we could say, she was pretty jaded in that every way was the white man's way. And I can still recall this, "Child, don't sit down like that, move your arms. The white folks won't like that." "Don't pick that glass up like that, hold your finger out because that's the way the white folks do it." And, "Girl, you better go in there and straighten that hair, don't you go out of here with that hair all napped up like that. The white folks don't do this." Now, mind you she was also very fair complected, and she was the first black midwife in the area. So she, everything was very proper because she had been taught to do this or else, and "else" could have been a number of things. My parents on the other hand were a little different. They were pretty much bent on that we were not going to endure what they had endured, seeing things. So it was not tolerated for us to say negative things about people of the opposite race.

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GEROME

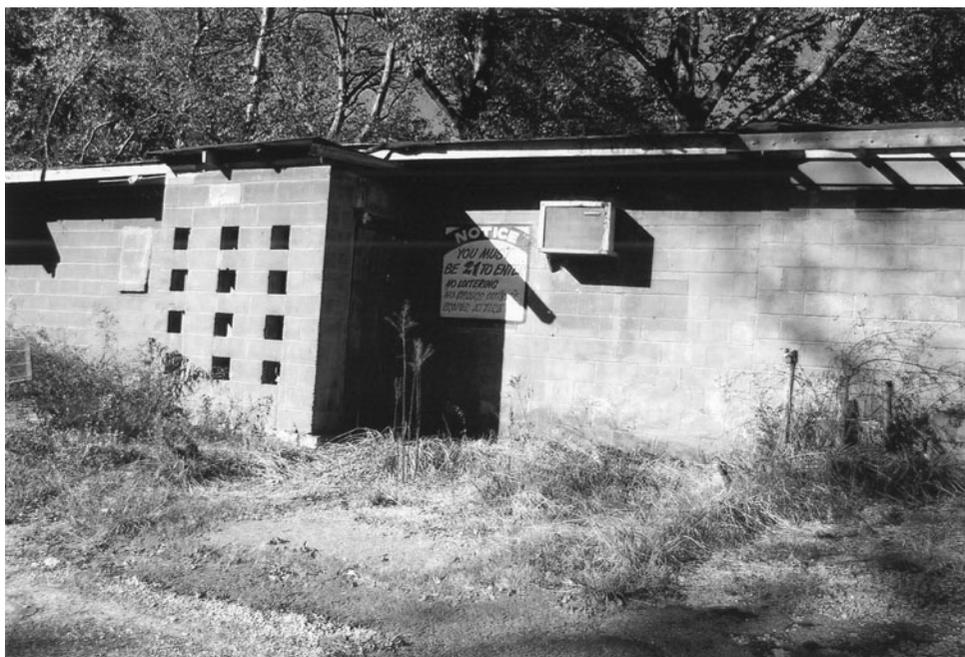
Gerome is one of the people I met through Ann McCarthy in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. As I recounted in the Introduction, he is also one of the narrators who stood me up for our first meeting—something for which Ann chastised him later on. He shared with me later that he had to “pray on it” before he spoke with me. His homosexuality is something that he hopes God will take away from him (see Chapter 3), and therefore he was unsure whether he wanted to discuss that aspect of his life.

Gerome is a diminutive, soft-spoken man who makes his living as a tailor. He never completed high school and failed at attempts to obtain his GED. Although he is functionally illiterate, he has managed to make a living sewing. As his story below reveals, learning to sew was a saving grace. Having lost his parents when he was very young, he quickly had to learn to be somewhat independent. His older siblings were his primary caregivers during his formative years. He was born in 1958 in Tuscaloosa and, except for a short excursion to California, has lived there all his life. The interview took place at Ann McCarthy’s home in Tuscaloosa on January 9, 2005.

[. . .] I was just so disgusted with the black situation; blacks wasn’t getting very good breaks in life. I went to work for this Korean family, Mr. and Mrs. Kwan that owned a boutique shop downtown. I went to work for them in their store, and they hired me to come in and to make sales on clothes, shoes, anything in the store. Wigs, belts, jewelry, whatever they had in the store. [. . .] They were downtown in the old Kresge’s building. It’s still down over there and turned into someplace now. This couple hired me to come in because I did alterations, you know. I could sew. ☪

How did you learn how to sew?

It was more or less, I think, a gift from God, and my mother had that gift and my oldest sister could sew, you know. And my older sister kept the sewing machine. She had a portable Singer machine. She did a lot of beautiful personal tailoring. I mean, professionally. My mother was just a genius at it. She could make whatever, and it looked better than what came out of the store, to be honest, because I saw a lot of her work. And anyway, it was in me from birth I do believe. [. . .] I ended up leaving Mr. and Mrs. Kwan’s after I worked there with them for a while. An incident took place there that I was devastated with. There was this guy that came into the store to steal. And I don’t know if this guy had a gun on him or what, you know, but he came into the store. I was the only guy working in there, plus her. Her husband had left. This guy came in and he stole. Whatever it was he stole, he stole it and ran



Local club in Gerome's neighborhood, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

Photo by the author.



Local store in Gerome's neighborhood. Photo by the author.

out of the store and went down the side and around the building. And this Korean lady, Mrs. Kwan, she goes after the man like a dodo. And she's looking at me like, "Get him, get him!" And I'm saying, "Oh no, darling. I was hired here not for your security, not your security guard. I'm the salesperson, so you go get him." And you know she ran behind him and I looked at this stupid woman. You know, we didn't know what this man had on him. So I *walked* out of the store behind her while she *running* and, you know. And I'm standing looking like, "Are you stupid enough to go down in that alley behind this place, behind a pair of shades or whatever it was he stole?" [Laughter] It wasn't like he stole the register or the money box or nothing, so I couldn't figure it out. But anyway, after then she was so upset over it, Mr. Kwan came back. Her husband, he came back to the store a little bit later and she told him about what the guy had done and everything, you know. And oh he was all upset over it and everything. But what got me was that the guy was black. And that was so embarrassing to me. So she and he both, you know, picked up on it because they came to me with it, you know, "That had nothing to do with you. He was not your friend, Gerome, and da-da-da-da." And I'm saying, "Okay." So I get up the next morning and go in to work and go in to work a few more days, and then I decided that I'm fixing to let this job go because I don't like this. That's frightening, someone coming in like that. What if he had had a gun and just shot up or something, you know. So I wanted to let it go, and then they talked me into working on with them for a while longer, and I did it. But then they found this place in Birmingham that they wanted to go because it would have been closer to . . . they would have been saving a lot of money on shipping stuff, you know, here to Tuscaloosa and all that. So they wanted me to relocate with them. And when I thought about it, you know, when the store moved . . . Young's Fashions was the name of it . . . Young's Fashions . . . When they moved to Birmingham, they wanted me to relocate with them because they knew of my situation. "He's a single guy, he has no spouse, no children, you know, he's single, he can go. He can come stay here," you know and all this. And they was nice to me. But I did not relocate, and that's when I think I made one of the first mistakes. Afraid to leave home, trusting these people when I should have been wise enough to know, "Okay Gerome this may be the door for you to go through." But I didn't. And I've regretted it since because they even told me, "Well when you decide that you want to come, let us know." And I didn't. Because I was doing great in the sales department, selling things that they couldn't sell, you know. You're talking about wigs, to the women, to them little ol' women. And I was selling wigs and shades, glasses, shoes, things that they weren't selling. And me being a black guy and most of the cus-

tomers that came in there were blacks, you know, buying this stuff: makeup, powder, face powder, just whatever they had in the store.

I think I should have been brave enough to just go to Birmingham. But to me, at that time, Birmingham was like from here to New York. That's how southern I was, you know, stupid, you know. But then maybe it was meant and maybe it wasn't. I don't know.

So what did you do after that?

After they relocated, then I went and started working for this Ruth Fashions, this garment plant, factory. This white lady, very . . . now you're talking about the South and *racist* . . . I went to work for a blond-headed one. You know what I mean? [Chuckle] She was a way back sister from the old slavery time, and she felt like blacks were made to serve. And so I did it for not quite a year, for like seven months. I was on an assembly line, making his and her . . . she had like this garment factory and she had like I think about thirty-something people working for her. Thirty or a little less employees making like say women's dress coats and . . . she had these two black guys that were the spreaders.⁹ [. . .] I could not take her hard racism. I just couldn't do it. And she *begged* me to stay. You know, she was willing to . . . for money, she was willing to come on down to earth and realize that this one is not going to bow. And I couldn't, for some reason.

What would she do?

She would come in and try to make more pressure. Okay, like for instance, she knew, "Okay he can turn over two hundred jackets a day." She needed someone to do that. You know, just sit there and run the commercial machine. She realized, "He could set two hundred collars a day. He could set two hundred sleeves. He could set a hundred and forty pockets," you know in jackets. And she saw, "Okay this nigger can do it." And you know behind our backs they were saying like, "niggers," you know.

Watch you?

Yeah. And they saw me being very productive. [. . .] At the time I'm just thinking it was just stuff telling me, "Do it, Gerome. You can do five-eighths seams. You can do half-inch seams. You can do quarter-inch seams. Do them and do them well. Do your best." And you know I did it. And this lady was sold on it. And she felt like, "Oh he wants to cut out of here now." So she decides to change her arrogant attitude to try to be more nicer, but I had already gotten the assurance within me, "You can leave now." But what she got out of it was that, "I just lost the one that was setting my collars and sleeves." So that meant she had to go back and retrain somebody, and she wasn't paying me that kind of money. If she had of came with the right *dollar*, I probably would have stayed there, but it wasn't enough money in it. So I told her. Her name

was Bonnie. Bonnie *Ruth*. I told her, “Bonnie, listen. I don’t mean no harm or anything like that, but I gotta go.” I said, “I’ve done my last. I gave you my notice.” And I didn’t just up and quit now. But some part of me just wouldn’t let me just be rude and just be nasty and just quit. Now don’t you think now that it didn’t cross my mind, because I was just that disgusted with her. I think it was like three dollars and thirty-five cents or something like that, back then. It wasn’t enough money for me. Three thirty-five, you know? So I said, “No I’m not staying here for that.” And when she did try to make an offer, I said, “That’s awfully nice of you but I’m still going,” you know. Did the notice. That lady stood there and watched me leave on my last day, you know. And later on in my life I said, “What was that for?” You know, was there something in there for me or for her? And I realized it was something in it for both of us. I found out, “Gerome you can do better, but you’ve got to learn to hold on until you can see your way through.” And through that experience, I became better with my sewing. I got better at that. She came out with more money and she made, you know, she got paid for it . . . for the work that we did or that I did. And then I left there and went to do another job. It was at food service at the university.

University of Alabama?

Uh huh, in the kitchen. And I just could not take that. So many big pots and pans and all of the banging, and it just wasn’t me, you know. So I left that. And then I went to . . . I was requested at the university in the drama department to come into the drama department . . .

Costumes department?

Yes. And I went and did that. And the university just loved my work. You know, Dr. Moran and several of them on the committee there that was over the drama department, you know, said like, “We could give him . . .” what they did was they gave me a university package deal: full-coverage insurance, dental, hospital, a cost of living raise, just like on staff. Uneducated. Couldn’t even hardly read. Still pitiful reading, you know. But I could work the devil out of that drama department, the costumes, making those costumes. And I mean these was like eccentric costumes and things. And we was doing some like for the *Wizard of Oz*, making costumes. And they couldn’t understand how, “This guy here is barely reading and barely . . .” you know, “As slow as he is book wise, he can come in here and turn this thing out.” And I was doing it, you know, in this whole drama department. And they got furious because I ended up leaving it. I stayed with it for like a year and a half, and then I left. And the reason I left was because this new quarter of students that was coming in, some of those students were . . . I

don't know, they said they was northerners or whatever, but they were very prejudiced. Some of those white students were very . . . you know, doing nasty things. And I just said, "No I'm not going to let that rub off on me. I'm going to flee this environment," but I shouldn't have though, but I did. But I stayed there and I hate I left the benefits that I had because, had I stayed there with the university, I could have eventually got into study classes, reading and everything I needed. I could have been a student there and worked the drama . . . but that was something that was, like I would say it was nothing but the devil himself that made me get disgusted with it and say, "I'm not going to take that anymore. I'm just going to go." Because I was doing uniforms . . . not uniforms, costumes . . . for some of the students, and they were turning out perfect. I'd go back and come to find out they were doing spiteful things like picking the seams, you know. I mean racist stuff. You know, nasty stuff. And at that time, I wasn't aware of how low . . . and you probably have never seen it, but those people can do some nasty things. Things you'd never even think to do, to be low-down. But I found out these kids had been taught this, and now they are out of high school, they're like nineteen, twenty and twenty-one, twenty-two years of age and practicing how to be wicked. I knew that there were prejudices, but I'd never had a clue that they could be so spiteful. [. . .] So I left that. And they said, "Skipping sissy," but I was skipping my way to a little more sound peace. I just wasn't going to take it, and that was it.

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GODFREY

Godfrey is one of many men that I met through my friend and student Curt, who was murdered (see the Epilogue). Curt had a wide social network, so he had a "reception" for me at our mutual friend "Rob's" home to introduce me to men who might be interviewed for Sweet Tea. Godfrey was one of those men.

An articulate and gentle man, Godfrey is what many southerners would call "cultured." His family was middle class and Episcopalian—something quite rare among southern blacks. He, like a few other middle-class men I interviewed, takes a lot of pride in the fact that he does not match most whites' stereotypical profile of black people—that is to say, that they grew up poor in single-parent homes. Godfrey was raised by both parents in a black middle-class community in Durham, where he was born in 1947. He is the older of two children. The interview took place on August 19, 2004, in his office at North Carolina Central University, where he is an administrator

Were all of your schools segregated?

Yes. Yes, definitely. I graduated from high school in 1965. By that time, a few pioneers had integrated the schools in Durham, but I wasn't one of them. And, very shortly after that, there was a concerted effort by the state to integrate schools, and so they started more active kind of busing in the city. The county schools were separate from the city schools, and so a lot of the white students actually migrated to the suburbs and to the county, and so integrating the county schools became a real big issue. When I was in school, however, there was one black high school in the city, and one black high school in the county, so that Hillside became the one place, mind you, we had several different junior high and elementary schools, but Hillside became the one place, if you were black, where, you know, the whole community kind of came together, which I think is part of the reason why it's so quote/unquote storied.

Did you feel like you missed out on anything because you went to a segregated school?

Oh no. Of course not. As a matter of fact, knowing what I know now, I think my education was far superior than if we had been in an integrated system, especially during that time period. I guess I was fortunate in that, with segregation, there weren't a lot of opportunities for blacks who were educated, so that, you know, people say that the mail system has never been the same since black Ph.D.s could find jobs elsewhere. The professors that I had at Hillside went on to teach college in the same subjects. You can't see the location on this tape obviously, but Hillside High School at one point was at the other end of the street, Brant Street, where the entrance to North Carolina Central was located. And there was a lot of interaction, at least academically, between the two. Some of the professors at the university came over to teach classes. A lot of the teachers, a lot of the students at North Carolina Central who were considering careers in education did their student teaching in the school system in Hillside. It was basically the only place they could go.

At any rate, we were talking about whether or not I felt like I missed anything. At any rate, I've had an extraordinary set of teachers. The school setting, I think, was much more supportive in that segregated environment than it would have been in an integrated environment where all the black administrators were replaced by white administrators, which happened so much in the South. So no, I felt that I was supported, that I got the best education I could get. When I went off to college, I found that my education was second to none, because we were fortunate enough to be in Durham, with the kind of resources we had, you know, universities, businesses, that

sort of thing. And, quite frankly, you know, we were fortunate enough to have an opportunity to travel. We went places, we did things, we saw stuff, and we had, you know, a black library where, you know, the librarians tended to be neighbors, etc., etc. So you always got exposed, and, the world was yours. And, overtly during this time period, there was a consensus among, at least the black middle class, that you had to prepare your children to move forward, to move gracefully forward, and so they made sure that you were ready. You know, I remember that we used to have concerts by the North Carolina Symphony, and all of the black high schools in the area would be invited. Usually, to this university, North Carolina Central University, and, because they had a large gymnasium that could seat, you know, several hundred people. So they would all come there, and the symphony would perform. We would prepare for those symphonies, you know, everyone would, there'd be a sing-along, and then there would be two or three orchestral works, and so we were drilled. We had to know the song backwards and forwards, the song was put into context, we listened to the actual orchestral piece on recordings, we were told how to conduct ourselves, when to clap, etc., etc., you know. How you bathed, so that you would be presentable, etc., etc. So, you know, all of the tools you needed to succeed in life, I think, were given to you, as a matter of pride.

So was your neighborhood segregated, or the city segregated as well?

Yes, of course. I mean, even now Durham is divided by a set of railroad tracks. It's beginning to mean less, primarily because of the development of the Research Triangle Park, which was put in the southeast section of town, which used to be the black section of town, because land, quite frankly, in that area was cheaper. It also had the advantage of being right in the middle of a triangular landform that was between Durham, Chapel Hill, and Raleigh. As a result, the success of the Research Triangle Park has pushed development into that little corridor there at Durham, so you're finding, you know, white people moving into this neighborhood now, you know, mainly because it's still a black neighborhood and prices are cheaper, but it's also centrally located and close to everything that you'd want to be there. I mean, from where we're sitting now you could be in Raleigh, Chapel Hill, in half an hour, and downtown Durham in five minutes, and at least at this point, you know, all of the, the local points of, of interest, you know, whether that's Duke University, or the administration of any of those cities that I've mentioned, Research Triangle, or the University of North Carolina, you know, North Carolina State, all of those are within half an hour. So it's one of the best locations in town. Prices, as I've said, have not kept up with tonier neighborhoods, but that's coming.

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“C.C.” (B. 1961, GREENVILLE, MISS.)

When you were growing up, was your town segregated?

No and yes. [. . .] I just knew then it wasn't about black and white; it was just about people who had and people who didn't. Because I realized then we were different because we went from all-black neighborhoods to black and white neighborhoods because it was just clear to me it was about money. Like I realized working in my grandfather's store that poor white people had to come and buy their groceries on the notes 'til they got paid. So I knew then that, oh this ain't about race. It's just about people who've got something and who don't. And I've always been able to recognize that. Because of those early experiences, knowing . . . “What are you white people doing?” Because they would have to line up, 'cause like when they got their check, my grandfather would be standing there with those books and they actually would cash their checks. Well, he would cash the check 'cause he was going to take out their grocery money.

What would you say then were the racial politics of Greenville?

I really couldn't tell you because at that time, which is so disturbing to me now when I go back to those places, black people didn't think about white people. [Chuckle] At all. Black people . . . I mean we were like just all fabulous! I mean just, you know, every house you went to had that crystal. You know everybody was getting ready for to go to the Elks Club on Fridays. You were all going to the football game. And by the way, there may be some diva soprano [who] flew down to the South to give her concert. So you didn't even know. You didn't even talk about white people.

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PATRICK

Patrick carries himself in a way that suggests that he's much older than he is. He reminded me of the older, distinguished middle-class black men in my hometown: he has a deep baritone voice, he's confident, but not cocky, a methodical thinker, and he has an aura of wisdom. He's what some would call a “man's man.”

Before committing to do the interview, he made me promise that I would give him two copies of the book—one for himself and one for a friend who was struggling with his sexuality. I found this quite moving and think it says a lot about Patrick's character.

I did not know Patrick before the interview. I received his contact information from one of my contacts in Atlanta. We met at my friend Ian's house in Atlanta for the interview on Halloween of 2004. Patrick was born in

Vidalia, Georgia, in 1966. Vidalia, best known for onions of the same name grown there, is located in southeast Georgia and has a population of less than 15,000.

Was your town segregated?

Oh, very much so. Very much so. There's a railroad track that runs down the middle of my hometown, and black people lived on one side of that railroad track, and we had our churches and our grocery stores and our homes and everything that we needed to sustain us; and on the other side of the railroad track was just the polar opposite. That was the white. In my little town, there is a First Baptist Church, which is white, and there is a First African Baptist Church, which is black. So during the time that I grew up, almost everything was a white and a black. There was a white Methodist Church. Well, there's a black Methodist Church, you see. Even in high school, when we chose homecoming queens, there was a white homecoming queen and there was a black homecoming queen chosen at the same time. The proms were segregated. There was a white prom, there was a black prom. So it was—and the pop-, the black population at that time in my town was about 30 percent black. It was 70 percent white, 30 percent black. It was a place where time stood still. But in my opinion, everyone pretty much respected the other.

And I'll give you an example. Time stood still in the sense that we still had our Klan. I can recall vividly, as a child, minding my own business, playing in my own front yard, and my mother sitting on the porch and this car filled with young white boys driving by and throwing wet toilet paper at me in my front yard. And I remember my mother running down off the porch, grabbing me and running in the house. She never discussed what happened; she never said why she did it. All I knew was whatever they did she felt threatened her child. So she was removing me from harm's way. Several months after that, I recall waking up, hearing my parents talk, waking up and the house was completely dark, with the exception of this bright light that was coming from the front of my house. And I realized that that was the direction that my parents' voices were coming from. So I wandered into the living room, and my living room, which was about the size of the room that we're sitting in, was absolutely filled with light, but the light was coming from outside. And when I went to the window and looked out the window, there was a cross burning across the street from my house. Across the street from my house was the black elementary school. Someone had planted a cross on the property of the school and burned it, and our house just happened to be right in front of it. And so those are the types of memories. I clearly recall going to

the doctor's office—there's a white waiting room, there's a black waiting room. I'm going to movie theaters—the black kids had to go around the back, up the stairs, and sit upstairs, while the white kids entered through the front door and sat closer to the screen downstairs. Other than those types of examples, everyone pretty much stayed to themselves. I don't recall a lot of racial tension, with the exception of those things that I've just mentioned. I remember growing up and going to school and having white kids very curious about the black kids. They wanted to know, "What do you eat, where do you live?" I even had a little white girl ask me, "What do you wash your hair with?" Those types of questions. But other than that, it was—I felt it was a very good place to grow up.

What it instilled in me was obviously a lot of pride about the community and the family and the place that I come from. Because whatever my parents and grandparents and elders had to live through in that part of Georgia was never once passed down to their children in the form of hatred. What was passed down to us was, you were born here but we don't expect for you to die here. There's a better world out there, there's a big world out there. We didn't have a chance to see it or experience it, but we want you to see and experience it. And the only way that you can do that is to get an education.

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RODERICK

It's funny how people come in and out of your life. I first met Roderick in 1992 when I was a doctoral student in the Department of Speech Communication at LSU and he was a freshman majoring in voice. We met through another graduate student who worked part time at the black cultural center. Roderick was then, and still is now, an effervescent spirit. He has a knack for bringing people together.

After I left LSU in 1993, I did not keep in touch with Roderick but always wondered what had happened to him. Then, by sheer coincidence, we reconnected in 2002 in Chicago. A friend of Roderick's whom I had just met invited me to a brunch to meet some other black gay men in "Chi-town." Sitting at the table when I walked in was none other than Roderick. It was a joyous reunion. He had moved to Chicago and was working at a non-profit.

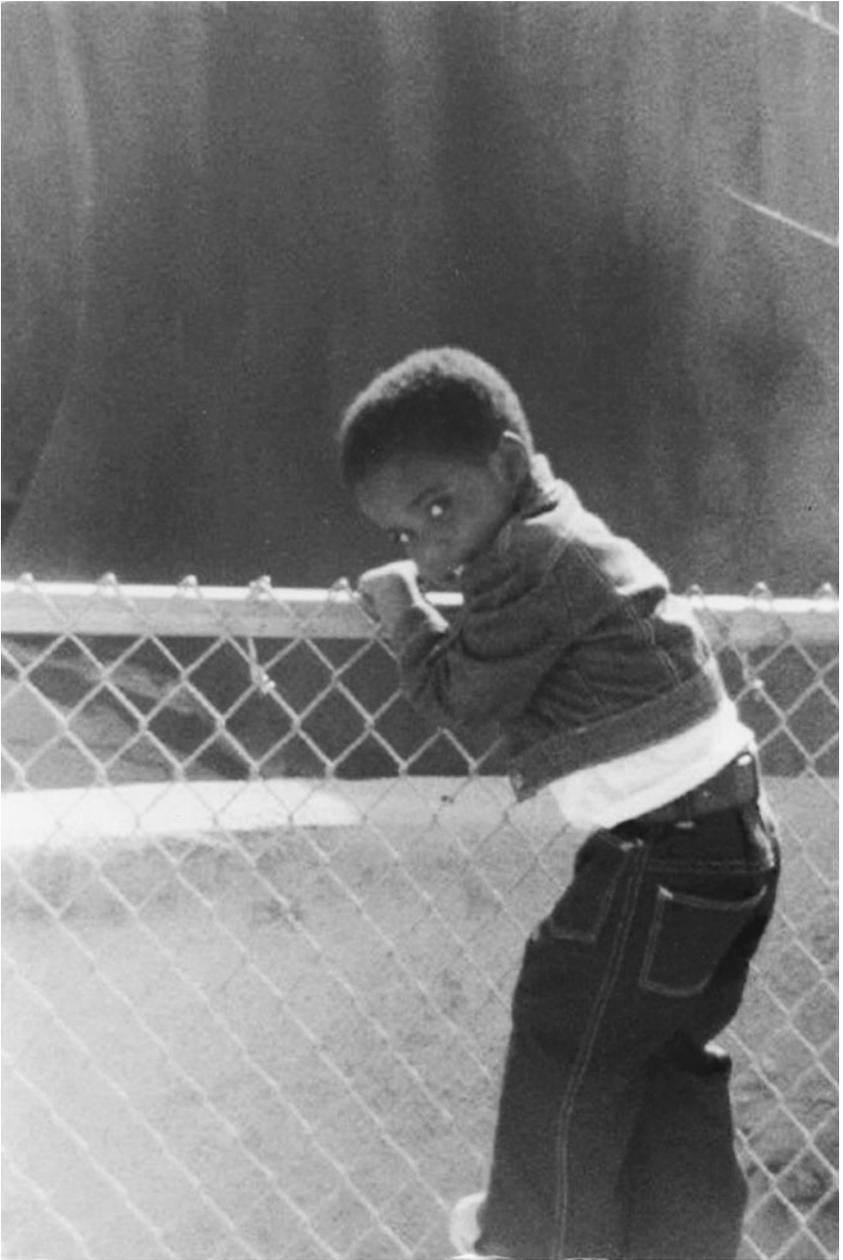
The reunion was short-lived, however, as he decided to move back to Baton Rouge to take a job in state government. The transition back to the South has been bittersweet for him, as he was happy to be closer to his family and old friends, but he misses city life and his larger black gay community.

Roderick's apartment was my hub during one of my research trips to Louisiana, and Roderick agreed to be one of my subjects, for which I am grateful. He was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1974. The interview took place on January 23, 2005.

For me, it was simply you sort of knew where the black neighborhoods were. You knew where the white areas were. North Baton Rouge equated to blacks. South Baton Rouge sort of meant white, but there's also an old South Baton Rouge [that is] black. It's also called The Bottom. [. . .] The area by LSU, called The Bottom. It's old South Baton Rouge. Some of the streets slope down . . . like they have a slope down, and this is called The Bottom. In some communities, people refer to the bottom as like a real poor or low-down place. You know, "You're on The Bottom of the juke joint or something." The Bottom was actually a place where some very well known today black leaders came from in the community, or who did their thing and aren't around anymore or whatever. So it was a cool neighborhood actually. But now it's definitely economically depressed. Very, very, very much so. But you knew where the neighborhoods were. You just knew where the neighborhoods were. [. . .] In [the neighborhood of] Zachary [. . .] train tracks probably separated more of the blacks from the whites. There was definitely a train track and the blacks lived mostly up to the east of the train tracks and the whites lived mostly west of the train tracks. And there were some integrated areas too. It was interesting in Baton Rouge. And I think in Baton Rouge also, when it comes to race and neighborhoods like that, it may be unspoken, but you just know. Somehow you do know the neighborhoods you're going to. Where I lived it was saturated with black folks, so going to a white neighborhood involved getting in a vehicle and driving there. And there wasn't any interaction. Beyond the workplace, there was no interaction.

What were the racial politics in Baton Rouge? Did blacks and whites interact at all?

You may see me at work, but other than that, you know, you go your way, I'll go mine. Most of the churches, forget about it. I don't see much interaction. I think there's lots of separation in Baton Rouge. Then and now. And folks will try to be, you know, "We're not like that." Baton Rougers, I think, try to act like they're sophisticated when they're not. They take the fact that this is the capital city . . . they may take that with too much pride. And I really think that, you know, because it is a pretty forward-moving city. As of lately, it's proven that in a way by electing the first black mayor. But I think it's, it's here. There's racism. There's racial issues. People don't want to talk about it.



*Roderick, age four, climbing a fence at the Baton Rouge Zoo.
Courtesy of the narrator.*



*Roderick sporting bell bottoms at age three.
Courtesy of the narrator.*

People think that we're okay, but we're not. I think when it really comes down to the nitty-gritty, people show their true colors. Pun intended. I think we do have a ways to go when it comes to racial issues in Baton Rouge.

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TIM'M

I met Tim'm in 1999 when he was a graduate student at Stanford. He decided not to finish his Ph.D. and instead to pursue a career as a spoken word artist and HIV/AIDS activist. He is a founding member of the black gay hip-hop group, Deep Dick Collective. Hailing from Little Rock, Arkansas, but reared in Taylor, Arkansas, Timothy (as he was christened) was born the son of a pastor in 1972. Taylor is a small town that sits on the border of Arkansas, just fifty miles northeast of Shreveport, Louisiana. The interview took place on September 24, 2005, at my home in Chicago. Tim'm currently lives in Atlanta.

Was [your town] integrated?

It was integrated. Like Taylor's an interesting town in that I don't know that any African Americans lived within the city limits, but there's a ring around Taylor. And that periphery is almost predominantly African American. It's one of those definite . . . I wouldn't say "other side of the tracks." But there's kind of that dynamic. And you know the black kids are essentially bused into town to go to school. And my graduating class was probably fifty-fifty. There were probably more whites in the school, overall. But it was pretty balanced.

What were the racial politics of Taylor?

Oh goodness. Racial politics of Taylor. Were there racial politics? It was definitely self-segregation. And one of the examples that sort of strikes me is, you know, one of the places where you had the most meaningful integration in my high school experience was through sports. Because you have one team and everybody plays, you know. But if you go to the basketball games at Taylor, at least it was this way when I was there, you have a black cheering section and a white cheering section. And the black parents and black families of the team sit in one section, and the white parents and students and whatever sit in another section. But mind you everyone's cheering for the same thing, but there's definitely that . . . It kind of reminds you of the reality that this is a town that wouldn't have integrated if it wasn't absolutely forced on them. And that dividing line was very clear. I mean in some ways, Taylor felt like an all-black school because, socially speaking and in some regards, the black students didn't really interact with whites. I was an exception

because of academically, you know, I was in the upper level classes. And then because I knew that being involved on the campus and in school also bettered my chances of getting scholarships and other things, so I would force myself to interact with white students in other regards. I was president of Future Farmers of America, National Honor Society, a lot of other clubs. Not because, you know, I thought it was the coolest thing but just because, "This is my strategy for getting out of this place." You know, I think having an early awareness that this was not . . . And I think part of it was like coming from Little Rock and other cities, they may have been southern but it was definitely a sense that they were more progressive. Which I think is an interesting thing in the South. Like you know people say "the South," but there even is a distinction between urban South and rural South. So if you think Memphis is backwards, you know, go to some of those little towns out South where they're talking about how Memphis is like the bastion of, you know, liberalism and homosexuality and whatever, and it's like you're thinking, "Memphis? Huh? Are we talking about the same place?" But in relationship to some of these other places, it is. It's seen that way. So I think because we came to Taylor from Little Rock, we had a sense that like, "Okay Taylor's definitely backwards." Because Little Rock, even though it's a small city relatively speaking, and a southern city, because it's the main city in Arkansas, you do get these sparks of . . . a lot of people moved back from other places. I knew black lawyers and black doctors. Some of my peers in school were very wealthy African American people. Little Rock has a pretty substantial black upper middle class. And some of those kids were my classmates so I knew that there were black people who were well off. We just weren't one of them. [Chuckle] But I think that was an interesting thing to witness in a city that has a lot of African Americans . . . to actually get that class experience. Whereas when we moved to Taylor, it was pretty much like that. Pretty much all of the black people were poor, working-class, and that's pretty much it.

Describe some of your friendships in elementary, middle school, and high school. And are you in touch with any of those friends?

Elementary school, probably not. Like I say, I think that moving around a lot really shaped my fear around developing close friendships. I can remember two people. It's kind of interesting. One was a young man named Craig Matthews. [. . .] We were really close. I think I had my first male fantasies about Craig. A white kid. He went to Terry and Franklin [elementary schools] with me. And there've been a few times when I'd Google him or try to look him up and then like "Nah, let me leave this alone." But I got invited to a party that his parents threw him, and then I got disinvited. Because they assumed that because whatever academic grouping I was in with him . . .

That you were white?

Right. And then when they discovered that I wasn't . . . and he was destroyed by it. And I remember him walking up to me on the playground one day and like just . . . almost like bawling and apologizing that he was so sorry, and I was telling him that it was okay and I knew it had nothing to do with him. But it was definitely one of those reality checks of, you know, like we're close and we're friends but this is still the South. It was also, I felt, like a reprimand against my love for him. I knew I liked him and I knew it wasn't just, "Oh he's my friend." And this was kind of leading up to like fifth, sixth grade. I mean I started to have a more developed notion of what relationship type stuff may have been. At that point, boys and girls were dating. They had girlfriends and boyfriends. And I knew I saw him in that regard. And so that racial thing, but also you know how class plays a role in that. So he was like the one friend I remember. The other was, interestingly enough, my elementary school–middle school girlfriend, Tracy [last name]. A wealthy African American. I think her father was a prominent lawyer. Her mother was a something like the Cosby family. And she was a paternal [fraternal] twin? And just wealthy. And I remember writing her a letter [chuckle]. That reference is in my book and on the CD. I wrote her a letter and she sent it back with all the corrections to my grammar. And I saw that as a class reprimand. Because you know Matthews the white boy, Tracy the black girl, but it was still like you know you're not just a nigger but you're a poor nigger. So you can't even hang with the rich niggers. And those are the only two people I think I can reference by name because their force in my life was pretty integral. The only other person I can think there was Alicia [last name] who graduated from Brown the same year I graduated from Duke. Her mother was a teacher at Terry. And I caught up with her because her brother Andre was in grad school at Duke while I was finishing my undergrad and I ran into him. He said, "I'm from Little Rock." And I'm like, "Oh do you know Alicia [last name]?" And he said, "That's my little sister." Ding, ding, connection. And Alicia and I kind of touched base at that point. It's "Oh wow!" like, you know. She was also a black student who was in the upper level classes, so we . . . It was kind of interesting to see that we had all . . . a few of us who were in that cluster had all gone on and continued to do some pretty interesting things. But I haven't really been in touch with anybody since then. High school is a little bit different. I was a part of what's called Upward Bound at Southern Arkansas University. I was a hugely popular person in that program in that . . . the way Upward Bound works in rural places like that, you get students from all these little small towns like Taylor. So it's not just one city's . . . it's like people from a vast body of places and at that point I knew I

was leaving. I was very well aware I was gay by the time I was in there, although I was closeted. But I had a lot of friends. But most of my close friendships were not at Taylor. Most of my close friendships were through Upward Bound. And other students who probably had a lot more in common with me because they were academically accelerated, had hopes of going to college, you know, were probably a little bit more progressive in their thinking than maybe some other students because they saw themselves as wanting to leave the area and this Upward Bound was sort of this vehicle to this life outside of this place where a lot of people were dissatisfied with being for years and years and years.

How would you describe your family's feelings about difference?

My family didn't really trust white people. It was kind of a thing where in this world you had to interact with them, but if you could choose not to, it's best not to. It was very much, you know, if you could go to an all-black school and it was convenient, that would have been better. But since this is what works out, this is what you'll do. It was definitely this distrust for white people, which was marked by my mother in particular with like very specific incidences of being spat on, you know, walking to school when she was a kid in Taylor when the schools were segregated, you know. And just . . . I saw that develop. Like, as she started working at the school and seeing that I did have some sorts of connections to some of the white students that I considered my friends. You know, Upward Bound was a mixed-race kind of activity, but then we all had in common that we were all poor. Some of the differences were more class as opposed to . . . class was a bigger difference than race often was. So I mean definitely around . . . And that was really the only difference that got discussed. I mean when you live in Arkansas, race is kind of always present. It's like this . . . you know there were towns that were around with like . . . I believe up until the time I graduated from high school, like you know the KKK had a welcome sign on the town, you know, as people came through. And there were times that they were definitely recognized, "They have a huge KKK organization here" or if you're black and you're not supposed to be in town after a certain time. And this was still up until like . . . You know 1990 was when I graduated from high school and there were these places, when we would travel, just like we had to leave right after the game because, you know, it could get ugly. So almost a sense that like the sort of progress that would be made from '65 or whatever had not really affected my town and the parts in Arkansas where we lived. It was just kind of like it was a time warp. And the only reason whites and blacks interacted was because they were sort of federally enforced. Otherwise, people wouldn't have chose to, didn't want to. And there were exceptions to that. Like Upward Bound.

Like sort of institutional things that both people needed so they had to kind of do it together. But you still got the sense that like “No.” One little, I think, noteworthy difference in my interactions around whiteness was I left my dad’s church around twelve and started going to a Mormon church and so . . . a predominantly white church, very different religious experience than I grew up in. So I mean I had sort of a weekly interaction with white people who historically have a really negative understanding of black people and their rights to certain degrees of heaven and what have you. Other than that, it wasn’t obvious to me. What was obvious to me among the Mormons that I went to church with on Sunday was that they were nice people. To me, they were nicer white people than the other white people. So to me it was kind of this really hopeful relationship to them because for the most part they didn’t seem as racist as other white people I knew.

GAY MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY

I have often been in the company of white friends and/or colleagues who, at some point in a conversation about homophobia, suggest or express the belief that the black community (as if there is only one!) is more homophobic than white communities. And each time I hear this I cringe. I cringe not because black people aren’t homophobic. Quite the contrary. Most of the black people I know hold or express homophobic views, including members of my own family. What troubles me is when people quantify the degree to which black people are homophobic because implicit in the “more” is the notion that black people also have more institutional power to enact their homophobia on the LGBT community, when that is simply not the case. Certainly, the black church is an institution that has recently gotten in bed with the government to spew hate and enact discrimination, but that relationship is still based on one less powerful institution (the black church) colluding with a more powerful one (a conservative White House) in order to curry favor. This indeed may make the public face of black folk appear to be more homophobic, but it does not account for what’s actually happening on the ground in black communities around the country, and even in the South.¹⁰

In recalling their childhoods, the narrators in *Sweet Tea* reveal the full range of community reactions to people who were “funny,” “that way,” or had “a little sugar in their blood.” Many such people were incorporated into the community without much fanfare, while others were ostracized and kept away from children. Others demanded the respect of their communities by going on the offensive—they took shit from no one. Finally, some of

the narrators talk about their own gay family members who became role models or paved the way for them to deal with or accept their own budding homosexuality.

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BOB (B. 1940, BAXLEY, GA.)

Were there other men in your community that people thought of as or knew were gay?

Oh, yes. We were told to stay away from them. Um-hmm. But you didn't know why. You were just told not to be—you just—well, now, don't go anyplace with Mr. So-and-So. No explanation was ever given. The musician at the Baptist church was married and had a big family, but he was a bisexual, now that I look back on it, because he approached me. I was in tenth grade. He approached me to go with him ten miles away to see some, I don't know, and I didn't do it. And I was told, "You don't do that." And then another man who belonged to that same church who was married and had children was openly—not openly, but everybody knew that he was very effeminate and we were told, you know, don't go near this person. And those were the only two men of African descent in my early experiences that were adults who were—who preyed on young boys. And I don't know anybody who ever had any experiences with them personally, but I know now in hindsight that—this is when I was a college person [. . .] and I had gone home with my cousin who I had maintained contact, who lives here in Atlanta now, this man who's now deceased came by my mother's house and he had these little pictures of naked boys and he was showing those to us. "Look at this. Look at this. Look at this." And I was embarrassed by that and so—because I didn't really like him. I was always offended by him somehow, I don't know. I suppose because we were—our family was always very neat and clean and orderly and his family was not. And it's sad to say that there was this caste—kind of a caste system. But, you know, we just didn't—and his mother was a seamstress but her place was junky. And people talked about it. And you could hear the older people talking about, you know, that. And so somehow I guess in the back of my mind, I just didn't really want to be associated with that person because it was outside of our caste, you know, so.

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FREDDIE (B. 1944, MADISON, GA.)

Well, I guess the first real gay person I remember was in . . . I think I was in high school. His name was Billy. And [chuckle] it's funny. My grandmother was shacking up with a man. And I was going to visit my grandmother, and I

heard a voice say, “Hey,” and I said, “Hey.” He said, “Come here.” And so I went over. This guy was sitting on the steps. And he said, “You’re Miss Evvie’s grandson, aren’t you?” and I said, “Yeah.” “What’s your name?” And I told him my name. He said, “Well I’m Billy.” And so that was my first time meeting Billy. His name was Billy Hefflin. And so I started to visit Billy. He was kind of the first gay person I knew. And this started kind of a friendship until at some point I dumped him. [Chuckle]

And miraculously, the man my grandmother was shacking up with had a grandson, much younger than me. He was just the steamingest, hottest little sissy I ever met. [Laughter] And you know, I mean this was just a steaming-hot little sissy. And I won’t call any names, but his mother wanted he and I to be friends, and we’d take him to the movies and stuff. And I did a bit of that with him, but all I can say is just a steaming-hot little sissy. And I did a few things with him. My grandmother, at some point, stopped shacking up with this man and moved on, and I lost touch with him. But the woman who married the grandfather had a granddaughter who was one of my girlfriends in high school. So one night I was visiting Gloria—her name was Gloria, and every year sort of at the beginning of a season, she would get out her clothing for the oncoming season. So she started opening shoeboxes and there were no shoes. Then she would look for dresses to go with the shoes, and the dresses were missing. And she said, “That goddamn Wooglie . . .” the little kid, they called him Wooglie. Was actually dancing in drag in Gloria’s clothes. [Laughter]

There was a theater called “The 81 Theater” on Decatur Street here in Atlanta. It’s been torn down a long time, and Georgia State University has a building on that site. But there was this guy, Snake, they called him. I don’t know why they called him Snake because he was really kind of a fat, dark-skinned man. But they called it “Snake’s Stage Show.” There was live entertainment on Tuesday nights, where people danced, and some of them were drag queens and there would be homosexuals who would do what we call “shake dancing,” exotic dancers. One called Miss Mary Jo and Madame Kilroy. Miss Mary Jo was the pretty one, a nice light-skinned guy who was really quite pretty when done-up, but had had no surgery or anything. And Madame Kilroy was not very attractive, but was very good at what he did. But Wooglie, this little guy, was dancing on Snake’s Stage Show in Gloria’s clothing and went on to have I think a total sex change, and now is a successful hairdresser in New York.

What time frame is this?

I think he’s still alive now, but I’m trying to think. I finished high school in ’52. I would say he was dancing in drag as early as . . . no, I finished high

school in '62. So he was dancing in drag, I would say, in the early '60s, as a very young person. And I don't know at what point he moved to New York, changed his name a couple of times. I think he actually got married before he left Atlanta. But moved to New York and I think has a good life. I actually saw him on TV back in the early '80s. One of the shows was doing a special on black hair and he was a consultant. And has a name that sounds very phony. I will not call it because he . . . *she* . . . lives totally as a woman. Actually would come to Atlanta to model on the Bronner Brothers' fashion show and do hair. And she might still come to do hair. But went on to have the sex change and live a wonderful life.

And it was an interesting situation. I have a mutual friend, a friend who kept telling me about this girl. I knew that it was a girl who used to be a boy. And so after hearing about this girl several years, we were at a party one night and these two girls came in. And one of them looked at me and said, "Did you have a grandmother named Miss Essie or Effie or something like that?" And I mouthed, "Wooglie?" and she said, "Yeah." So that was how we kind of got reunited. We haven't kept in touch, but there she was, little Wooglie all grown up, with a different name. And was really quite pretty. Had some surgery done, I think to redo the nose. Nothing as extreme as Michael Jackson. [Chuckle] But it's kind of a success story because you know many of those stories are not successful. The girl she was with that night was a boy who entered Morris Brown College as a boy, finished Morris Brown College with a name change as a girl, was the son of an AME bishop, was the prettiest boy I've ever laid eyes on. To look at that boy, that wonderful skin and had wonderful shoulder length hair, was just a real pretty boy. And we didn't get to be really good friends, but he called me one day and said, "I want to talk to you since you seem levelheaded." And he came out here and said, "I have a decision to make. I can either go to grad school or I can complete my surgery." So I said, "I can only tell you what I think. I can't tell you what to do." I said, "But I have a question to ask you." I said, "If you don't go through and complete your surgery, are you going to wash that lipstick off your face, cut that hair and go back to wearing boys' clothes?" She said, "Oh never!" So I said, "Well if it were me, I would get the surgery so that I would be as much of what I look like as possible." And I said, "You can always go to . . . maybe get up some money and go to grad school, but I would hate to see you walking around looking like you're looking, living as a woman, and not being as much of a woman as you could possibly be." I said, "Now if it were me, that's what I would do. Or I would go back. Because look at me, I have no interest in having a sex change or living as a woman. I'm perfectly content living the life I live." I said, "But if you're not going to do that, I would have the surgery if I were you,

if it were me.” And so she did. Moved to New York and was totally destroyed by New York and is no longer with us. I mean even knowing he was a boy, he just had this wonderful skin. But just a beautiful boy. A beautiful boy.

I’m sure I’ve rambled way past the point. You asked me about gay people and role models. Billy was the first one I met, and people in the neighborhood talked about him. And I was with him one day . . . it was kind of funny but sad in a way. A little boy said, “Hey Sissy Billy.” And Billy got all riled up. What occurred to me was that the little kid didn’t mean any insult, but he had sat by his mother and seen Billy pass and she said, “There’s old Sissy Billy.” He thought that was Billy’s name. Sissy Billy. Just an innocent sort of kid. And so I said, “His name is Billy. You don’t want to call him Sissy Billy. That’s not his name.” And what I found was I always kind of carried myself in a way that made the neighborhood people distinguish me from the likes of Billy. I mean I was just a natural person. I never kind of put on. I mean what you see is what you get. I was always the same. My voice never changed. Well it changed some, but even now on the phone people still, “Yes ma’am” me. [Chuckle] There was a time I looked very androgynous. I didn’t really have to shave until I was thirty. I never went in drag. I mean I might have gone to a costume ball or two. Well, I would buy sometimes things from the ladies department, a sweater or something if I like it. But basically I never went in drag. And oftentimes I was still, “Yes ma’am’ed” by people. They wouldn’t mean any harm; it was just kind of a response. But Billy was the first one.

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DUNCAN TEAGUE (B. 1960S, KANSAS CITY, MO.)

When it came to gay folks, I’m very careful about this one because I don’t buy the mythology that black folks are more homophobic than anybody else. And the reason I don’t buy it is because I grew up knowing gay people whom my parents knew, and they were all in the church. And I’m not talking gay, I’m talking flaming queens who ran the choirs and sang the gospel music. And I met James Cleveland as a child. And the Troubadours, who were an all-male group, and none of them were butch. And I met the Hawkins Family. Yes, I’m gonna say it. And so I met Edwin and Walter Hawkins and their entourage and their family before they were out, some of them. I won’t out all of them. But I will say those that are out now, I met them before they were out. And so there was this silence around their sexual orientation, but they were present. And the silence only got broken when there was some sort of controversy, and then folks would start whispering about the fact that they were gay or different.

And my mother hated it. She was very homophobic. And my father was,

once again, more quiet about it—at least at that point. Because I think he was flabbergasted. He was just not ready to have not only a gay son, but a flaming queen son who was intelligent and articulate and a Christian and struggling with it. Nothing in Muscogee, Oklahoma, prepared him to have a son like this.

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GEROME (B. 1958, TUSCALOOSA, ALA.)

There were two that were older than me. One lived like across the street. He was older but he was real feminine, sharp makeup. Okay, you see how smooth you keep your skin and everything? Okay, he would wear a little foundation to cover up the shading spots, but the eyelashes and the wigs and all that, no. If he did that, he left town to do it. But as far as being neat, very conservative, clean. His name was Oxford [last name]. He was very conservative with his limits. Now when he left town on his vacations to go to Ohio and places like that, I thought he was real discreet in his lifestyle. But he didn't care about anybody knowing about his feminine ways or what have you, you know. He was just a clean, clean, very particular person. So he was one. Then he had a brother that was little younger than him, named Evon. He was gay. Now, I and Evon became friends, you know. We were more or less on the same level. Evon may have been a year or two older than me, a couple years older than me. And then there was another gay guy that lived on the next street in back of us, James [last name]. He was gay. Very little, petite, feminine, you know. He was radiant.

Were they incorporated into the community or were they ostracized? How did people deal with . . .

I would say incorporated. They was not ostracized. They was just themselves, and who dealt with them dealt with them. It wasn't like, you know, being stoned or anything like that. None of that. It would have been a big riot, you know. But there were others in the city. But in that community, I could say that there were like three that was known, other than myself.

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DEAN

Before he was murdered, Dean lived in Dallas, Texas (see Epilogue). He was an older student at Southern Methodist University. I met him at one of my book signings in Dallas in February of 2004. I was doing a reading/performance with Njoki McElroy, a former colleague at Northwestern University who had performed as my grandmother in a show I directed. Njoki was on the faculty at SMU, and Dean was one of her students.

Dean and I kept in touch after my visit, and he said that he would help me secure other men to interview for Sweet Tea. At the time, I did not know that Dean was conflicted about his own sexuality or that he suffered from bipolar disorder. He also had other health problems and had surgery a few times over the course of the year that we were in touch before my interview with him.

Dean was born in Leesburg, Texas, in 1962, the fifth of seven children. Leesburg is located just twenty miles east of Dallas and has a population of less than 500. According to Dean his childhood was “Terrible. Terrible. Alcoholic family, mother, father. Mother came from an alcoholic father,” and he was a “Loner. Angry. Very creative though, very creative. Just never knowing what was going to happen in the family.” Dean’s troubled family background might explain why he had such a difficult time dealing with his sexuality once he became an adult. The interview took place at Dean’s apartment in Dallas on January 11, 2005.

There was an older man, he wasn’t married. And they said that he messed with men or raped little boys. You know, they would say that, you know, they would say things like that. And even coming up as a teenager, my parents was concerned about him raping me, thinking that he was going to rape me. They would say stuff like, “Don’t talk to him.” Like one Sunday my sister, older sister and her children and myself, we went for a country ride. And he called me over to him. And I just went over. He says, “Do you want to go drinking with me?” And I says, “No.” I went home that evening and told my mother. And my mother and father said, “Don’t talk to him because he’ll try to rape you.” And then they didn’t want me to, because I was doing lawns and stuff to earn money, they didn’t want me to go to different places away, saying that he would try to find me or something like that and rape me. And the thing about it, this man had this reputation. And he even raped my great-aunt, who was living alone, ill, and no children. And she had to be in her 70s at that time. So when she moved here with my grandmother and my aunt, well, my mother, she told my mother about how he would come there with fruit and stuff because, you know, she would be there by herself, and just how he would just rape her over and over. And so—and then to this day, this same man is still living in that community. And he just has this reputation. [. . .] So nobody in the community did anything about this man. And this sister, this is a church member, and she would say that he doesn’t rape anybody, that women give him sex, you know, people give him sex, and that people are lying, so the denial part was just amazing, how the community as a whole. And one of my classmate’s brother, he had I guess, you know, kind

of like had him as a sex slave. And his sister didn't know anything about it. So when we were in high school, people were just talking. And some of the community kids, you know, they said, "Well, you know, your brother lives—stays—goes over and stays with this man." And she didn't know anything about it, you know. And later, this guy died. He died, I think he had an asthma attack, swallowed his tongue or something like that. [. . .] So unless something was physically seen with their own eyes, nobody said anything in the community, you know.

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"C.C." (B. 1961, GREENVILLE, MISS.)

It's funny. I just think my family always had a very interesting way. [. . .] I remember to this day, Sam. I mean . . . and Child, if you come in my house like the middle of the night, there'd be like drag queens . . . queens all over the house because they knew they could come to that place. And my stepfather was a truck driver. And he'd come home and the queens would be in there playing spades and all that, so when I went to college, they continued to hang out there. [Laughter] Even 'til when he got sick with cancer, those queens was there taking care of him. So it's really interesting when you come up in a family like that. And they'd be there getting ready . . . we'd be like, "Hurry up ya'll," getting ready to shows. [Chuckle]

[. . .] When I was growing up, and this goes back to really what I know I can thank God for. Back in junior high school, I was going like to parties. I was going to grown folks' parties. Because there were gay men in the community that were very sophisticated. And this is something I tell everybody. I grew up around very sophisticated black gay men, and in some ways I didn't even know of any other thing. So that's why when I kind of started traveling and I would always think, "Well why are these rich men . . .," be it Jewish, white or whatever, European, would be all over me. And I got it. I had the best education in terms of being well read, how to eat, how to have a wide palate. So when you're traveling, a young black man, and then meeting these people and going, "Oh this is different from even where I come from." So I think that was still that old school, where people were just not allowing you to be anything. They had a vested interest in your well-being.

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GERALD

I first met Gerald in the mid-1990s in Amherst, Massachusetts, where he was a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts and I was a faculty member at Amherst College. He lived in Springfield, Massachusetts, for a

while before meeting his current partner. They decided to move back south to Maryland.

Gerald was born in 1964 and grew up in New Bern, North Carolina, in the late 1960s and early 1970s in a single-parent household. New Bern is located in the eastern part of North Carolina, just thirty miles from the Atlantic Ocean and about fifty miles northeast of Camp Lejeune, one of the largest Marine bases in the country. The interview took place on May 5, 2005, at Gerald's home in the suburbs of Washington, D.C.

I had a cousin who was out and was a transgender. And, I had a great-uncle who was wasn't out, but he was out for his day. For his day, he was very out. You know? And, my grandfather used to make comments about taking an ax handle to him and that kind of stuff. You know? [. . .] He would become so mad. [. . .] My one cousin that used to come in, and he would come to visit my mother because my mother was more open and accepting, and um . . . he would be, you know, he would be dressed in women's clothing, and my grandfather would become so mad just when he walked in. And, he wanted to be called Latonya. [Laughter] And, you know, they called him Junior growing up. And, my grandfather refused. Everybody else in the family would call him Latonya, because he wanted to be called Latonya. And, he would correct you, but he didn't correct my grandfather, because my grandfather was very adamant about calling him Junior. He would always call him Junior. [Laughter] So, it was very clear early on that when it came to sexuality, that there was not that tolerance. The tolerance was not there.

I know you said that your grandparents had issues, but in general, did the community accept these people?

That was the interesting thing. Well, you know, they were just accepted. That's who they were. Even Junior, or I mean Latonya, who used to walk around in women's clothing and used to date Marines from the Marine Corp base [laughter], you know, because New Bern is you know Camp Lejeune and Cherry Point [a Marine air station] are there. And so even Latonya. I can't say everybody flocked to be their friends, but it wasn't like there were any hate crimes going on or any of that. I'm sure that they had their own personal struggles. My great-uncle came from a different experience, and you know, he was very religious, too. He had been in the military, very religious, and I remember there were always a lot of ministers around his house, and I didn't really understand the full significance of that until later years. He was dating a lot of the ministers in town. You know? [. . .] For me, that wasn't even a concept of who they were. And, he was known in town as the cake man because he made all the cakes, and he had sort of like a home bakery. You

know? If you wanted a cake or a pie, you would go to Mr. Haywood. And, Mr. Haywood would make you a cake and a pie, and he would charge you for that. And, he was a cook at the local Holiday Inn. He did this on the side, the cakes and pies. And, my great-aunt actually does the same thing. She does cakes and pies and things like that. So, he was sort of accepted, because he was well known in the church as well, so people knew that Mr. Haywood was funny. [Laughter] They knew that Mr. Haywood was funny. Mr. Haywood was different. [Laughter] And, I guess they talked around him, probably about him behind his back, but I never really saw any real animosity directed towards him. You know, except for my grandma, who was really through with him most of the time. My grandmother was walking through a store one time, and this woman came up to my grandmother in Piggly Wiggly and said, "Mrs. Hazelton, would you please tell your brother to leave my husband alone." [Laughter] And, my grandmother would say, "Just get away from me with that common stuff." She used to call it that, "Get away from me with your common stuff." And, then she would go and say, "Haywood, I don't know why you have to have those men laying up on you." But, you know, she would really give him a hard time. But, as far as that, I never really saw any animosity directed toward him.

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PHIL

I met Phil through another of my narrators, Bryant. Phil and Bryant dated years ago, and are now good friends. Phil is also Jaime's brother. It was interesting to hear two different takes on growing up gay in the same household.

Phil was born in Covington, Kentucky, in 1964, the tenth child in his family. Covington is just across the Ohio River from Cincinnati, Ohio. The interview took place on July 24, 2005, in Cincinnati.

Ohhhhhh, yeah. [Laughter] We had Miss Nelson, Miss Sandy. Miss Sandy was a semipro football player and looked like William "the Refrigerator" Perry in a wig. And then Miss Nelson was a former Golden Glove boxer. And she used to apparently indoctrinate several of the boys in the neighborhood, you know, pieces of trade and she'd turn 'em out. And nobody messed with them because they were huge guys. And then there was another guy named Ben [last name], who was just—to say "flame" is not even doing justice—I mean, he was the Statute of Liberty flame. [Laughter] Whoo! But, those were the kind of things that we saw. And he was like just real. He was real. He was interesting. He went to prison twice. And I think supposedly he killed one of

his sister's husbands. And so, one had been beating on his sister, so it was never proven [. . .] but he went to prison for a while. And no one ever really messed with him. I mean, they kind of protected themselves, but people would say things when they'd go by, but they were just real. So that was our example of gay men and that was something you didn't want to be, you know.

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BRYANT

Bryant has to be one of the most "country" gay men I know who also has bourgeois taste. He is a very successful corporate executive, who drives a Mercedes, lives in a beautiful home, and loves to travel. But just try to get him to eat something that hasn't been fried! Imagine trying to find KFC in Madrid, which he did on a trip to Spain with his partner.

I can say these things about Bryant because we are good friends. We met in 1999 after he had begun dating one of my good friends, Ian, in Atlanta. Bryant loves to tell stories and, as he notes in his narrative, he comes from a family of gossipers. When we get together, we often dish about celebrities, especially Whitney Houston.

Bryant was the very first person I interviewed for Sweet Tea, so in many respects he was the guinea pig. He was born in Dublin, Georgia, in 1967 and is the eldest of four children. Dublin is located about fifty miles southeast of Macon and has a population of approximately 16,000. The interview took place in Atlanta on July 20, 2004.

I remember them [his parents] talking about one person growing up who was a friend of my father's, and he was older. He was probably between my father's and my grandfather's age, maybe about 60-something now. But I remember them talking about him being gay. I don't know that he ever was, and he certainly doesn't have, he certainly, if he's gay now, I don't know anything about it. But I remember them talking about him. Everybody talked about him. If being gay came up at anybody's house, and it did sometimes, he was always the person that they pointed back to. He ran a barbershop in town, which sounds, because at the time men weren't doing women's hair in Dublin, so. But he was the, he was the town gay person, and if anything, we were told not to socialize with him, so we didn't go get our hair cut at that barbershop. But he was always at my grandfather's church because he was a friend of the family's; so they would be at church and they'd be nice to him, and then talk about him. Because after church every Sunday we always had to have a debriefing and dinner. Our dinners at home on Sunday happened immediately as soon as the service was over with, so we always ate about

two o'clock, so we'd talk about everybody who had been in church. And he was . . . the only person, he's the only person I can really remember them talking about being gay. I don't remember them, I don't remember any other conversation about anyone else, not that, not to the extent, if they mentioned anyone else's name. I don't know that, I just remember him being the one. So there could've been a variety of people that they just didn't refer to, but he was the town black gay person that people talked about.

The general consensus about being gay was that it was very negative—hellfire and brimstone. We had sermons in, we had sermons in church, from both my grandfathers about mankind shall not lie with mankind. I think that was something, when I grew up and heard that later on. It was nothing new to me, because I had heard that as long as I can remember, that the worst thing that you could do was be like this man, be like this man. He spoke at my grandfather's funeral, and it's funny I can't think of his first name now; I can see his face as clear as I'm sitting here talking to you, but that was, you were not going to be, you're not supposed to be gay because you would be like this man. You're not supposed to be gay because my grandfather and grandfather, both my grandfathers preached against it. And I remember about the age of twelve, Dan Rather had a program on CBS, and he talked about gay men in a park, the sex, the public sex in a park. It was one of those *60 Minutes* programs, and I remember my parents sitting there watching it with us, and I remember feeling uncomfortable about that because at twelve years old I already knew that I was probably going to be gay, and I remember wanting to watch the program but not wanting them to be in the room with me, but we only had one television. So we all had to sit there, we all had to have equal disgust at what was being shown, but I wanted to hear about it, because I didn't have, my only source of, even though that show was negative, because it wasn't showing anything positive, it was showing how men had sex in public in city parks; that was the first time I think I had ever heard that, or seen anything on television about it. And the first time I had heard conversations around anything gay outside of, "don't be like this man," and it was going on from what I had heard, from the pulpit.

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RODERICK (B. 1974, BATON ROUGE, LA.)

I remember this one guy. We called him "Larry Harry." I'm assuming Larry was his official real name, but I don't know where the "Harry" came in at. [Laughter] He was a friend of my great grandmother. And he would come to visit. Her house was like a Dew Drop Inn. Everybody came to visit her. But yeah, definitely, we knew that Larry Harry was a "punk," as some of my cous-

ins would say or you know, as my uncles would say. He would get his little daily walk in. He was effeminate. He would do his thing. The joke was, “You guys behave or we’re gonna let Larry Harry come and getcha.” Or, “We’re gonna let you go home with Larry Harry.” But no one ever bothered him. No one ever bothered him that I know of. Larry did his thing. Larry would come visit my grandmother, and that was that. The kids would giggle, “Oh that’s Larry Harry.” I remember that. I believe Larry’s dead now. But I remember that.

I had an uncle who was gay. Well, I won’t say he was gay, but he was really definitely bisexual because he had this girlfriend for years. Actually, what had happened was, one of my aunts got married . . . her second or third or whatever marriage . . . and at the wedding . . . her husband sang at this church—or what is it?—Greater King David. And the director of choirs there was this gentleman named Reginald [last name]. And Reginald sang at the wedding. And during the reception—it was at his mother’s house because it had a big yard—during the reception, I saw Reginald. And at this point . . . I’m jumping all over the map here, so forgive me. I was definitely out of college when this happened. All I remember [is] being at the wedding and seeing Reginald talk and I knew Reginald was gay. I remember seeing Reginald talking to my Uncle Alonzo. And they’re talking and I’m thinking to myself, “He’s trying to work my uncle.” And so at one point, there were some numbers exchanged. I think Reginald gave my uncle his number, and he took it, you know. And I was like, “Okay.” So later on in the reception, I was like, “I saw what you did.” He said, “What do you mean?” I said, “I saw you give my uncle your number.” And he didn’t know what to say. He was speechless. I was like, “Uhm hmm.” And so he was looking at me like, “Damn. That little bitch.” [Laughter] So he probably was thinking that about me, you know. So I said, “Uh huh.” Well, Alonzo . . . Lonnie as we call him . . . Lonnie was killed. [. . .] And this happened in [. . .] 1994 or 5. But after he died, I was like, “Ma, did you ever think that Lonnie messed around?” And she said she had heard rumors and wasn’t ever sure, but she had heard things, you know. So I said, “Oh okay.” So she probably knew more than rumors, yeah.

I have an aunt, my mother’s older sister, who actually lost two sons to AIDS. Definitely one of them was gay. We called him Junior. And he actually did prison time too. But I mean he was gay before he went to prison. It’s not like he got turned out in jail. But he was definitely gay. It was one of those things that you know. You don’t talk about it, but you know it’s there. And there were other . . . probably some siblings in my biological father’s family, too. You know he’s gay but you don’t need to talk about it. Like I know I’ve got a cousin . . . my aunt whom I had spoken about earlier, Aunt Yvonne,

she's got a son that's definitely gay. And I know because, you know, we've hung out a few times. His name is . . . well it's spelled like "Roger," but she never would . . . it's pronounced "Ro-jé." [Chuckle] And we called him "Magoo." That's his nickname. So Magoo definitely is gay. [Laughter] He's cool. And it's one of those things; you know I've seen a lot of black families . . . maybe a lot of families in general. It's known about. It may not be talked about. But you know and you know that you know, as they say. [Laughter] And they're part of the family. What are you gonna do? So there's that acceptance too, there, where it's, "Okay yeah, you know." And that's that. It is what it is, you know. So there was some awareness of gay people.

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"KEVIN"

Kevin was born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1981. He is one of the youngest men I interviewed. He is a "PK," or "preacher's kid." Later on in life, his mother also was called to preach and so was he. He is a minister of music for a local church. The interview took place on July 20, 2005, in Memphis.

There was this one guy who moved into the neighborhood when we were in elementary school, so probably about fourth or fifth grade. He used to come outside and dance in the driveway. Just turn on the radio and dance, I mean he was the same age. I'm like, what is the matter with this clown? And my dad, now he did come in the house one time and I remember this distinctively, he was like, who is this little gay boy across the street? He was like just always shaking and gyrating and all this stuff, and I was like I have no clue. So one day my younger sister and I, we were outside playing and we saw him dancing and he was on the phone and always talking wild and stuff. So we just went over there and introduced ourselves. We were like, "We are [Kevin] and Sandra." We were like, "Welcome to the neighborhood. We see you at school. Why do you dance like that?" So I think with that, he was the only one at that time, because even when we all were playing, it's like I, you might have gotten called sissy here and there, but that was the norm. I mean, we all called each other sissies, especially if we were playing the game hide-and-go-seek and somebody fell and started crying. Yeah, we're going to call you a sissy if you're a boy. He, on the other hand, that was the first time, when he moved into the neighborhood was the first time I heard the word "fag-got." I was like, "oh my."

And who would be calling him that?

A few other kids in the neighborhood. Now, apparently some parents were calling him that too, because I remember this one girl, her name was

Sabrina and she stayed right next door to him, and she said, “Well my mama said you a faggot and you going to hell.” And it was like, we were playing outside with him and we were like, okay. We used to hear him say little crazy things, but he said, “Your mama must be on crack.” Just messing with her back. So it was like you could tell somebody’s parents were talking, but for the most part, with the neighborhood we grew up in, everybody was still pretty much welcome in everybody’s house, even though you didn’t get a chance to come in, everybody was still welcome.

See in my dad’s house, at our house nobody could come in that house but us. Even if he was there, no other kids because I think around that time, like the ’80s and the early ’90s, there was a lot of molestation was going on in a lot of homes around people who knew each other, so they were like, oh no, we’re not going to play this game, you got to be going right on back to your house. Don’t come here to get no water. Y’all come in the house, fine, but nobody else is able to come in the house. But with that they cut down a lot of junk, other than my dad, you know, making that comment at that time, we didn’t really know of too much talking that went on, but I think it was so understood, as long as ain’t nobody trying nothing now. I would say that my mom even actually was like, now there’s nothing going on. Now she would ask things, and as we got older we learned that that meant is there anything going on out of the norm of what you’ve been accustomed to, or like what you’ve been accustomed to seeing. We were like, nah.

Do you think that guy was gay?

I mean I know he was. This is the crazy part now. He went to the same elementary school; we ended up going to the same middle school. By the time we got into high school, I think he transferred the last year. No, we ended up graduating together. So the year after we graduated, being that we still stayed in the same neighborhood, well I went off to college and I stayed on campus, but I would still come home, so he was still there. And one day I went over there and spoke to him, after we had graduated for about, after a year and a half, and he said he was getting ready to go and get ready for a show. I’m like, “a show? What kind of show?” He was like, you know, he has to perform. Okay, I understand that, but perform what? He was, “Oh just a little singing and dancing.” I’m like, “oh okay.” So he said, “Help me. I still need to get some stuff out of my trunk.” So he opens up the trunk and all of a sudden all these gowns, wigs and . . . I’m like, “Are you a drag queen?” And he was like, “Well, you know this my little side gig.” I’m like, “okay.” So from there, I come to find out one of his boyfriends was a friend of my ex, and so that’s how I knew that he was gay from that point.

From Page to Stage¹: The Making of *Sweet Tea*

E. Patrick Johnson

Like so many of my generation and earlier, my introduction to what is now known as “performance studies” was through “oral interpretation.” But oral interpretation was not a new concept to me when I entered college. Growing up in a community of oracles who demanded that we children memorize and recite the poetry of Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, and Gwendolyn Brooks—among others—taught me early on the value of literature and orature—particularly within the black aesthetic. What oral interpretation did, then, was formalize into an academic methodology what I had been doing as part of my “cultural” training. Drawing on the literary properties of poetry and the narrative conventions of fiction to bring literature to life on the stage provided a blueprint for how to mine texts for their performative possibilities.

As the field morphed into “Performance Studies” and the objects of study expanded to include ethnographic texts, the foundation—the attention to details—that oral interpretation provided never faded. In fact, there was a way in which the tools in my oral interpretation toolbox became sharper. Thus, my dissertation on my grandmother’s oral history as a domestic worker required that I read not only her words as transcribed, but also her words as performed through her body. In other words, my training in oral interpretation sharpened my critical and analytical eye as an ethnographer witnessing oral history performance. The semiotics of embodied history was discernible through the critical eye of interpretation.

When I began collecting the oral histories for my book, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South—An Oral History*, a performance was the last thing on my mind. I was more interested in creating an archive of life stories heretofore undocumented. It was not until after a year into the research and after meeting so many great storytellers that I realized that a performance was in order. For the page could not capture the vocal cadence, verbal ticks, nonverbal cues, and *intimacy* created through oral history performance. Initially, I considered adapting a script from the oral histories and casting a show of eight to twelve actors. After more thought, however, I decided not

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to turn the performance into a full stage production with multiple cast members and instead make the show a solo piece with me performing excerpts from various narratives. I also made this decision because I saw it as an opportunity to use performance to ask larger questions about how to stage ethnographic fieldwork. For instance, how does moving the narratives from the printed page and the mostly private space of a reader to the stage with a public audience alter their meaning? What does the dramatization of the researcher's relationship to the researched and to the audience reveal that the book version only implies? What are the ethics of performing these narratives in the absence of the narrators? How does the researcher sustain the focus on the men and their stories rather than the researcher and his talents as a performer? These were somewhat different questions from when I pursued analyzing a poem or piece of fiction. The stakes were different because the narratives are those of living people and, as Dwight Conquergood so aptly noted, "[o]pening and interpreting lives is very different from opening and closing books" ("Moral Act" 2). And yet, the attention to details of a text that Interpretation requires is a skill that is actually grounded in ethics—an ethics of care that propels one to "pay attention" to what the text is telling you (Madison, "Dialogic Performative" 322). And it was this sense of detail that propelled me to think about performing the narratives of *Sweet Tea* in such a way that their complexity was communicated and my role as copperformative witness highlighted.

From thinking through this process came "Pouring Tea: Black Gay Men of the South Tell Their Tales," a traditional Reader's Theater² rendering of the narratives, which I began to tour to colleges and universities around the country in 2006—even before *Sweet Tea* was published. In "Pouring Tea" I sit on the stage on a stool with a music stand with the script of the show and privilege the "voice" of the narrator—voice not just in the aesthetic sense, but also in the political sense. Since many of the men have never had a platform to speak, it was important to me to focus the audience's attention on the story each man tells as a *political* act. Unlike a narrator in fiction, the stakes of these men telling their stories were high in the context of a conservative and sometimes hostile environment in the South. The conventions of Reader's Theater lend themselves well to a focus on narrative, but do not necessarily accommodate the self-reflexivity so common in performance ethnography. In other words, I also felt compelled to implicate myself in the storytelling event so as not to obfuscate the role I played as researcher in the moment of oral history performance. My challenge in "Pouring Tea," then, was to find a way to draw on the tried and trusted conventions of Reader's Theater—e.g., adaptation, narrative theory, point of view, etc.—while also highlighting the ethical and political standards of performance ethnography. I had to find a way literally to navigate between what Wallace Bacon referred to in the first of his trilogy of essays on the state of the field as the "dangerous shores," so that I could be true to both the performance *as* performance, and the substance of the narratives themselves ("Elocution"). In his final essay on the topic, Bacon laments the lack of focus on the teaching of performance and more on talking about performance "in the interests of uncovering truths about the cultural environments of the performers and performances being discussed—truths anthropological,

ethnographic, sociological, economic, political” (“One Last Time” 358). My goal in performing “Pouring Tea,” however, was to build a bridge between these two shores—one neither on land nor sea, but rather suspended in the air—that would make the journey across no less “dangerous,” but certainly as “wondrous” as a voyage out to sea.

In her essay, “Making New Directions in Performance Ethnography,” Della Pollock outlines what she believes are five productive directions for performance ethnography research: international, immersive, incorporative, integrative, and interventionist (325–29). For the sake of my discussion here, I want to focus on one of these directions—immersive—as it relates to how I employed oral interpretation/Reader’s Theater with performance ethnography/oral history performance.

Pollock describes “immersive ethnography” as an ethnography in which “the self-subject of the researcher is immersed in the cosubject, entangled with, even ravished by the cocreative process such that the subjectivity of the researcher is diffused within, even to the point of disappearing into, the field’s body. Accordingly, we no longer see the scholar ‘I’ at work but we certainly feel her passion, his grace” (326). Pollock’s missive here encouraged me to think more critically about my engagement with the men I interviewed in relation to the politics of representation in the site of performance—that is, when I made the conscious choice to move these narratives from the page to the stage, how the “cocreative process” might be foregrounded such that my subjectivity is diffused, and yet the audience might feel my passion and grace. The move I make to incorporate, as best I can, this immersive stance, stems from my earlier point about focusing on voice. In the performance, I introduce each narrative with an audio clip from the original oral history interview that sometimes includes my asking questions. Preceding the clip is music that corresponds to the theme of the narrative I am about to perform (e.g., Diana’s Ross’ “I’m Coming Out” before a coming out story). In this way, the audience gets to hear the men’s voices in relation to mine. Following the clip I provide biographical information about the narrator that I am about to perform and where the interview took place. After a brief pause, I then begin to perform the narrative in the voice of the narrator, but without fully embodying him and while referring to the text. To keep the audience from fully suspending disbelief, I do not excise the questions I asked in the original interview and sometimes abruptly drop “character” to ask a question.

The spatiotemporal elements of Reader’s Theater in this context help facilitate drawing attention to the multiplicity of selves being performed: the narrator’s voice spoken from his own mouth (on the audio clip) in the past, the performer’s voice as omniscient narrator in the present, the narrator’s voice in the past as represented through the performer in the present, and the performer’s voice in the past as represented in the present. Indeed, I found that expanding the bounds of oral interpretation/Reader’s Theater provided a deeply engaging way to highlight ethical and political questions about oral history performance. Methodologically, it also provided a way for me to document ethnographic material that did not tilt too much in the direction of aestheticizing the political stakes of the narratives or of undermining the

complexity of the intersubjective experience shared between researcher, the Other, and the audience.

I continue to perform “Pouring Tea” around the country, but in 2009 Jane Saks, the Executive Director of the Ellen Stone Belic Institute for the Study of Women and Gender in the Arts and Media, Columbia College, Chicago, invited me to become an Artistic Fellow at the Institute to develop “Pouring Tea” into a fully produced stage play. While I was flattered by the invitation and was excited by the possibilities of developing the next incarnation of the work, I was also circumspect about how the transition from a staged reading to a fully produced theater production would potentially alter the intellectual, ethical, and political intentions of the work. Nonetheless, I became an Artistic Fellow and worked with five artists—directors, actors, musicians—to workshop the script and to prepare the show for full production. All of the artists agreed on two things: I should get rid of the stool and music stand and that the show should remain a solo production. For them the stool and music stand were too limiting; also, my relationship with the men is what made it different from other oral history theater pieces. Regarding this latter point, they also believed that the script needed more of my own story about being black, gay, and from the South. I, on the other hand, was reluctant about including more of my story because I feared upstaging the lives of the men whose stories I set out to feature in the first place.

One way I rationalized the inclusion of more of my own story in the script was to think about it as a mode of self-reflexivity, a hallmark of ethnographic research. Indeed, we have, for the most part, moved beyond the positivistic ethnographic models of modernity and contemporarily take for granted a “self-reflexive” mode of inquiry; and yet, self-reflexivity is not a panacea for all the pitfalls of performance ethnography. In other words, when does reflexivity threaten the “critical” in the term “critical performance ethnography” by colonizing the space of the Other for which the research is supposed to account? In speaking on this subject, D. Soyini Madison writes: “[w]e understand that our subjectivity is an inherent part of research, but in critical ethnography it is not my *exclusive* experience—that is autobiography, travel writing, or memoir (or what some people call *auto-ethnography*). I contend that critical ethnography is always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among others, one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in others’ worlds” (*Critical Ethnography* 10, emp. in original). Here, Madison makes a distinction between what she sees as “critical ethnography” and “autoethnography,” by linking critical ethnographic practice with political and social advocacy for, and a steady focus on, the Other. In my move from staged reading to full theatrical production and the inclusion of my story, I was challenged to conjoin critical ethnography and auto-ethnography in a way that adhered to Madison’s call to “make a difference in others’ world.”

This was not an easy task for me literally, emotionally, or psychologically. And yet, the seeming insurmountable obstacle of overcoming this challenge was the very process that made it clear to me why I had to include my story: sharing my life history in the same way that I had asked the men to share theirs made me vulnerable

in a way that I had not experienced in the field. Indeed, I was challenged to stand firmly in the moral center that Dwight Conquergood calls “dialogic performance” and later “co-performative witness” (“Moral Act” 9; *Lethal Theater* 472; see also “Rethinking Ethnography”). The process of writing myself into existence served not only as an act of validation and expression, but also as a self-reflexive mirror to see an image of myself that I did not or refused to see and did not necessarily want others to see. The “I” and the “eye” were in dialogic tension.

Confronting personal demons that had lain dormant for years, I created the character “EPJ” to represent the me, the not me, and *not* not me (Schechner 110) in what became *Sweet Tea—The Play*. In the version of the play that debuted in April 2010 in Chicago, directed by Daniel Alexander Jones, my stories were included alongside the men’s, clustered together in episodic groupings under themes like “Survival of the Fittest” and “Church Sissies.” Jones’ direction was steeped in the theatrical jazz aesthetic, a nonwestern theatrical aesthetic that, according to Omi Osun Joni Jones draws on presence, breath, listening, improvisation, simultaneous truths, collaboration, virtuosity, body-centeredness, and metamorphosis (6–7). In this iteration of the show, ninety-three year old Countess Vivian, the oldest man I interviewed for *Sweet Tea*, although still alive, functioned as an ancestor figure whom I conjured through a walking stick whenever he appeared onstage. He accompanied “EPJ” throughout the show.

In the most recent version of the show, which premiered in Arlington, Virginia at Signature Theater, a new director, Rajendra Maroom Maharaj, and the artistic team at Signature encouraged me to include an even more in-depth self-portraiture. Again, I resisted that impulse, but later came to understand that it was less about my concern of upstaging the men and more about my own resistance to self-disclosure about unpleasant things about my life. Ironically, being forced to do some “deep hanging out” with myself helped me to write what became the theatrical conceit of the play: listening to these men’s stories empowered me to tell my own. Thus, I framed the play with my own journey to selfhood, picking up pearls of wisdom and encouragement from the other men along the way. By the time the show opened in September 20, 2011, it was no longer a conceit, but rather the truth—my truth.

Embodying the character of myself each night is what helped me come to a different understanding of myself. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue about women’s self-representation, my self-embodiment in *Sweet Tea* “constitutes subjectivity in the interplay of memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency” (4). This interplay of memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency are made manifest through performance, the site at which the practice of everyday life is framed and named as extraordinary in a moment of cultural reflexivity. It not only provides a way to establish one’s authority as a subject, but it also situates “the body in some kind of material surround that functions as a theater of embodied self-representation” (5). In the context of *Sweet Tea—The Play*, the “material surround” is actually the men’s stories, the props onstage, and the viewing audience. It all becomes a part of the epistemological loop of self: a way of knowing the self as other and the self as same.

My journey from page to stage with *Sweet Tea* has been rife with ethical and political conundrums, personal consternation, intellectual provocation, and unadulterated pleasure. I consider myself fortunate to have had at my disposal training in oral interpretation to assist me in avoiding some of the pitfalls of performance ethnography and my training in ethnography to expand our notion of texts. If oral interpretation is the tea, then ethnography is the sugar. You need plenty of both to make *Sweet Tea*.

Notes

- [1] See Mary Frances HopKins, "From Page to Stage: The Burden of Proof." HopKins suggests that adapting texts for the stage is "burdensome," but worth the rewards that come with the process.
- [2] For more on Reader's Theater, see Joanna Hawkins Maclay, and Robert Breen.

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Introduction: Remembering

Della Pollock

While scholars and practitioners in any number of fields, across the university and public humanities, are turning to performance as both an analytic and a practice—as a way of both describing and entering into the creative work of social transformation—oral history and performance enjoy a unique synergy. Oral historians and performance scholars/practitioners are increasingly discovering shared and complementary investments in orality, dialogue, life stories, and community-building or what might more generally be called *living* history. By which I don't mean reenactments or heritage theater exactly but the process of materializing historical reflection in live representation as both a form (a container) and a means (a catalyst) of social action. Performance—whether we are talking about the everyday act of telling a story or the staged reiteration of stories—is an especially charged, contingent, reflexive space of encountering the complex web of our respective histories. It may consequently engage participants in new and renewed understandings of the past. It may introduce alternative voices into public debate. It may help to identify systemic problems and to engage a sense of need, hope, and vision. As live representation, performance may in effect bring imagined worlds into *being and becoming*, moving performers and audiences alike into palpable recognition of possibilities for change. Through the incorporation of oral histories into public memory, it may most fundamentally ensure that “those who have given up their time to talk, know that their words have been taken seriously” (Slim and Thompson, 2).

Remembering is intended to introduce some of the work currently being done at the intersection of performance and oral history.¹ It is not a manual.² Recognizing the specificity of oral history and performance in local contexts, it does not provide

instructions for developing oral history performances, although it does emphasize the unique integration of theory and practice, research and poetics, in each case represented here.³ Each of the essays in this volume focuses intensively on specific, sensuous *processes of production and reception* and is methodologically and theoretically suggestive rather than, in any sense, prescriptive.

In turn, the essays reflect the peculiar resistance of performance to logics of cause and effect. Each author is concerned with work driven to make a difference; each moreover is working with the symbolic fabric of language, narrative, image, bodies in artful motion, and their respective interaction and interplay. As oriented as a performance may be toward change, performance does not work instrumentally. In the symbolic field of representation, effects are unpredictable, even uncontrollable. They may be fleeting or burrow deeply, only to emerge in an unexpected place, at another time. They may unfurl slowly, even invisibly, on affective currents that may compete with what we think a given performance is or should be doing. Or they may refuse to come out altogether, preferring instead to rest in the discourses of “mere” entertainment or passing pleasure.

The performance of oral history is itself a transformational process. At the very least, it translates subjectively remembered events into embodied memory acts, moving memory into re-membering. That passage not only risks but endows the emerging history/narratives with change. Accordingly, this volume turns on a promise, what I would call the essential of promise of oral history performance: that the body remembering, the bodies remembered, and the bodies listening in order to remember (“you remember, I told you . . .”) will be redeemed in some kind of change—the small changes that come with repetition in different moments with different listeners; the large changes that might result from entering the memories of a whole body politic (medium-risk prisoners in Rouverol’s work; striking laborers in Gordon’s) into the human record of daily living. In this sense, performance is a promissory act. Not because it can only promise possible change but because it catches its participants—often by surprise—in a contract with possibility: with imagining what might be, could be, should be. As much as we may want to determine its effects—whether as a matter of intention or retrospection, it would consequently be counter-productive to do so. Whatever effects performances may have live beyond scientific controls and measures, in the ongoing reckonings of human understanding.⁴

What joins all the chapters is a sense that performance as promise and practice is at the heart of oral history. That insofar as oral history is a process of *making history in dialogue*, it is performative. It is cocreative, co-embodied, specially framed, contextually and intersubjectively contingent, sensuous, vital, artful in its achievement of narrative form, meaning, and ethics, and insistent on *doing through saying*: on investing the present and future with the past, re-marking history with previously excluded subjectivities, and challenging the conventional frameworks of historical knowledge with other ways of knowing. Each of the authors in this volume offers insights into the nature of oral history (as) performance, but all basically agree that the oral

historian stages a conversation in the relatively artificial context of an interview.⁵ The interview involves its participants in a heightened encounter with each other and with the past, even as each participant and the past seem to be called toward a future that suddenly seems open before them, a future to be made in talk, in the mutual embedding of one's vision of the world in the other's. The interviewer is her/himself a symbolic presence, standing in for other, unseen audiences and invoking a social compact: a tacit agreement that what is heard will be integrated into public memory and social knowledge in such a way that, directly or indirectly, it will make a material difference. The oral history interview lifts what might otherwise dissolve into the ephemera of everyday life onto the plane of ongoing exchange and meaning-making, infusing it with the power of shifting relationships among tellers and listeners (and listeners who become tellers to tellers who become listeners) near and far.

The oral history interview is a bounded event that asserts the "competency" of the primary teller to tell a particular history.⁶ It is framed by interpretive codes (even insofar as the tape recorder is loaded with cultural expectations) that endow that history with special meaning and value, making the interview a private/public act that uniquely joins historical accounts already shaped by prior conditions, conversations, and rehearsals with the prospect of new meanings unfolding across a panorama of reception. Understood as performance, in these among other ways, the oral history interview is an ignition point, charged by and charging its historical moment, giving so many oral historians the sense that the occasion of the interview—no more and so much more than an ordinary conversation—is *momentous*.

What then does it mean to stage oral histories? To move them from the implicit to the explicit context of public performance? What happens to the critical, interpretive vitality of the primary exchange? How does the performative process of *remembering* amplify the uncertainties and contingencies—the narrative irresolution—in history? How might the peculiar relays of *remembering* in turn enhance the *poiesis* of history—the creation and re-creation of new histories that might be the answer to crumbling communities, forgotten lives, and generations of young people lost to the presentism of tv/video/digital mediation? How might in turn *poiesis* become *kinesis*—the embodiment of symbolic knowledge in social action?⁷

Staged performance or "re-performance" appreciates the magnitude of the primary interview encounter by expanding it to include other listeners; rallying its pedagogical force; and trying—in some small measure—to convey the particular beauty of two people meeting over history. It moreover does so live, not only mirroring the primary telling but actively favoring oral history as a mode of *embodied knowing*—as an epistemology that lives, in Annette Kuhn's provocative words, "on the pulse" (101): precarious, contingent, sensuous, felt. Emphasizing that oral history is a performance in itself, the performance of oral history insists on the distinctive value of knowing by listening to words passed "mouth to ear . . . body to body" (Trinh, 136), words entered into viscerally charged debates about both *what* and *how* to know, and words shimmering with what may be unsaid, felt, withheld, stammered, introduced

in a pause, caught up in a breath, a sigh, an expressive rhythm, a physical or tonal gesture (see, e.g. Eisner's conversations with her interview partner, Chi T'ôi, in the sixth chapter of this volume, or Fousekis' conversation with Carol Watts in the last).⁸ In so doing, oral history performance challenges the textual drive toward narrative resolution and the conventional authority of more objective or objectifying modes of knowledge and representation with the power of open telling. At its best, it democratizes tellers and listeners by easing the monologic power of *what is said* into the collaborative, cogenerative, and yet potentially discordant *act of saying and hearing* it.

In so doing, oral history performance cultivates what Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga have called "theories of the flesh": the root metaphors and ideas about the world that both emerge from and "bridge the contradictions" of experience (Anzaldúa and Moraga, 23). Oral history performance refuses easy and all too conventional distinctions between experience and explanation, or body and mind—distinctions by which, for instance, scientific discourses have consistently dismissed the concrete, partial life of the "anecdote." It insists instead on the complexities of indigenous or vernacular conceptualizations of experience; the intersection of vernacular and "specialized knowledges";⁹ and the possibility of mobilizing both through the interactive dynamics of restaging histories told and heard in interview settings.

The essays in this volume comprise something of a polemic. More or less explicitly, each author characterizes performance as central to the nature and aims of oral history. Collectively and individually, these essays suggest that performance is not so much an interesting or entertaining option as an obligation. At the most basic level, re-performance is an expression of devoted reception. It is one attempt to fulfill the promise—the sense of contractual responsibility and enormous possibility—of historical talk. Beyond the particularities of interview practice or historical method, it enacts what Kelly Oliver calls "the response-ability in subjectivity" (139): the sense that the ability to respond (response-ability) that inheres in the obligation (responsibility) to do so defines what it means to be a human self. As many of the authors in this volume suggest, beyond storytellers, we are witnesses.¹⁰ We see each other and we (must) see to each other through the performance of witnessing. For Oliver, any one self is thus ontologically and ethically inextricable from "others." The self-subject as witness does not subsume or speak *for* others any more than it bespeaks an inalienable distinction between one's self and presumed other.¹¹ Rather, it gains resonance in vibrant relation to others. Accordingly, for Oliver, "the other is no longer *the* other. There is no the other, but a multitude of differences and other people on whom my sense of myself as a subject and an agent depends" (223). Oral history performance as a form of witnessing is one way of practicing the interdependence of human selves and of seeing through the past into an as-yet unspoken (much less written) future—for Oliver, one that will be, if indeed we recognize our defining role as witnesses, more just and loving.¹²

Remembering focuses specifically on *oral history-based performance*: performances that take their impetus from formal or informal oral history interviews when oral

history is understood as the re-creation of storied experience for the primary purpose of gaining social-historical perspective. It does not pretend to encompass all of the wide-ranging, related work done under the rubric of “documentary theater” or the important and equally wide-ranging work of performing autobiography.¹³ It recognizes essential kinship with but does not focus on: family and folk storytelling; heritage drama and historical reenactments; museum exhibition and performance; a broad definition of community-based theater;¹⁴ and performances of historical witness and intervention not based on oral history interviews. It is particularly concerned with the “response-ability” of the person who hears oral histories and the corresponding strength of that person’s agency as someone who acts on hearing if only by telling again.

One implication of Oliver’s formulation is that history cannot be held privately. No one person “owns” a story. Any one story is embedded in layers of remembering and storying. Remembering is necessarily a public act whose politics are bound up with the refusal to be isolated, insulated, inoculated against both complicity with and contest over claims to ownership. That’s her story, we might say, ostensibly valorizing the teller by remaining at arm’s length and failing to recognize, much less reckon with, our place in the network of social relations her story invokes. In this way, we may neutralize by privatizing a given history. As Sam Schragger has observed, oral histories are cultivated in narrative environments; they bear the dialogical imprint of many voices and perspectives.¹⁵ Each is already a communal text, documenting above all the “multitude of differences and other people” that converge on any one “memory act.”¹⁶ Oral history performance aims to distribute the great wealth of any one or anyone’s story/history: enriching each teller along the way.

Accordingly, Anna Deavere Smith’s revolutionary production of *Fires in the Mirror*, followed by *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, featured what seemed an almost endless range of perspectives on the Crown Heights Riots in 1991.¹⁷ Acclaimed for Smith’s virtuosic replay of twenty-seven characters, *Fires in the Mirror* is as much about the poetics of historical narrative as it is about the histories those poetics uniquely engage. Concerned with the complexities of race relations in the contemporary United States, Smith looks for American “character” in vernacular rhythms and images:

Speaking teaches us what our natural “literature” is. In fact, everyone, in a given amount of time, will say something that is like poetry. The process of getting to that moment is where “character” lives. (xxxii)

Character, Smith finds, emerges “in the gaps,” in those places where language fails, at those moments when it proves next to impossible to tell a whole or neat story, when the poetry of human history both rises from the rubble and falters:

My sense is that American character lives not in one place or the other, but in the gaps between the places, and in our struggle to be together in our differences.

It lives not in what has been fully articulated, but in what is in the process of being articulated, not in the smooth-sounding words, but in the very moment that the smooth-sounding words fail us. We might not like what we see, but in order to change it, we have to see it clearly. (xli)

Smith projects a cacophony of voices that, in their friction and failures, reveal the inequities that listening only for the coherence of a given narrative might otherwise obscure.

Julie Salverson complements Smith by hailing another set of gaps: those between the audience member and the lives represented on stage. Challenging what she calls an “erotics of injury”—the melancholic, often pleasurable identification with performance of/by the alleged victims or survivors of social trauma, Salverson warns against the potentially mystifying and reiterative effects of conventional empathy. She calls instead for an aesthetic of “detachment and contact”:

It is no longer enough—if it ever was—to assume that theater is by its very nature about connection; now those of us who practice theater that engages with people’s accounts of violent events must articulate the nature of that contact. I want to explore how theater operates as an ethical space in which a relationship between detachment and contact occurs. When, I wonder, is the meeting of lives (the narratives we construct, intuit, and perform about ourselves) about a contact that consumes the other person and reduces them to our terms? When, on the other hand, is it a contact that lets us come together differently and binds me deeply to another without collapsing either the “I” or the “other” into a totalizing “we”? (Salverson 2001, 119)¹⁸

Salverson and Smith insist on a testimonial theater filled with uncertainties and marked differences—even insofar as, for example, Moisés Kaufman and the Tectonic Theater’s *The Laramie Project* is flush with questions. Placing center stage the interactions among the actor/interviewers and the residents of Laramie, Wyoming, where Matthew Shepard was brutally murdered, the play dramatizes the search for an elusive complete or total(izing) story. *The Laramie Project* has perhaps done more than any other work to popularize oral history performance.¹⁹ At the same time, it has been duly criticized for smoothing over narrative disjunctions and the raw edge of homophobia that was ultimately responsible for Shepard’s death, presenting a kind of *Our Town* version of contemporary, horrific violence. This has been in part the effect of repeat productions in communities across the United States in which the original actor/interviewees are re/displaced by actors playing interviewer/actors, putting the representation of Laramie and the interaction between the interviewers and residents at one further remove from the reality of audience members who might otherwise identify with the members of the Tectonic Theater company as “people-like-themselves,” leading them to feel—as such—that they too might take up this

response-ability, that they might perform the role of asker/interviewer, that they might wonder harder about histories already smoothed over by time and repetition.

While this critique bears considerable weight, it also points to the (im)balance between representation and reality in all oral history performance. In addition to the gaps within and between stories (following Smith), and the gap between the lives of audience members and the lives represented on stage (following Salverson), is another crucial gap in oral history performance: that between representation and the “actual” events and tellers to which that representation refers. It would be unnecessary to pursue performance if its representational status were something to bury, hide, or escape; if its failure to provide an “authentic” experience did not in some essential way add to the understanding of history oral history promotes. While “living history” may try to collapse reality and representation to give the impression that “you were there!” all of the essays in this volume recognize the gap in re-presentation and struggle to articulate its particular value to knowing and making history.

Oral history performance is strung between reference to real events and real listener/witnesses, between recollection and anticipation of historical change. It has the peculiar temporality of the *representational real*: an engine embedded in historical time, it invokes the *beyond time* of possibility, making possibility real or at least staking the grounds of real possibilities.²⁰ In most of the projects described in this volume, the performance of reality is paradoxically a performance of possibility.²¹ Accordingly, oral history performance becomes the ethical space Salverson demands and Bruce McConachie defines in his important essay, “Approaching the ‘Structure of Feeling’ in Grassroots Theatre.” McConachie describes a collaboration between the Williamsburg Grassroots Theatre Project and the Roadside Theatre Company in 1995–1996 based on interviews concerned with the gradual shift from segregation to desegregation in a small southern town. The project, for McConachie, exemplifies the dialectical draw forward and then back again that makes up the affective dynamics of “community-based theatre”:

Community-based theatre . . . is less about representing the realities of actual or historic communities—although markers of these realities need to be present to “authenticate” the experience—and more about imagining and constructing the relationships of an ethical community for the future. The images generated in a grassroots show provide a structure of feeling that induces the audience to divide an ethical “us” from an immoral “them” and then to examine who “we” are. (42)

In all of its gaps, “betweenesses,” or liminality, oral history-based performance offers less an alternative recording of the past than an ethical imaginary of a future—a future that now feels so close “we” find ourselves almost at home in it, except that we must “examine who ‘we’ are” before we can cross its threshold.

In this light, I am particularly moved by Natalie Fousekis’ discovery, recounted in her essay here, “Experiencing History: A Journey from Oral History to Performance,”

that when she and her student-colleagues finally started literally cutting up tape logs and splicing interview transcripts—when they started playing with the gaps and messing with the isolation, insularity, and linearity of interview materials—they also finally started “acting like historians.”²² Their historical investigation began with what seemed an irreverent plunge into (re)creativity. They ironically started performing their scholarly roles as historians when they stopped trying to save their interviewees’ histories not only from mortal ruin (as preservationists might) but from theatrical disrepute (as moralists after Plato’s injunctions against the unruly poet-performer undoubtedly would). The result was, as Fousekis so beautifully describes, a reluctant but steady shift in her understanding of resilient themes in the history of women’s leadership and grassroots activism, as well as of herself as a daughter, scholar, and teacher. Her own transformation is now echoed in her classrooms, where her students’ performances bring them into equally dangerous close proximity to history.

The politics of oral history performance are critical, intimate, and felt, what Madison calls a “politics of the near.” Madison began her work as a Fulbright scholar in Ghana teaching literature through performance. Her students’ performances spiraled outwards into what eventually became a public performance enacting contested perspectives on the Ghanaian “Trokosi” ritual of secluding young females in temple-shrines in reparation for crimes committed by male members of their families. The arguments that surround the Trokosi ritual draw on international human rights agenda, problems in global economics, and long-standing religious and cultural traditions. Far-reaching in its implications, the students’ work nonetheless began close to the bone of their own histories and commitments. The final performance, *Is it a Human Being or a Girl?*, grew out of the symbolic staging of literary texts that expanded concentrically to encompass urgent social issues. Moving betwixt-and-between literary texts, personal and interview narratives, local debates, and global critique, Madison found a legion of possibilities for political performance—and a politics of performed possibility:

The performer, beyond bringing movement and sound to words and flesh to feeling, opens literature to the possibility of the hidden. And, within this possibility, lies the potential for political *investment*. This political investment is of a very particular kind. It is a politics of the *near*. It is intimate and close because it circles from the boundaries of the text into our inner world. It moreover brings into focus the regulating factors governing our day-to-day lives and our personal destinies. It also puts our lives and destinies into question. Performance opens the secrets of literature because it invites embodied comparisons between undercurrents that constitute operations of power in the literary imagination and undercurrents that constitute operations of power in our lived experience. The read but unnamed and the lived but unnamed are present in the text and in life, but are often only tenuously or too partially realized. Performance promises engagement with what is otherwise hidden, oblique, or secret. This is a political enterprise.

The final performance left open the question of whether the Trokosi ritual is ultimately right or wrong. It circulated around a central gap: the unanswerable question, the single question leading to more questions, embodied in the figure of the ethnographer/recorder who repeatedly states: “I need to ask more questions.” The ethnographer’s presence heightens the reflexivity of the performance as itself an inquiry into “the read but unnamed and the lived but unnamed” politics of the ritual. In the process of excavating the “unnamed,” however, the convictions that have kept it buried become evident—and the performance becomes full of the evanescent beauty of contrary beliefs.

Laurie Lathem also struggled with the representational value of oral history performance. As a playwright teaching playwriting, Lathem confronted the ethical, political, and artistic difficulties of translating oral histories into compelling dramatic forms. While Fousekis makes the painful crossing from text to performance through scissors—and the sudden discoveries that could then be made through juxtaposition, Lathem encourages her playwrighting students to abandon their original interview narratives altogether in an effort, paradoxically, to respond to them more fully. Most of the students participating in Lathem’s Interview Project at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre had never before talked with an old person at any length. Expecting a lesson in crafting plays, they found themselves cast in the strange adventure of soliciting tales from people they’d previously pass by without a second look—and then, in the interview process, seeing them become something like celebrities before their very eyes. Lathem conveys the students’ excitement and enthusiasm, as well as their ready, resistant ethics (one student wonders: “who am I?” to mess with someone else’s story?). While she draws them into writing plays that rely on distinguishing between the interview subject and the “main character,” they struggle to remain faithful to their interviewees’ worlds and words. Eventually, Lathem notes, “somewhere between the interviews and the monologues we were now watching, the line between listening and creating had been crossed. Could anyone say where that line existed? . . . Before any writing had officially begun, the question had already been raised: whose stories were these?” The stories were and were not the students’ “own.” Nor were they, by any measure of textual fidelity, the interviewees’. The students’ final performances realized the gap between the interviewees’ stories and their own re-creations, to some extent dispossessing either student or interviewee of exclusive rights and creating something more than either might privately “own.” In the end, the students’ plays dramatized the incorporation of another’s perspective into each of their own and, in turn, the expansion of their own to reflect another’s.

For the interviewees who then became witnesses to their stories transformed through the listening/writing process, the final performances were acts of powerful confirmation of their respective histories, alive now in the memories and imaginations of a younger generation. Both the older and younger people reveled in recognition across generations. As Lathem notes, the community-building she sought began—and could have stopped—the moment the students walked into the senior

center. But as Lathem, and many of the other authors in this volume suggest, the politics of oral history performance are not unidirectional. Indeed, the most significant effects of this work may have occurred through the “doubling back” of the performance on the students whose worlds—and eyes—opened in ways beyond compare.²³

Similarly, it is unclear in Rouverol’s work who benefited most—the North Carolina Anson County prisoners who crafted their stories into the performance, “Leaves of Magnolia: The Brown Creek Life Review Project for Young People,” or the “at-risk” youths brought in to see and hear the performance. Rouverol describes in reflection, fieldnotes, excerpts from the script, and various responses to the performance, a performance process fraught with risk for all involved—for the inmates who risked power-sharing through narrative exchange, honesty and trust otherwise barred from the defensive rituals of their everyday lives, and moral inquiry into the consequences of their actions; for the interviewers/workshop leaders whose relatively weak authority made them vulnerable to challenge from the inmates and to the power of a penal system that would unpredictably require changes in the project (by preventing inmate-performers from participating and barring the initial, intended audience from attending); and for the young audience members who not only could see themselves mirrored in the inmates’ storied lives but who were also literally incorporated into the performance in an interactive section that put their bodies on the same line the inmates walked. Integrated into the performance rather than positioned as, for instance, a follow-up Q&A, this section allowed young audience members to perform questions of criminal consequence *with* the inmate-performers. In the heat of these few moments of exchange, their lives became/could become interchangeable with those of the incarcerated men. In “Leaves of Magnolia,” performance pushed risk and reflexivity to their respective limits, generating *real possibilities* for change.

Both Eisner and Case are oral historian/performers trying to convey, at least in part, what it means to perform oral history. Both write “towards” loss, understanding loss as a defining link between oral history and performance. When I saw Case perform “Tic(k)” —the short, one-person performance she presents here—at the Oral History Association conference in Durham, North Carolina in 2000, I looked around and also saw audience members stunned with sudden, welling tears. A sometimes playful, pointed collage that joins recollection of her grandfather’s death with that of three elderly male interviewees, “Tic(k)” not only brings to the surface the mortal stakes of oral history (catch them before they die, record those libraries before they burn) but deeper bans against not only mourning those who have died but *feeling* loss, *wanting* to mourn. In the fleeting passage of performance, Case underscores both the speed with which lives pass and the living intimacies of interview-performances generally “put away” with archival materials. These are not stored in file drawers, however, but in the bodies of interviewees who become, in the interview process, “like” granddaughters, sons and daughters, mothers, fathers, and friends who remember loss, whose work is testimony to those who have passed but

who are, in the end, often left with profound desire and pain. Performance is always about to disappear. It is its peculiarly magical “now you see it, now you don’t!” quality that draws us to it in the first place. But it is also its vital ephemerality that draws death close and, in this case, invites remembering not only lost lives but losing them.

Rivka Eisner and her interview-subject have worked together so intensively now that indeed they have become like sisters. A Vietnamese national living in the United States, “Chị Tôì” (or “big sister”) performs with Eisner a familial connection from which she had been effectively barred by the Vietnamese–American war: on the eve of her birth, her father left their home in the South to fight and eventually die in the North; her mother was forced underground and then eventually to the North, leaving her infant daughter behind. Chị Tôì’s story is a history of loss and separation; it is also a story of lost history—of a past that came to her in whispers, scraps, reported discourse, the remains of a charred diary, and a few family photographs. Her interview performances and Eisner’s subsequent re-performances may be immediate but they are not unmediated. In this case, “liveness” means articulating the multiple layers of translation and craft that make up (for) memory.

Eisner’s aesthetic becomes one of “doubling.” At its most basic level, performance is a repetition. It is a *doing again of what was once done*, repeating past action in the time of acting. Because the repetition occurs in time, it differs from the original to the extent that any one moment differs from another. Judith Butler has theorized the powerful, social-disciplinary constraints on the everyday performance of gender as “performativity.” But in the time of embodied performance, even the heteronormative compulsion to repeat the “corporeal style” of gendered identities can never be exact.²⁴ It is riddled with error and so, indeed, with cost. *Performativity* in the material act of *performance*, Elin Diamond argues, reveals performativity for what it is: the reiteration of gendered codes so practiced and rehearsed as to become, for all intents and purposes, invisible (Diamond, 5). Performing performativity makes the invisible—gender discourses and the disciplinary stratagems that secure their repetition—visible.²⁵ Eisner, among others, elaborates the twice-behavedness of performance, going beyond even repetition-with-a-difference toward the more radical stance of doing two, often disparate things at once, magnifying the differences performativity would quiet.

Eisner opens up the gap between the “original” and its repetitions, understanding each as differential repetitions that she stages simultaneously. Accordingly, each repetition differs not only from prior instantiations but from each other. Eisner and Chị Tôì’s worlds ricochet and rebound off of each other. Eisner doubles Chị Tôì’s story in her own words and original movement. She doubles Chị Tôì’s father’s story in Chị Tôì’s recorded translation and then again in her own syncopated echo. Eisner effectively doubles up the force of Chị Tôì’s story by putting her body behind it—corroborating it in the collaborative creation and presentation of a usable (if double also in the sense of torn in two) tale of a broken family in a broken nation.

Locked in narrative identification with Chì Tòi, Eisner doesn't pretend to "be" Chì Tòi in performance. She doesn't "double" her in the sense of providing a mirror image. On the contrary, she works the hinges of their relationship and in Chì Tòi's story, seeking a likeness that travels across and between bodies, histories, and cultures—breath to breath and bone to bone—without assimilating one to the other or, in Salverson's words, creating a "totalizing 'we.'" This is one version, as Eisner explains, of the work of the interviewer-performer as a witness. What finally distinguishes Eisner and Chì Tòi, and draws them even more closely together, is that while Chì Tòi performs as a witness to a war-torn history, Eisner performs as a witness to Chì Tòi's performance: she relays in stark movement, symbol, and a symphonic layering of her own voice with the many voices that make up Chì Tòi's, what it may mean to put flesh to ghosts.

Michael Gordon collaborated with the professional company Theatre X to develop what he explicitly calls a "labor play" based on the oral histories of members of the United Food and Commercial Workers Local P-40 who participated in the twenty-eight-month strike at the Patrick Cudahy meatpacking plant in Milwaukee in the late 1980s. Drawing on the long tradition of WPA theater projects and "newspaper theater," Gordon positions the play as a public forum for renewing and revising public knowledge. His specific aim is to stimulate "public discussion about such important issues as attacks on unions, plant closings, job loss, and declining living standards." Accordingly, the play, *The Line*, became a dramatic critique of the foreclosures of dominant ideology on local memory. Gordon's critical leverage importantly comes "from below," from the strikers' own sense of betrayal and broken faith. In the course of the interviews, the interviewees reflected on their class position and challenged the alleged benevolence of the free enterprise economy in which they and their families had invested lifetimes of labor and yet which, in the end, betrayed them. *The Line* is a counter-narrative. It contradicts prevailing cultural scripts in which workers exchange dedication for job security and just rewards and in which the Cudahy workers had initially, faithfully played their designated roles. Pressing an alternative against a dominant version of history, *The Line* indeed stimulated discussion of what went wrong and what should be righted. It also proceeded to right history, not only by elaborating the workers' points of view—often buried as they were under official representations—but by literally giving the workers the last, angry word.

Touchable Stories, the Boston-based community arts group Shannon Jackson explores, expands the terrain of oral history performance from the stage to the interactive spaces of installations and "living mazes" that focus on common ground issues of ethnic and class difference. Locating these installations in the heart of Boston communities in which interviewees may have spent as much as a year living and listening, *Touchable Stories* creates what Jackson calls "relational field[s]": spaces that manifest history in the interactions of community members around material artifacts/art objects that resemble as much as they diverge from the "real." Inviting the co-presence of community members, these events nonetheless expressly refuse to fetishize what

might otherwise be presumed to be the special authenticity of preserved objects, places, and voices. As Jackson explains, “the anonymous hands, disembodied voices, shadowed bodies, miniatures, dolls, scrimms, tapes, and videos” that make up *Touchable Stories*’ installations:

resist literacy and testify to the multiple technologies available to enable a moment of human connection. If this is “presence,” it is one that is explicitly aware of its own production and unafraid to present a sense of discontinuity in the act of remembering. Together, *TS*’s oral performances illustrate the indirect, roundabout work of tangible story-telling.

For Jackson, *Touchable Stories* positions speakers and listeners in environments that induce “infrastructural memory”: awareness of a shared material relation and the operations of difference in a specific context that may, through the “indirect, roundabout work of tangible story-telling,” help to form partial collectivities.

Working his or her way through the radical contextuality of *Touchable Stories*’ installations, the witness is the performer, acting in the most pedestrian ways to negotiate a corner, open secret drawers, wind up a toy, even trash or “write over” conventionally untouchable (in every sense of the word—for gazing only, sacrosanct) artworks. The tactility and motility of *Touchable Stories*’ work makes it, above all, an occasion for *poiesis*: for *making* memory, history, meaning and community in response. It is a dispersed interpretive context, spatializing the need beyond dialogic exchange for installations of other kinds, for installing new memories or re-remembering a past that once was or could have been, and now defines ways of being and acting in communal relation. *Touchable Stories* says history begins *here*. Touch its resonant forms. Recognize your place in its felicitous shadows and shapes. Tell it what to do *now*. And begin.

Notes

1. All the essays in this volume are original contributions (Gordon’s essay, “Memory and Performance in Staging *The Line*,” is a revision of an earlier publication). Other important published work on oral history performance includes the special issue of *The Oral History Review* (1990) dedicated to oral history-based performance (essays by Della Pollock, Shaun S. Nethercott and Neil O. Leighton, and Chris Howard Bailey, and Pam Schweitzer on “Reminiscence Theatre” in Britain). On how performance is being engaged in other fields, see also Dwight Rogers, Paul Frellick, and Leslie Babinski’s experimentation with performance in their efforts to improve the experiences of first-year teachers.
2. Other work that is more directive for practice and that has been critical to a variety of community-based projects includes Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* and *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, and Michael Rohd, *Theatre for Community, Conflict, and Dialogue*.

3. Following, directly and indirectly, Dwight Conquergood's 2002 mandate for performance as activist research.
4. See Phelan on her powerful insight into the afterlife of performances that disappear into the processes of "reckoning."
5. See Schrager's fundamental insight: "What the oral historian does is to provide a new context for the telling of mainly preexistent narrative" (78–79).
6. See the definitional framework Bauman offers in the title essay in *Verbal Art as Performance* as well his complementary perspective in *Story, Performance, and Event*.
7. Conquergood charts a course in performance studies from *mimesis* to *poiesis* to *kinesis*. He celebrates "the restless energies and subversive powers of kinesis," taking up de Certeau and Renato Rosaldo's respective efforts to put "culture into motion" (Conquergood, 1998, 31; quoting Rosaldo, 91).
8. See Cvetkovich's powerful discussion of interviewing lesbian participants in the AIDS activist group, ACT UP. Intrigued by the radical potential of oral history to "help create the public culture that turns what seems like idiosyncratic feeling into historical experience," Cvetkovich is also troubled by the methodological power of the interviewer/ author to reveal intimacies as well as, in some cases, to maintain silence (166).
9. See Madison "That Was My Occupation."
10. In his foreword to Barbara Myerhoff's *Number Our Days*, Victor Turner describes Myerhoff's sense of "our species as *Homo narrans*, humankind as story-teller, implying that culture in general—specific cultures, and the fabric of meaning that constitutes any single human existence—is the 'story' we tell about ourselves" (xv). Myerhoff claims "The tale certifies the fact of being and gives sense at the same time. Perhaps these are the same, because people everywhere have always needed to narrative their lives and worlds, as surely as they have needed food, love, sex, and safety" (271). Turner extends this understanding in later work, defining humankind as *Homo performans*: "If man is a sapient animal, a toolmaking animal, a self-making animal, a symbol-using animal, he is, no less, a performing animal, *Homo performans*, not in the sense, perhaps, that a circus animal may be a performing animal, but in the sense that man is a self-performing animal—his performances are, in a way, *reflexive*, in performing he reveals himself to himself" (*The Anthropology of Performance*, 81).
11. Answering to some extent Alcoff's landmark essay, "The Problem of Speaking for Others."
12. I want to note but cannot begin to encompass in this brief introduction the vast literature on witnessing and memory that grounds, extends, and challenges Oliver.
13. For complementary work on the performance of autobiography see e.g., Lynn C. Miller, Jacqueline Taylor, and M. Heather Carver, eds., *Voices Made Flesh: Performing Women's Autobiography*; the special issue of *Women and Performance* 10.19–20 (1999) devoted to performing autobiography, and e.g., Anne Davis Basting, "'God is a Talking Horse': Dementia and the Performance of Self"; Rena Fraden on Rhodessa Jones' powerful Medea Project; Jonathon Kalb, "Documentary Solo Performance: The Politics of the Mirrored Self"; Chris Anne Strickling, "Actual Lives: Cripples in the House," and Rosemarie Garland Thomson, "Staring Back: Self-Representation of Disabled Performance Artists."
14. See e.g., Susan C. Haedicke and Tobin Nellhaus, eds., *Performing Democracy: International Perspectives on Urban Community-Based Performance*; Eugene van Erven, *Community Theatre: Global Perspectives*; and e.g., Linda Frye Burnham, "Reaching for

- the Valley of the Sun: The American Festival Projects *Untold Stories*"; Sonja Kuflinec, "[Walking Through A] Ghost Town"; and Diana Taylor, "'You are Here': The DNA of Performance."
15. See Schragar.
 16. See Bal, Crew, and Spitzer, eds., *Acts of Memory*. This perspective is certainly influenced by the Bakhtinian "revolution" in thinking about voice as dialogically composed at the intersection of any number of often conflicting discursive contexts.
 17. For important critique of Smith's work, see Kondo; for helpful elaboration, see Denzin, 89–105.
 18. See also Salverson 1996, 2000.
 19. Note the grassroots history of such work in companies like Tale Spinners in San Francisco (thanks to Mercilee Jenkins for this reference) and the Roadside Theatre out of Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky. Note also the recent success of *The Exonerated*, by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen, at The Culture Project in New York. The play, based on interviews with sixty people who had spent from two to twenty-two years on death row before being exonerated for crimes they did not commit, featured a rotating cast of celebrity actors in "readers' theatre" style. Studs Terkel's work has, of course, often been called into voice and production, perhaps most notably in Derek Goldman's adaptation of Terkel's *Will The Circle Be Unbroken?: Reflections on Death, Rebirth, and a Hunger for a Faith* at the Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago, 2004.
 20. Correlating to Richard Schechner's infamous assertion, following on Victor Turner's sense of the "subjunctive" nature of ritual, that "sometimes—especially in the theater—it is necessary to live as if 'as if' 'is'" (Schechner, xiii).
 21. For a complementary perspective, see Madison on "Performance, Personal Narratives, and the Politics of Possibility."
 22. As an interesting corollary, see Tim Raphael's alternative pedagogy for pursuing issues in the history of white supremacy. Based in part on Hayden White's sense of the analogous relation between writing history and writing a play, Raphael explains: "By underscoring the similarities of the tools and techniques employed by historians and writers of theatrical 'fiction,' students would, I hoped, begin to develop a critical stance toward the implied inevitability of the historical narratives they encountered. By situating historical writings within a field of multiple narrative possibilities, I hoped to stimulate students to imagine their writing as an installment in an ongoing dialogue out of which historical 'truth' emerges as a contingent product of a contestational process waged between competing discourses" (127–128).
 23. For a complementary/alternative pedagogy, see Armstrong, 2000.
 24. See Butler 1991 and 1993.
 25. On "doubling," see also Pollock (1999), particularly ch. 4, "Secrets/Doubles."

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Anna Deavere Smith

The Word Becomes You

an interview by Carol Martin

Anna Deavere Smith's *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights Brooklyn and Other Identities* is a series of portraits of people enmeshed in the Crown Heights riots where Jews and blacks were so violently pitted against one another, in Brooklyn, August 1991. The riots were provoked when Gavin Cato, a black child, was hit and killed by a Lubavitch rebbe's motorcade. By the end of that day Yankel Rosenbaum, a young Jewish scholar from Australia, was murdered in retaliation. The piece was first performed at the Public Theatre in the late spring and summer of 1992, with Christopher Ashley as director. *Fires in the Mirror* was then mediated for television broadcast by PBS's "American Playhouse," directed by George C. Wolfe. The TV adaptation first aired in April 1993.

In the stage version Smith performed barefoot in a white shirt and black pants. Sitting in an armchair, or at a desk, donning a yarmulke, or a cap of African Kente cloth, or a spangled sweater, Smith brought her 29 subjects to the stage to speak *their own* lines. That there were unresolvable contradictions in the multiple versions of truth Smith portrayed did not diminish the conviction of each character that what they said was true.

Smith's apparently hypernaturalistic mimesis—in which she replicates not only the words of different individuals but their bodily style as well—is deceiving. Derived from a method more documentary than "artistic" in the usual sense, Smith's performance can easily be understood as a feat of technical virtuosity. Brilliantly portrayed characters, however, are not enough to generate the enormous critical success of a work about a very turbulent set of events. The authority of one group over another, of one individual over others, is undermined by the presence of Smith as the person through whom so many voices travel. Smith gives these people the chance to speak as if to each other—in much the same way a "spirit doctor" brings ancestors or other spirits in contact with the living—in the presence of the community of the audience. It is this fictional and yet actual convergence of presences that gives Smith's work its power. Angela Davis, Nzotake Shange, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Rabbi Shea Hecht, Reverend Al Sharpton, and others, known and unknown, speak together. They speak together across race, history, theory, and differences in their own words through

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Smith's conjuring performative language. Their "presence" and words mark the absence and silence of the two people around whom the drama revolves, Gavin Cato and Yankel Rosenbaum.

Fires in the Mirror is part of a series of performances titled *On the Road: A Search for American Character*. Smith began working on this series in 1979 by walking up to people on the street and saying "I know an actor who looks like you. If you'll give me an hour of your time, I'll invite you to see yourself performed" (1992:18). Early in her work Smith's focus shifted from individuals to groups of individuals at gatherings, conferences, or as members of a community. Some of the work has been commissioned and performed for specific conferences, while other pieces were developed for theatre audiences. Often the title of the work reveals the theme: *Building Bridges Not Walls* (1985); *Gender Bending: On the Road Princeton University* (1989); *On Black Identity and Black Theatre* (1990); *From the Outside Looking In* (1990). Smith's desire is to "capture the personality of a place by attempting to embody its varied population and varied points of view in one person—myself" (Smith 1992:18).

I spoke with Smith in August 1992 after seeing *Fires in the Mirror* at the Public Theatre.

MARTIN: How did you become interested in Crown Heights?

SMITH: George Wolfe had asked me to participate in a festival of performance artists called "New Voices of Color" last December [1991 at the Public Theatre]. The thought of coming to New York and doing *On the Road* was pretty overwhelming.

Then, on August 19th Crown Heights happened. I put it in the back of my mind. When I went to the Bunting Institute at Harvard in September I still didn't know if the festival was going to happen. It wasn't until the day Anita Hill began to testify that I got a call from the theatre formally inviting me to the festival. I didn't have a commission so there was no money to build anything big. I thought I would do a show that I'd already done before and just put a couple of things about New York in it. I asked the Public Theatre for four days in a hotel and a round-trip air ticket. In those four days I had to get everything. I only performed it twice but it went very well so they decided to think of it for a run.

What was personally compelling about Crown Heights was that it was a community with very graphic differences. Everyone wears their beliefs on their bodies—their costumes. You can't pass. Crown Heights is no melting pot and I really respect that.

MARTIN: You were already dealing with issues of race, identity, and difference.

SMITH: Yes.

MARTIN: So Crown Heights was really a graphic way for you to...

SMITH: Explore.

MARTIN: How did you make your contacts?

SMITH: I usually get a few contacts from the newspaper and then try to make my way into any institution, to somebody in authority. In this case, I went to various people in the mayor's office and asked them for ideas for people to interview. People lead to more people. Eventually, I know very specifically what kind of person I want to meet so I know what kind of person to try to find.

On the Road Series

Anna Deavere Smith

- 1982 *On the Road, New York City*
A Clear Space, New York, NY.
- 1983 *A Birthday Party* and *Aunt Julia's Shoes* (original poems
and *On the Road* material)
Ward Nasse Gallery, New York, NY.
- 1984 *Charlayne Hunter Gault*
Ward Nasse Gallery, New York, NY.
- 1985 *Building Bridges Not Walls*
National Conference of Women and the Law, New
York, NY.
- 1986 *On the Road: ACT*
Summer Training Congress, American Conservatory
Theatre, San Francisco, CA.
- 1988 *Voices of Bay Area Women*
Phoenix Theatre, San Francisco, CA.
- 1988 *Chlorophyll Post-Modernism and the Mother Goddess: A
Convers/Ation*
Hahn Cosmopolitan Theatre, San Diego, CA.
- 1989 *Gender Bending: On the Road Princeton University*
Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.
- 1990 *Gender Bending: On the Road University of Pennsylvania*
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.
- 1990 *On Black Identity and Black Theatre*
Crossroads Theatre Company, New Brunswick, NJ.
- 1990 *From the Outside Looking In*
Eureka Theatre, San Francisco, CA.
- 1991 *Fragments*
Conference on Intercultural Performance, Bellagio,
Italy.
- 1991 *Identities Mirrors and Distortions I*
Calistoga Arts Festival, Calistoga, CA.
- 1991 *Identities Mirrors and Distortions II*
Bay Area Playwrights Festival, San Francisco, CA.
- 1991 *Identities Mirrors and Distortions III*
Global Communities Conference, Stanford Univer-
sity, Stanford, CA.
- 1991 *Identities Mirrors and Distortions IV*
Festival of New Voices, Joseph Papp Public Theatre,
New York, NY.
- 1992 *Dream* (a workshop)
Crossroads Theatre Company, New Brunswick, NJ.
- 1992 *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights Brooklyn and Other
Identities*
Joseph Papp Public Theatre, New York, NY.
- 1993 *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*
Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles, CA.

MARTIN: Did people in the community get to know your presence?

SMITH: I wasn't there long enough. I did all the interviews in about eight days.

MARTIN: The two anonymous young black men were very interesting and very important. How did you find them?

SMITH: That was lucky. There were few women in the piece. In the "Crown Heights" section there was only one. One of my goals when I came back to New York in the spring was to do a few more interviews with women. I found one young woman who was a friend of Henry Rice. I went to interview her. She runs—it's so sad—a center in the Ebbets Field apartment houses, but it's just an empty dark room with a few chairs. A radio was playing in the background. It's no place for her [Kim] to be making activities.

I went to interview Kim around eight o'clock at night and two boys were just sitting there. They inched their way into the interview. I didn't invite them in. They just, you know, invited themselves. The second one, the "bad boy," really did not even come into the group. The one who talked about justice was "Anonymous #1." He came right into Kim's interview and sat down with his friend. His friend said nothing the entire time but the "bad boy" [Anonymous #2] just lurked in the dark corner watching. When we discussed Limerick Nelson, the 16-year-old accused of killing Yankel Rosenbaum, the "bad boy" started talking. None of these kids believe that Limerick did it. They told me they know who it is but they won't tell. So then he [the "bad boy"] spoke up. I loved what he said and I just loved how he talked.

MARTIN: There is a sense in the performance that when you interview blacks they acknowledge you as a member of their community. There's no sense, however, when you're interviewing the Jews that they looked at you as a member of the black community.

SMITH: Could you tell me little bit more?

MARTIN: There is the use of pronouns like "us" and "we." There is the guy in the restaurant scene who comments about rape of black women and people ending up like you [light-skinned]. There's a sense of inclusion.

SMITH: I actually tried to heighten the sense of inclusion for everybody by using the pronouns "us" and "we" in relation to everybody. I address the text like a poem. I work on "us" and "we" whenever anybody, regardless of race, says them. I don't want to confront the audience or make them feel that it's you and me. My experience of the interviews I included was that there was an "us" before I left. People's will to communicate came forward even with Roz, the Jewish woman at the end. She acknowledges me. She says, "I wish you could have been here. I would have showed you the *New York Times*."

It's a fact the Muslim [Conrad Mohammed] calls me "sister." I think everybody else calls me by name.

MARTIN: You are easily included when you're speaking to the members of the black community in Crown Heights. At the same time, there's also an openness in the interviews with the Lubavitchers.

SMITH: I think that has to do with how the Lubavitchers are. It doesn't have to do with me or with any stranger. Obviously, there are clear lines. But they are taught, as I understand it, that the expression of feelings is su-



1. Smith portrays Conrad Mohammed as he tells of the horrors of the African Middle Passage and slavery. The interview highlights Smith's connection with the Muslim as a "sister." From *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights Brooklyn and Other Identities*, performed at the Joseph Papp Public Theatre, New York, in 1992. (Photo by William Gibson/Martha Swope Studios)

perior in some ways to the intellect. It doesn't have to do with me. It has to do with the fact that the Lubavitchers will come forward with what they feel. That's how they are with each other. They forget that not everybody is like that.

My experience in academia is the antithesis. I've realized people in academic circles aren't really talking to me. They're trying to figure out if I'm smart or not. I'm not so stupid that I don't know I'm being sized up. It's so sad!

MARTIN: You're involved with feminism. How does feminism shape your work? How does feminism really inform the end product?

SMITH: I don't know because I don't understand the intellectual part of feminism. Feminism... this is tricky... I hope you don't mind if I have to think here.

MARTIN: I could tell you some of my reactions. One of the things about *Fires in the Mirror* that most moved me was the lack of closure. You didn't attempt to resolve the complications and contradictions of these conversa-

2. In the latest segment of her *On the Road* series, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, Smith interviewed nearly 200 people, including Katie Miller, a bookkeeper and accountant (performed here). The premiere performance was at the Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles, in May 1993. (Photo by Jay Thompson)

tions. There was a continual presentation of diverse people with all their faults and insights. You didn't shy away from some of the qualities of Al Sharpton, for example. The same is true of the characteristics of some of the Jews. At certain moments your portrayal was close enough to caricature to make spectators uncomfortable—close to but not really caricature.

In displaying ethnicity in a slightly magnified way you underscored the humanity of the people you interviewed. Instead of trying to make a cohesive picture, you revealed different landscapes of emotions and histories. I connect this approach to feminist ideas about open-ended narratives, about the refusal of ultimate authority—even though there's an authority operating.

SMITH: I think you're right. But the honest truth would be that I've always been like this. Since I was a girl my creative life has been about trying to find a way of being me in my work. I felt very oppressed by the formal structures of theatre, the first one being the role of an acting teacher in a classroom. When I became the acting teacher, there was this expectation that I was going to be this authority who resolved everything and came up with the answers.

The through-line always made me feel bad in teaching, reading, and trying to write plays. It was something inherently I, Anna, was trying to ex-



press. Period. If anything opened me intellectually it was when I was trying to write about acting in order to find out why I had trouble with the Stanislavsky technique. I came across a graph of the objectives of the Stanislavsky technique. Super objective. Little objective. It was straight lines with arrows. Quite soon after that I was reading a book about African philosophical systems and saw a picture of a wheel that had all these little spokes with arrows pointing towards the center. I knew then that I wanted to try to find a way of thinking or a structure that was more like that.

As you know, the black church is not only about speaking to one God. The whole thing is supposed to be an occasion to evoke a spirit. This was one of the things that lead me to thinking in more circular ways and resisting the through-line.

MARTIN: You don't really understand feminism?

SMITH: It's not that I don't understand feminism. I try to understand things but I'm also an empathetic and intuitive person.

Why don't you offer some words and I'll see if I feel like they fit. I understand that feminism is... is about us, finding our place and finding our language.

MARTIN: Yes, but it's also given women a means to read texts, life, power relations, and interactions. Feminism is implicated in ways of seeing, believing, and feeling as well as intellectual life. Intellectual life is divorced from other senses. The lack of closure in *Fires in the Mirror* worked so well because it kept expanding the complexities of the communities and giving us an opportunity to acknowledge that truth, in both the divine and mundane sense, is difficult to discern. Acknowledging this difficulty is a humbling experience that also contains the possibility of acknowledging difference.

Your performing style, not the obvious—that you play both men and women—but the way that you present and characterize people through language and at the same time remain present as Anna also seems informed by feminist ideas. You're not invisible nor do you step aside in a Brechtian way and comment on those you are presenting. You're visible and yet so are all those other people. This palimpsest creates a density and authority in individual characters and, at the same time, calls into question the absoluteness of our differences.

Sometimes we see you obliquely when someone refers to the process of being interviewed. You've formed this difficult material in a very emotional and human way. It must take some struggle, to get to that place, to make those decisions.

SMITH: My grandfather told me that if you say a word often enough, it becomes you. I was very interested before I developed this project in how manipulating words has a spiritual power.

I can learn to know who somebody is, not from what they tell me, but from *how* they tell me. This will make an impression on my body and eventually on my psyche. Not that I would understand it but I would feel it. My goal would be to—these kinds of words are funny and probably, in print they sound even worse—become possessed, so to speak, of the person. I don't set out to do anything as intellectual as what you're talking about.

MARTIN: My observations are from the outside.

SMITH: I know that this is there. I've emphasized to my students that acting is becoming the other. To acknowledge the other, you have to acknowledge yourself.

It's not psychological realism. I don't want to own the character and endow the character with my own experience. It's the opposite of that. What has to exist in order to try to allow the other to be is separation between the actor's self and the other.

What I'm ultimately interested in is the struggle. The struggle that the speaker has when he or she speaks to me, the struggle that he or she has to sift through language to come through. Somewhere I'm probably also leaving myself room as a performer to struggle and come through. Richard Schechner talks about this much better than I when he talks about "not me" and "not not me."

MARTIN: Yes, but in the case of *Fires in the Mirror* we know several of the people from the media. There is the media image of people like the Lubavitchers and Al Sharpton. Familiar representatives of different communities are brought onstage through you and this is somehow less fictional than documentary footage or journalistic accounts of the same people.

How did you decide to give Carmel Cato the last word? I thought it was right and emotionally difficult at the end of the piece.

SMITH: In December, he did not have the last word. The Crown Heights section ended with him, but I had more stuff. JoAnne [Akalaitis] said "When the father speaks the show is over."

When I left that interview, I knew that I'd met a remarkable man. I have never heard anybody journey in a language across so many realms of experience. From the facts of a personal experience, to his own belief system and his own sensitivity—his power—to the circumstances of his birth. When I first developed *On the Road*, and was learning how to do this, I would ask people for an hour interview and I would talk to them. I'd tell them we could talk about anything. I was looking specifically, not for what they said but for these places where they would struggle with language and come through. I talked to a linguist about it and she gave me three questions I could ask that would guarantee this would happen.

MARTIN: What were the questions?

SMITH: One of them was: What were the circumstances of your birth? So I end this show with how I began my own exploration. He [Carmel Cato] answers that question. I didn't ask him. I didn't ask him.

MARTIN: You didn't ask him!

SMITH: No! He just said it. I interviewed him on the street at night. We were standing on the street and this man was talking about knowing his kid was going to die before he dies. Then he says he's a man, a special person. I thought he was going to say, "I'm a man, a black man." But he said "I was born with my foot" [feet first]. The very beginning of my project was that question so, in a way, for me, it would have to be the end.

MARTIN: You've spoken about integration being a nostalgic idea. Where are we now? There's no operative paradigm—not multicultural or intercultural. What do you think about us now?

SMITH: I'm very excited because I think we're going to find something better. I think a lot of people feel very betrayed by integration because it didn't work.

MARTIN: Did people really try it?

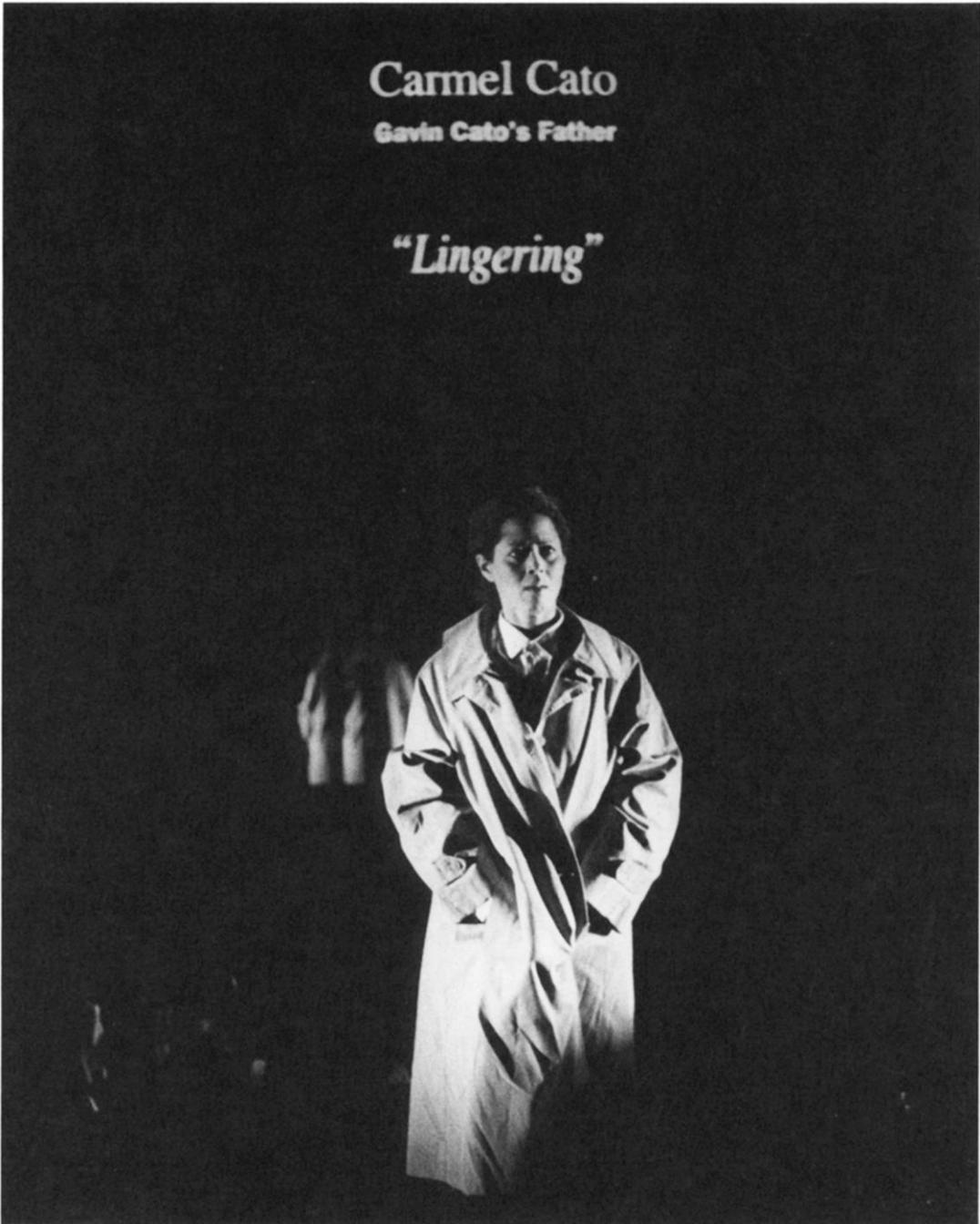
SMITH: Some people gave their lives, some people died for it. Died. I

3. Upon the advice of JoAnne Akalaitis, Smith chose to end *Fires in the Mirror* with the powerful monolog of Carmel Cato, the father of the accident victim Gavin Cato. This performance was at the Joseph Papp Public Theatre, New York, in 1992. (Photo by William Gibson/Martha Swope Studios)

Carmel Cato

Gavin Cato's Father

"Lingering"



would never say that people didn't try. It's only going to be a few people who are willing to sacrifice their lives for the experiment.

There are people who are willing to change the course of their lives for the experiment. At Bellagio [a 1991 conference on intercultural performance¹] there was this language about negotiating boundaries and difference that I hadn't heard before. I've been wondering how to find the tools for thinking about difference as a very active negotiation rather than an im-

4. *The Los Angeles segment of Smith's On the Road series furthers her work in dramatizing the conflicts of community resisting the popular myth of an American melting pot. The character of Sgt. Charles Duke, Los Angeles Police Department, from Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 at the Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles, May 1993. (Photo by Jay Thompson)*



age of all of us holding hands. There are too many contradictions, problems, and lies in American society about the melting pot. You're invited to jump into the hot stew but you're not wanted. That's the case for black people, even with seemingly well-meaning, well-minded people who would benefit from my presence and the presence of others like me. We're not wanted.

It's going to be hard.

Motion is what I'm interested in right now. People who talk about motion, who use the word move. In my show I've become interested in which characters can move in the space and which ones can't.

Angela [Davis] walks. Richard Green walks. Sharpton moves his chair. Whatever we think about Sharpton's limitations, he's in motion.

You know, we normally think of passing as something that you do. You pass up, right? If you're a light-skinned black, you pass up. You never pass down. Guillermo Gómez-Peña talks about passing as going back and forth between borders. This is very exciting to me. It brings back images of the underground railroad...

MARTIN: Seems impossible. I taught public speaking at City College [City University of New York] at 138th Street for a year. My experience there was very different. Just taking the subway was a demonstration of inequities. The white and Asian students got off at Columbia, the rest of us got off two stops later and walked through a park of drug dealers. In that situation, I was a minority among minorities [a white person among mostly black and Hispanic students] in a very heated atmosphere. It was during the time of the clash between Leonard Jeffries and Michael Levin.² I had to bridge the gap being a white woman speaking to a class of 25 mostly black and Hispanic men.

SMITH: Oh my God!

MARTIN: I could never pass in any sense of the word. I had to be who I was or they would surely feel I was disingenuous. I had to allow them to see my vulnerability. The class was a public speaking class and one of the required speeches was a commemorative speech. Many of these young men used this as an opportunity to talk about their lives and the people who inspired them and helped them survive—mothers, uncles, clergy. A few even cried during their speeches. There was always this silence after each of them spoke. I knew they were witnessing one another in ways they never had before. Many of them found a way to talk about the reality of their lives to one another and to me. They were able to be supportive *and* critical of one another's work. The dynamic was about each of us being who we were, not about passing. I was teaching them about how to use language to present themselves—a calculated performance of self that would help them gain entry. Ultimately, I wasn't wanted. The Speech Department wanted me and so did my students but there was a feeling on campus that only black and Hispanic professors belonged there. Anyway...

SMITH: In terms of passing up and passing down, it's probably harder for a white person to pass in, if we think of the social structure as black on the bottom and white on the top. There's less structure for you to pass than for those black males. For them there is a structure. They could go to jail on the way but there is a structure. It may be corrupt but there are steps for going up. Very few and mysterious steps but they are there.

It's just like in speech. It's easier to make a rising inflection and it's much harder to do a downward build because you have to work with gravity a different way.

MARTIN: What we are talking about is a concern with language and what language reveals and...

SMITH: That was the birth of the project ten years ago.

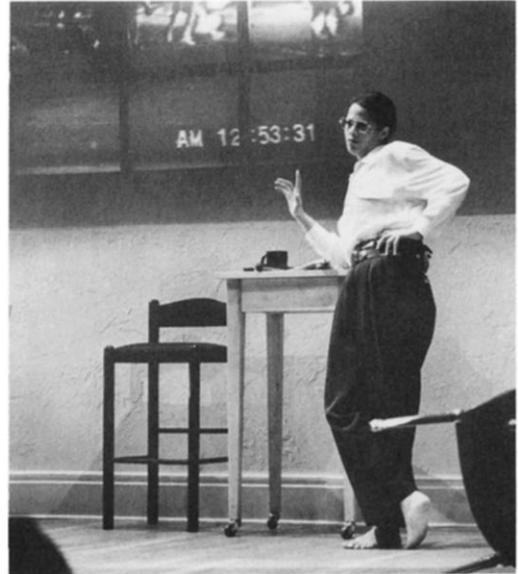
MARTIN: Language?

SMITH: My major fascination in the world.

MARTIN: You do quote Shakespeare a lot.

SMITH: If it hadn't been for Shakespeare, I wouldn't be where I am because it was my Shakespeare teacher who got to me. In the first class we had to take any 14 lines of Shakespeare and say it over and over again to see what happened. So I picked, of all things, Queen Margaret in *Richard III*:

From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept
A hellhound that doth hunt us all to death.
That dog that had his teeth before his eyes



5 & 6. *The Rodney King story as told by two divergent people and embodied by Smith: Angela King, aunt of Rodney King (left) and Judith Tur, ground reporter for the Los Angeles News Service. From the Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles, May 1993 production of Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992. (Photos by Jay Thompson)*

To worry lambs and lap their gentle blood,
That foul defacer of God's handiwork,
That excellent grand tyrant of the earth
That reigns in galled eyes of weeping souls,
Thy womb let loose to chase us to our graves
(*Richard III* 4.4.47-54)

Right? I knew nothing; it was my first acting class ever and I had a some kind of a transcendental experience. I was terrified, I was mystified. For the next three years, as I trained seriously, I never had an experience like that again. Ever. I kept wanting to have it so I kept exploring what language was.

I remembered what my grandfather told me because it's one of those experiences that is so peculiar you have try to explain it to somebody. What happened to me? Was I crazy? What was it? It sounds really interesting but nobody can name it, so it's your quest.

MARTIN: No more psychological realism?

SMITH: The opposite. Psychological realism is about—this is a real oversimplification of Stanislavsky—saying: Here's Leonard Jeffries. You have to play Leonard Jeffries now. Let's look at Leonard. Let's look at his circumstances. Let's look at your circumstances. How are you two alike? How can you draw from your own experience? Contrary to that, I say this is what Leonard Jeffries said. Don't even write it down. Put on your headphones, repeat what he said. That's all. That's it.

MARTIN: And what happens as you repeat what he said?

SMITH: When dealing with somebody as powerful as Leonard Jeffries with such a fascination with details, I almost didn't have to memorize him. He made a psychic impression, it just went, FOOM! You and I could talk at

great length or go into a studio and work on Leonard Jeffries. We'd have a good time figuring out his psychological realities, we'd get a blast, right?

MARTIN: Maybe.

SMITH: That's not the point. The point is simply to repeat it until I begin to feel it and what I begin to feel is his song and that helps me remember more about his body. For example, I remembered he sat up but it wasn't until well into rehearsal that my body began to remember, not me, my body began to remember. He had a way of lifting his soft palate or something. I can't see it because it's happening inside. But the way it played itself out in early performances is that I would yawn, you know, 'cause he yawned at a sort of inappropriate moment [yawns]. I've realized now what is going on. My body begins to do the things that he probably must do inside while he's speaking. I begin to feel that I'm becoming more like him.

MARTIN: What you're saying in *Fires in the Mirror* is that differences between people are very complicated and maybe unresolvable as well as interesting and wonderful. When you perform, however, you give over to each person in a very deep way and become them.

SMITH: In spite of myself. Many of the characters have chiselled away at the gate that's between them and Anna. That's the part that's very fascinating, challenging, difficult, painful. Psychological technique is built on metaphors for a reason. I believe it's quite organic. You listen to some of the characters and you begin to identify with them. Because I'm saying the stuff over and over again every night, part of me is becoming them through repetition—by doing the performance of themselves that they do.

I become the "them" that they present to the world. For all of us, the performance of ourselves has very much to do with the self of ourselves. That's what we're articulating in language and in flesh—something we feel inside as we develop an identity.

These words are knocking at my door and they're saying, "parts of Anna, come out."

MARTIN: Where is the spectator in all this?

SMITH: I don't know. I'm just talking about my process. I hope that the words are knocking at their door too.

MARTIN: How much did you edit the interviews? You may have an hour of material but you obviously can't give each person an hour of time.

SMITH: I try to find a section that I don't have to interrupt. The performance is much more difficult if I've created chaos in their frame of thought. I'd rather have a section in which their psychological through-line is reflected in language. Everybody does it. I just wait. I think the longest section is seven minutes.

MARTIN: What were the other two questions that the linguist advised you to ask?

SMITH: Have you ever come close to death? and, Have you ever been accused of something that you didn't do?

MARTIN: Did you use those in any interview?

SMITH: That was way back when I was inventing this in the early '80s. Now I'm working with events. I'm just trying to get the story.

7. An Anonymous Hollywood Talent Agent admits that “maybe—not maybe but, uh—the system plays unequally” to Smith, and she emphasizes his confusion during her performance of *Twilight*: Los Angeles, 1992 at the Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles, May 1993. (Photo by Jay Thompson)



MARTIN: The deaths of Gavin Cato and Yankel Rosenbaum created an event but in a certain sense they're not the subject of your piece.

SMITH: That's the real reason I ended with Mr. Cato. Around Thanksgiving I read an article in the *Voice* called "Toilet Diplomacy." It was all about the big figures in the [Crown Heights] story. I didn't know why I was so sad and over a series of days; I realized I was so sad because the more I read, the more Gavin Cato's name was disappearing.

Only the first rabbi in my show refers to Angela Cato [Gavin's sister, who was also struck by the car]. That the father's first line is, "In the meanwhile"—in the meanwhile, 90 minutes ago, we started talking. In the meanwhile, Angela was on the ground and she was trying to move. This little girl was in a body cast for months. The neighbors were still concerned about Gavin. I thought it would be powerful to have the audience forget about Gavin. I'm sure many people leave the theatre and still don't know anything about Angela. She's only mentioned twice.

There's a way in which the larger powers obliterate the smaller powers even when those smaller powers are the very reason for our gathering. It's like parents giving their kid a birthday party and getting drunk.

MARTIN: Is there such a thing as an American character, as the subtitle of *On the Road* suggests?

SMITH: I'm looking for it. I think different people are shaping it. I suppose what I should do is try to collaborate with David Hammonds, [an installation artist] or somebody like that.

MARTIN: In the U.S. there was the myth of the American character formed on the frontier. This myth was destroyed by industrialization, massive immigration at the beginning of this century, and the resulting urbanization. Now the question seems to be what experience constitutes being an American?

Are we specialists in diversity? When one goes to Europe it's apparent that there's very little conversation or language about diversity, about difference—even where there needs to be.

SMITH: We could be specialists. That's what's exciting. We could become specialists if we could get up off of our hate and our elitism. Some of the people who have the best equipment for helping to do this are such snobs and the system makes people who have the ability into snobs.

I know from interviewing people who are experts that they have a lot of armor. I guess they have to get it to survive. Some of the people who have a real facility for language get very snobby about the very language they own. To talk about passing again—I think we need to pass language back and forth across borders.

There is great resistance to including less articulated ideas. All this does is force words on us that have nothing to do with our experience. I know I don't have the language to argue with the people who have the key and have the privilege.

MARTIN: Having the language is one thing. Having the presence of mind or the ability to keep one's emotional nerve is also necessary. One has to be able to say, "Hey, wait a second, this is not quite right or what it should be."

SMITH: This is why the "bad boy" is so fascinating. When he talked to me I knew he did not have very many words. I knew he wasn't telling the complete truth because he knows, he thinks he knows, who killed Yankel Rosenbaum. He performed for me, looked me straight in the eye with very kind eyes—talking to me as though I were stupid. Not like condescending stupid, not like that. More like "this sister doesn't understand so I'm going to help the sister get it." He wasn't arrogant but more like the kindest person talking to Sophia [Martin's five-year-old daughter]. I loved that. I am the sister who don't get it and he was nice enough to tell me the way it is. With his repetition of words he sang it to me. That's what's compelling.

MARTIN: What about his final line: "That's between me and my creator."

SMITH: He's saying: "I have to have my dignity. I know who did it and I'm not telling you." He doesn't appropriate his own culture.

Notes

1. Under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation, Richard Schechner, working with a steering committee that included Peggy Phelan, Jean Franco, Folabo Ajayi, Judith Mitoma, and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, convened a conference on "intercul-

Anonymous Boy #2

from Anna Deavere Smith's *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights Brooklyn and Other Identities*

BAD BOY

(The same recreation room as Anonymous Boy #1. He is wearing a black jacket over his clothes. He has a gold tooth. He has some dreadlocks, and a very odd shaped multicolored hat. He is soft spoken, and has a direct gaze. He seems to be very patient with his explanation.)

That sixteen year old
didn't murder that Jew
For one thing
He played baseball
Right?
He was a athalete
Right?
A bad boy
does
bad things
is
does bad things
only a bad boy could stabbed a man
somebody who
does those type a things
A atha lete
sees people
is interested in
stretchin
exercisin
goin to his football games
or his baseball games
He's not interested
in stabbin
people
so
it's not on his mind
to stab
to just jump into somethin
that he has no idea about
and kill a man
Somebody who's groomed in badness
or did badness before
stabbed the man
Because I used to be a atha lete
and I used to be a bad boy
and when I was a atha lete
I was a atha lete
all I thought about was atha lete
I'm not gonna jeoparsize my athleticism
or my career to do the things
that bad people do
And when I became a bad boy
I'm not a atha lete no more

I'm a bad boy
and I'm groomin myself in things that is bad
you understand so
He's a athalete
he's not a bad boy
It's a big difference
Like
mostly the black youth in Crown Heights have two things to do
either DJ or a bad boy right
You either
DJ be a MC
rapper
or Jamaican rapper
ragamuffin
or you be a bad boy
you sell drugs and rob people
What do you do
I sell drugs
what do you do I rap
That's how it is in Crown Heights
I been living in Crown Heights most a my life
I know for a fact that that youth
didn't kill that that that Jew
that's between me and my creator

8. "With his repetition of words he sang it to me." *The Anonymous Boy #2* tells Smith his own truths, and she repeats his insights in her performance of *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights Brooklyn and Other Identities at the Joseph Papp Public Theatre, New York, 1992.* (Photo by William Gibson/Martha Swope Studios)



tural performance" that met at the Bellagio Conference Center from 17 to 22 February 1991—at the height of the Gulf War. Participants in the conference included Eugenio Barba, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Sanjukta Panigrahi, Trinh T. Minh-ha, William Sun, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Michael Taussig, Yamaguchi Masao, Drew Taylor, and Smith.

2. A heated black/white, Jewish/black conflict roiled New York's City University in the early 1990s. Professor Leonard Jeffries made a public speech disparaging Jews and accusing Jews of controlling and manipulating the media; Professor Michael Levin voiced the opinion that blacks were not mentally the equal of whites. After a particularly inflammatory speech in Albany (July 1991), Jeffries was replaced as chair of the Black Studies Department. He sued, claiming his First Amendment rights were denied him. In May 1993, he won his case in federal court.

Reference

Smith, Anna Deavere

1992 *Playbill* 92 (no. 7):18. Program for *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights Brooklyn and Other Identities*.

Carol Martin is the author of *Dance Marathons: Performing American Culture of the 1920s and 1930s*. (forthcoming, *The University of Mississippi Press*) and the editor of *A Source Book on Feminist Theatre* (forthcoming, *Routledge*). *Martin* is an Assistant Professor in *The Department of Drama, Tisch School of the Arts/NYU*, and a book review co-editor for *TDR*.

Health Theatre in a Hmong Refugee Camp

Performance, Communication, and Culture

A Hmong widow walks to a crossroad in Camp Ban Vinai, surveys the scene, and then settles herself on a bench outside the corner hut. Bracing her back against the split-bamboo wall, she begins to sing. At first softly, as if to herself, she sings a Hmong *khy txhiaj* (folksong). Aware of a gathering audience, she raises her voice to fill the space around her. She sings a lamentation, carving her personal anguish into a traditional expressive form. With exquisitely timed gestures, she strips and peels with one hand the branch of firewood she holds in the other. Tears stream down her face as she sings about the loss of her husband, her children, her house, her farm, her animals, and her country. She sings of war, and flight, and breaking, and of a time when she was a wife and mother in the Laotian village where silver neck-rings were worn. She punctuates each refrain by tossing away a sliver that her strong fingers have torn from the wood she holds across her lap as if it were a child.

The sad beauty of her singing attracts a crowd. She never makes eye contact but acknowledges the crowd's presence in her spontaneously composed verses, subtly at first, and then more confidently. She is both lamenting and entertaining. With nothing left to tear away, she makes the final toss of the last splinter, rises, and begins to sway with the rhythm of her song. People set out food for her. I give her the few baht I have in my pocket. Her face still wet, she breaks into a broad smile. Strange laughter interrupts her otherwise balanced verses.

She thanks us for listening to her sadness and tells us how happy it makes her to sing for us. Then she crosses the road to where I am standing and gives me a blue sticker the size of a nickel, with a crescent moon on it. It is one of the stickers the camp hospital puts on medicine bottles to indicate when the medicine should be taken, morning or night. With her thumb she presses it onto the page of my journal in which I am writing field notes on her performance. I notice that she has blue moons and golden suns stuck to her cheeks and forehead.

I came across this performance on my first day of fieldwork in Refugee Camp Ban Vinai in Thailand, where I had been assigned by the International Rescue Committee as a consultant for their environmental health education program. In many ways this opening image cathects the themes that would become salient in my fieldwork: performance, health, and intercultural exchange between refugees and expatriate health professionals.

I arrived in Thailand in February 1985 having just completed, with Taggart Siegel, a documentary on Hmong shamanism and the Sudden Unexpected Death Syndrome that has reached epidemic proportions among the Hmong resettled in the United States (Siegel and Conquergood 1985).¹ My intention was to do straightforward field research on cultural performance in refugee camps, particularly shamanism, but the refugee situation had become so politically sensitive in Thailand that all camps were closed to outsiders, particularly researchers. Therefore, I sought employment with the international aid voluntary agencies that administer health care and services to the camps. Fortunately I was hired by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) as a health worker in Ban Vinai, a hilltribe camp not far from the Mekong River that divides Thailand from Laos, and the oldest and largest refugee camp in Thailand (figure 1). During the time of my fieldwork the official population of the camp was 45,231 with an additional 2–3,000 undocumented “illegals” living in the camp without rice rations. I offered my services as an ethnographic consultant in exchange for the official papers that would legitimize my presence in the camp. My major assignment was to help design and direct an environmental health education program for this camp which was represented in many agency reports as the “filthiest,” most “primitive,” and “difficult” in Thailand.

Working with the refugees and a local Thai IRC employee, I helped design and direct a health education campaign based on native beliefs and values and communicated in culturally appropriate forms. Specifically, we started a refugee performance company that produced skits and scenarios drawing on Hmong folklore and traditional communicative forms, such as proverbs, storytelling, and folksinging, to develop critical awareness about the health problems in Ban Vinai.

The Ban Vinai Performance Company

Camp Ban Vinai may lack many things—water, housing, sewage disposal system—but not performance. The camp is an embarrassment of riches



Figure 1.

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in terms of cultural performance. No matter where you go in the camp, at almost any hour of the day or night, you can simultaneously hear two or three performances, from simple storytelling and folksinging to the elaborate collective ritual performances for the dead that orchestrate multiple media, including drumming, stylized lamentation, ritual chanting, manipulation of funerary artifacts, incense, fire, dancing, and animal sacrifice (figures 2–6). Nearly every morning I was awakened before dawn by the drumming and ecstatic chanting of performing shamans (figures 7 & 8). During the day women everywhere would sew *pa ndau* (flower cloth), an intricate textile art that sometimes takes the form of embroidered story quilts with pictorial narratives drawn from history and folklore (figure 9). Performance permeates the fabric of everyday life in Ban Vinai.

A high level of cultural performance is characteristic of refugee camps in general. Since my work in Ban Vinai I have visited or lived for short

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Figure 2: Funerary rites in Center #5 of the camp. (Photo by Dwight Conquergood: Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives)

periods of time in 11 refugee camps in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, not counting a shantytown for displaced people in Nigeria. In every one of them I was struck by the richness and frequency of performative expression. One explanation for this is that refugees have a lot of time on their hands to cultivate expressive traditions. But I think there are deeper psychological and cultural reasons for the high incidence of performance in the camps. Refugee camps are liminal zones where people displaced by trauma and crisis—usually war or famine—must try to re-group and salvage what is left of their lives. Their world has been shattered. They are in passage, no longer Laotian, certainly not Thai, and not quite sure where they will end up or what their lives will become. Betwixt and between worlds, suspended between past and future, they fall back on the performance of their traditions as an empowering way of securing continuity and some semblance of stability. Moreover, through performative flexibility they can play with new identities, new strategies for adaptation and survival. The playful creativity of performance enables them to experiment with and invent a new “camp culture” that is part affirmation of the past and part adaptive response to the exigencies of the present. Performance participates in the re-creation of self and society that emerges within refugee camps. Through its reflexive capacities, performance enables people to take stock of their situation and through



Figure 3: Spirit bridges used in soul-calling rituals. (Photo by Dwight Conquergood: Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives)

this self-knowledge to cope better. There are good reasons why in the crucible of refugee crisis, performative behaviors intensify.

And, of course, even before the Hmong became refugees, oral traditions and cultural performance were the primary ways of educating the young and promoting beliefs and values among adults, as is the case in most third world cultures (see Ong 1982). Any communication campaign that ignored the indigenous cultural strengths of performance would be doomed to failure.

There is always the danger, however, of appropriating performance and using it as an instrument of domination. I wanted no part of the puppet theatre approach used by some expatriates as simply another means to get refugees to do what bureaucrats think best for them. Instead, I hoped that performance could be used as a method for developing critical awareness as an essential part of the process of improving the health situation in the camp. My project was aligned with the popular theatre approach to development and political struggle that is being used with success throughout the third world, particularly Africa, Latin America, and Asia. This theatre movement frequently draws inspiration from Paulo Freire's fieldwork as documented in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1986). Augusto Boal (1985) and Ross Kidd (1982, 1984) are perhaps the best-known names associated with the popular theatre,



Figure 4: Young tricksters with powder masks prepare to throw water on the author during the Thai New Year water-throwing festival. (Photo by Dwight Conquergood: Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives)

or people's theatre movement. Fortunately, a sizable body of literature is developing around this kind of third world theatre (Bustos 1984; Desai 1987; van Erven 1987; Eyoh 1986; Kaitaro 1979; Kidd and Byram 1978; Thiong'o 1981, 1983, 1986). In *Helping Health Workers Learn* (Werner and Bower 1982)—which is the companion volume to the widely distributed *Where There Is No Doctor: A Village Health Care Handbook* (Werner 1977)—there is an excellent chapter on politics, health, and performance entitled “Ways to Get People Thinking and Acting: Village Theater and Puppet Shows.”² This work perhaps more than any other inspired my efforts in Ban Vinai.

The critical/political component of popular theatre enacts itself in the process of developing the performance as much as, if not more than, in the final presentation to an audience. The backstage processes of researching and developing culturally appropriate materials along with the participatory involvement of the people are experiential/processual dimensions as significant as any explicit “message” communicated in a skit or scenario. For popular theatre to work effectively as a tool of critical awareness and empowerment for oppressed peoples it must be rooted in and begin with their cultural strengths. Instead of aesthetic distance and



Figure 5: Unmarried Hmong women dance in a camp cultural revival center. (Photo by Dwight Conquergood: Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives)

other concepts of elite theatre, popular theatre is contingent upon what Kenneth Burke calls rhetorical processes of “identification” and “consubstantiality” (Burke 1969, 19–23).

The health worker who would use popular theatre must, perforce, become a participant fieldworker. Getting to know the people well is important not just as a technique for collecting appropriate materials and dramaturgical ideas to be worked into performance programs but as a way of earning their trust and respect. No matter how flashy and entertaining your health show, village people are wary of outsiders, experts who drop in for a day or two and then leave. Refugees, even more than villagers, have good reason to be skeptical of officials who hold themselves at a distance. The Hmong have a proverb: “To see a tiger is to die: to see an official is to become destitute” (Tapp 1986, 2). When a health worker gets involved, becomes part of the struggle, that speaks as forcefully as any line in a performance script. Ndumbe Eyoh said it clearly: “There seems to be no other better way than associating fully with them, meeting them in the villages, joining them in their daily chores and shar-



Figure 6: The leader of the Hmong cultural revival center performs a newly composed song about becoming refugees. (Photo by Dwight Conquergood: Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives)

ing with them their lifestyles” (Eyoh 1986, 23). That is why it was crucial for me to live in the camp with the Hmong, although that was considered a great oddity by the other expatriate agency workers who commuted from Chiang Kham village, an hour’s drive away. Indeed, it was one of the camp rules that agency workers had to leave by 5:00 P.M. every day. Nevertheless, through delicate negotiations with the camp commander, a Thai colonel, I was able to stay overnight in the camp.

I hoped to break the pattern of importing the knowledge of “experts” and distributing it to the refugees, who were expected to be grateful consumers. I wanted to help demonstrate to both expatriates and refugees that *dialogical* exchange between the two cultures, the two worldviews and sensibilities, was possible (see Bakhtin 1981; Todorov 1984; Conquergood 1985).

One of the things that worked well for me as a health worker was to barter recommendations and health practices with traditional healers. This kept the program from being too one-sided. Because of the camp conditions, I personally had frequent trouble with intestinal disorders. For this discomfort, I went to the women herbalists who gave me a root to chew that was quite helpful. Early in my fieldwork I fell through a

bridge and gashed my toe when a rotten board gave way. Herbalists treated my wound with soothing poultices from a glossy-leaved plant. Within a week the jagged wound had healed and I was able to go without a bandage. Because of the rugged terrain, however, I stubbed my toes repeatedly and reopened that wound more than once. I became quite dependent on the herbal healers—they knew that my trust and respect for their medicine was genuine. Their pleasure in my trust was overwhelming. Never have I received such devoted attention. However, when I came down with Dengue fever, a somewhat serious illness, I spent a week in a Singapore hospital taking advantage of the best that modern medicine had to offer in order to get back on my feet as soon as possible. My friends, of course, were curious about the hospital, and I shared the details of my treatment with them. What I tried to do in my fieldwork was enact an example of dialogical exchange, or barter, wherein each culture could benefit from the other, approaching health care issues within a both/and embrace instead of an either/or separation of categories; this approach was particularly important because the refugees were accustomed to having expatriates undermine, even outrightly assault, their traditions.

The first test was whether or not the Hmong would accept a popular theatre approach. Quite simply, could we gather an audience? That test came earlier than I had planned when five rabid dogs rampaged through the camp biting several children. The solution proposed by the camp commander was to go to the Thai market, buy five machetes, and kill all the dogs. To his great credit, the director of the International Rescue Committee in Ban Vinai persuaded the colonel against this course of action. He proposed instead that IRC use its funds to buy rabies vaccine and inoculate all the dogs in camp. The vaccine was purchased and IRC personnel were at their stations ready and poised with needles to vaccinate the dogs. No dogs arrived. The problem centered on communication. The Hmong were not boycotting the rabies program. They simply were baffled by this strange procedure, or unaware of it. There was no effective way of getting the word out as to where, when, and why dogs should be brought to the IRC stations for injections.

I had just arrived in camp and was beginning to establish rapport, recruit, and work with refugee performers/health workers. We had developed some characters based on stock figures in Hmong folklore and were designing and constructing costumes and masks. We had started improvisation and confidence-building exercises, but everything was still very tentative. The group was very young; all but one were under 20. We were just beginning to mesh as a group when the IRC director



Figures 7 and 8: An assistant balances a Ban Vinai shaman in ecstatic flight. (Photos by Dwight Conquergood: Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives)

approached me and asked for help with the rabies vaccination project. Time was running out. The camp dogs would have to be vaccinated soon or Ban Vinai might have a serious rabies epidemic.

I certainly did not feel confident about putting the fledgling actors to this kind of major test so soon. We met and discussed the seriousness of the situation and collectively decided what would be the best strategy for quickly communicating this important message to as much of the camp population as possible. We soon agreed on a grand, clamorous, eye-catching “Rabies Parade” that would snake its way through all the sections of the camp. The tiger costume—appliquéd cotton fabric with a long rope tail—was almost finished, so it was agreed that the tiger would be the lead figure in the parade (figure 10). The tiger is a trickster figure in Hmong folklore and mythology, a very dramatic and evocative character. We knew the tiger would draw attention, inspire awe. The tiger would be followed by a nature-spirit, a ragged costume with long colored strings for hair, that would sing and bang on a drum. That noise,

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we hoped, would reach the people inside their huts and bring them out to see the commotion. We agreed that the chicken, a feathered costume with a striking cardboard mask that covered the entire head, would be the pivotal figure. After the dancing tiger and the clamorous nature-spirit got people's attention, the chicken would talk through a bullhorn and explain in terms the Hmong would understand the seriousness of rabies and why it was important for every family to round up the dogs and bring them for injections. The chicken couched all this in an appeal toward protecting the children and then gave specific instructions for each neighborhood in the camp as to where and when they should bring the dogs. It was culturally appropriate for the chicken to be the leading speaker because in Hmong lore chickens have divinatory powers. They are frequently offered up in spirit ceremonies as guides to lead the way to the sky kingdom. Three days after a baby is born, chickens are used in an augury ceremony to determine the child's future. Hmong naturally associate the chicken with divination because, as was explained to me, "Who is the one who knows first when the sun comes up every morning?"

We had some pep talks among ourselves to build confidence for going on the road the following morning. Not only would this be the performance company's first show, it would be the first time any member of our young group had performed in public. The ones who seemed to be the most extroverted were selected for the key roles of tiger, nature-spirit, and talking chicken. The rest would don masks and come along

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Figure 9: A Hmong story quilt entitled "Viet Shoot Hmong." The Hmong use the story cloths to teach their children the tragic history of *neeg taw grog*, "war-broken people," or refugees. (Photo by Jerry Zbiral)

as backup and as moral support for their comrades. Without assigning them specific roles, I encouraged them to do whatever they felt comfortable with in the parade. This would be an opportunity for them to get exposure in front of an audience before assuming more demanding roles.

Our casting instincts for the critical roles of tiger, nature-spirit, and chicken turned out to be inspired. At first, everyone was extremely self-conscious and inhibited. I was prepared for the worst. But as we kept banging the drum and hanging together, some children began pointing their fingers and laughing at the listless tiger. This brought him to life. The young fellow turned out to be a natural acrobat. Drawing on the media influence of Chinese movies that Thai entrepreneurs show in the open air once a month, he created a highly physical "Kung-Fu Tiger" to



Figure 10: The tiger leads the 1985 Rabies Parade. (Photo by Dwight Conquergood: Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives)

the joy of the people who streamed out of their houses to see such a sight. The fellow playing the nature-spirit turned out to be quite a musician. In addition to the drum, he brought along a folk instrument, a reed pipe organ, that his grandfather had made. He spontaneously danced as he blew the pipes, a great hit with the crowd. The chicken enjoyed the importance of his role and took it quite seriously. Understanding the power of word-of-mouth networks, the young actor instructed his audiences to go and tell their neighbors and relatives what they had just heard.

In terms of ability to gather an audience, the Rabies Parade was a huge success. Also, the novice performers had acquitted themselves beyond my highest expectations. However, the real test of our communication effectiveness was whether or not the Hmong would bring their dogs to the vaccination stations.

The next morning, full of nervous anticipation, I staked out the first vaccination station. It was a heartwarming sight. Dogs came pouring in—on rope leashes, in two-wheel pushcarts, and carried in their owners' arms. We could not vaccinate them fast enough. I myself vaccinated scores of dogs. The vaccination stations became a sort of street theatre. As you can imagine, the dogs did not submit willingly to these injections. It is a rather intricate operation to hold a struggling dog up in the air—we had no veterinary tables—and get it injected properly. There was a lot of scuffling and abortive thrusts of the needle—the stuff of farce.

Also, with so many nervous dogs concentrated in one area, fights broke out. For a week this part of the rabies program performed before rapt audiences, drawing crowds equal to those for the parades. We vaccinated almost 500 dogs.

We took advantage of the performance company's initial outing to elicit direct audience feedback as part of the process of testing, developing, and refining our concepts. The drum that was used belonged to a shaman, and some of the older people objected to its use. When the young performer brought the gong from home, I recognized it as a shaman's and questioned the company about the appropriateness of using it. Everyone said there would be no problem, and that a shaman had donated it. In any event, we never again used a shaman's instrument in our performance.

Throughout the development of our health theatre programs we actively solicited feedback from Hmong elders. We received excellent, helpful criticism. After we had rehearsed our first set of acted scenarios we showed them to a Hmong leader. He critiqued the performers on three points: (1) the performers and stage managers not in costume should wear traditional Hmong clothes, and not Western-style T-shirts and trousers available in the camp through charity outlets; (2) the backup music for the dances should be authentic Hmong, not Thai or Western-influenced melodies; (3) the rhymed chants were a little off from the traditional Hmong prosody; he taught the young performers the correct speech patterns. These criticisms were very useful because many of the members of the performance company were quite young and had grown up in the camp, exposed to outside influences. Moreover, the critique demonstrated the concern of Hmong leaders for maintaining their cultural integrity against the forces of assimilation.

There was one other criticism regarding the masks and the tiger. The oldest member of the performance company declined to wear a mask of any kind. The masks were too real for him. He was unable to frame the wearing of a mask as make-believe and worried about problems with spirits as a consequence of wearing the mask. We, of course, gave him roles that did not require wearing a mask and he remained a dedicated and important member of the performance company. But, soon after the Rabies Parade, a few of the people said that the masks and the tiger were scary and worried that some of the children's spirits might be scared away and they would fall sick. This response struck terror in me. As many anthropologists have noted, the political influence and power of shamans lies in their role as interpreters of the source and cause of illness. Shamanic ceremonies for a patient are in two phases: first, the

divination/diagnosis, then the cure (see Conquergood 1989). A shaman can influence the politics of a village by interpreting certain actions as the cause of illness or calamity. There is no lack of children falling sick every day in Ban Vinai. Fever and diarrhea are prevalent. Hundreds of children had enjoyed our parades. If one shaman attributed the sickness of one child to spirit-flight precipitated by the parade, the Ban Vinai health and performance company would be destroyed. One accusation could ruin us.

It was a tense week for me, but no accusations came. However, we decided to modify our staging techniques based on this feedback. Powerful characters like the tiger would no longer play directly to the audience in open form. Using theatre-in-the-round staging, we would direct the energies of the tiger and other masked characters inside the circle, using onstage focus. We would have these dramatic characters interact in an animated way with one another, but not directly confront the audience.

However, we did not want to lose the power of open-form communication, so we needed a narrator character who could safely and directly address audiences. Proverbs are an important communication form in all oral cultures and particularly popular with the Hmong (see Conquergood 1986). We wanted to use a character who could recite health proverbs and tell stories and who would have a special rapport with small children. Almost a quarter of the camp's population is under the age of five, the most vulnerable group with a high rate of disease and death. Appealing to them would also be a way of involving their parents; Hmong families are tightly knit and children are greatly loved. This led to the creation of our most successful character who became the symbol for the entire health communication program: the beloved Niam Tsev Huv (Mother Clean), our cleanliness clown (figure 11). She was the collective creation of the entire performance company. Inspired by Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre, I introduced the idea of a huge muppet figure constructed on a bamboo frame (figure 12). The performance company took it from there. Someone designed her face, a pleasant smile painted on a cloth-stuffed dummy's head tacked atop the bamboo frame; someone else did her costume, a colorfully striped dress that made her look larger than life; another member made her hair out of dyed yarn. The performance company worked collectively on all phases of the performance process, from research for scenarios to composing songs and proverbs to costume construction. Except for the tiger's mask which I purchased in Loie, the provincial capital, all of the costumes and props were handmade from local materials.

The performer who eventually assumed the role of Mother Clean



Figure 11: Dwight Conquergood performs with Mother Clean in 1985. (Photo by Lw Vang)

was a late starter—not one of the precocious three who emerged during the Rabies Parade. Several members of the company tried out the role, but he was the one who brought Mother Clean to life. Mother Clean, as he created her, was as gentle and loving as she was physically huge and imposing. She was a narrator-character who set the stage for the performance and, during the performance, could negotiate back and forth between direct address to the audience and dialog with onstage characters. Mother Clean particularly loved little children and always had special words for them. They adored her; sometimes during a performance they would run on stage to peek underneath her muppet skirts. Mother Clean always handled these moments with tender dignity, improvising skillfully. She also was very, very funny. Adults would double over with laughter at her antics. The incongruity between her size and her feigned daintiness was very farcical. Mother Clean grew in popularity so that the sight of her coming down the camp road would immediately draw a huge crowd for a performance. As she would walk through the camp, small children would shout her name. Hundreds of T-shirts were printed with her image in the Ban Vinai Print Shop run by a Japanese Refugee Relief Agency (figure 13). The camp literacy project used her image on



Figure 12: The frames for the muppets are constructed out of split bamboo wicker. (Photo by Dwight Conquergood: Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives)

posters. She was perhaps the most visible figure with the highest name recognition in the camp and she became the linchpin of our communication campaign. People believed that Mother Clean was on their side and the side of their children and they listened to what she told them about health and sanitation.

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Performance, Garbage, and the Environmental Setting

Once we had demonstrated that performance was an appropriate and successful way of communicating with the Hmong, we set out to work on the environmental health problems of the camp. Ban Vinai has serious hygiene and sanitation problems. The cause, however, lies in the environmental circumstances, not any innate character flaw of the Hmong. Simplistic health messages imported from Western middle-class notions of cleanliness simply would not work for Ban Vinai. What was needed was a health education and consciousness-raising program that was sensitive to the history and specific environmental problems and constraints of the camp.

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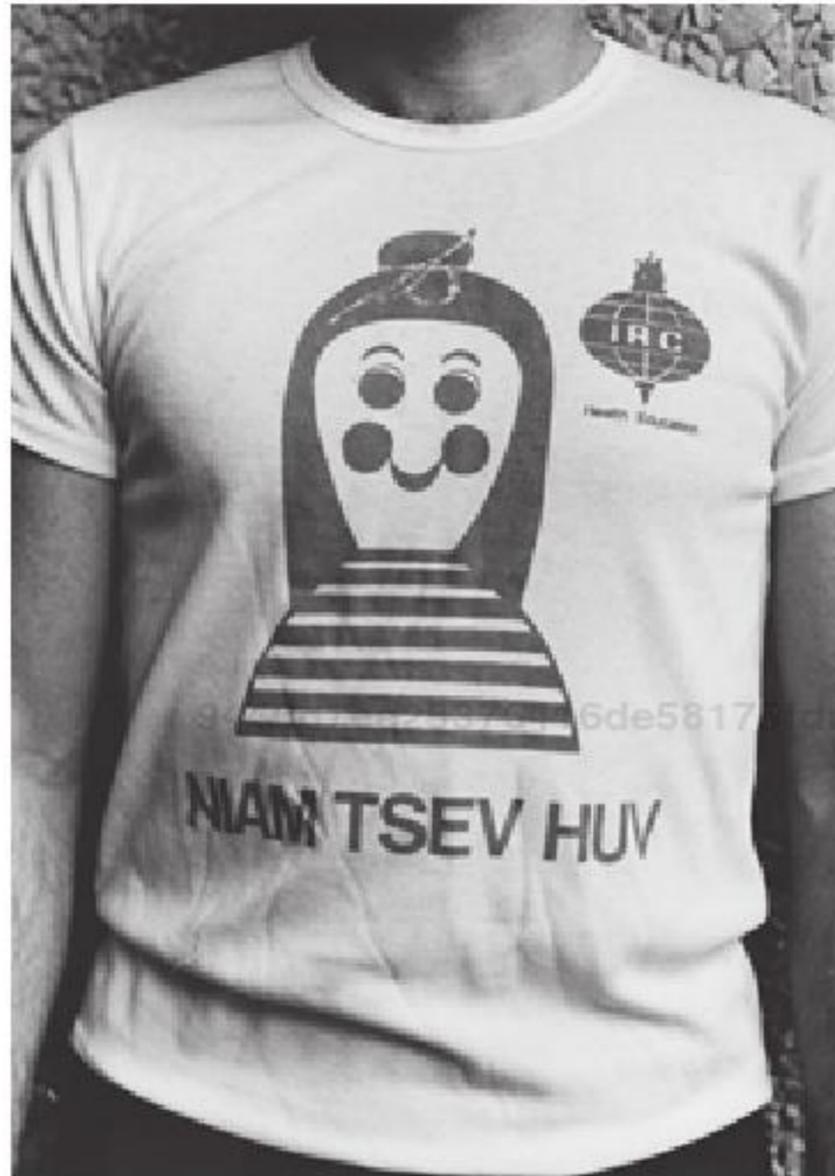


Figure 13: A Mother Clean T-shirt printed in the Ban Vinai print shop. (Photo by Dawn Murrey)

Ban Vinai is located in an isolated, hilly region of northeast Thailand, the poorest sector of the country. The camp has a population larger than any city in this remote area of Thailand, surpassing even Loei, the provincial capital. It is the most populous refugee camp in Asia. All these people are crowded onto about 400 acres of undeveloped land. The camp space is intensively used because refugees are forbidden to go outside the camp without the express permission of Colonel Vichitmala, the Thai camp commander. Armed guards enforce this policy. During the time of my fieldwork more than one refugee was shot for venturing outside the camp.

The overcrowding in the camp, not to mention the sanitation level, is compounded by large numbers of animals. The Hmong were sturdy peasant farmers before they became refugees. Resourceful by nature, they supplement their diet by raising a variety of animals within the confines of the camp. Purchased as inexpensive chicks, and a valuable ceremonial animal, chickens scratch about everywhere. Every family seems to have at least half a dozen. Ducks and geese are also raised. Pigs are a common sight, and dogs and goats roam freely throughout the camp. Because space is at such a premium, there is little room for separate

livestock pens. During the day they roam outside and at night they are often brought inside the house. In one of the thatched huts where I regularly slept overnight, I shared a corner with seven chickens—they were kept underneath wicker baskets at night—and the neighbor's pig. Inside many of the homes of very poor families you could find guinea pigs scurrying about, an inexpensive source of protein. Ban Vinai boasts a herd of more than 20 dairy cows, a gift from a well-meaning but uninformed charitable organization with the intention of raising the nutritional level of the camp. The Hmong do not drink milk; like many Asians, some are lactose intolerant. Because the cows were donated for the common good, no individual is authorized to butcher them. Therefore, completely useless, the cows wander freely throughout the camp, contributing to the hygiene and sanitation problems of the camp.

Housing is extremely crowded and inadequate. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees built 395 tin-roofed buildings, each one with ten small rooms. The camp was established in 1975 for 12,000 refugees; the population has nearly quadrupled since then. The 1984 birthrate was 5.5 percent, one of the highest in the world. Twenty-five percent of the Ban Vinai population was born in the camp. The refugees have responded to the housing shortage by building more than 2,250 thatch/bamboo huts. But it costs more than \$50 for the materials to build a house. That kind of money is hard to come by in a refugee camp, so extended families crowd together in congested living quarters. During the rainy season, some of these dirt-floor huts are in danger of getting washed away so families use partially buried discarded glass bottles to bank up the earth around their huts.

Camp Ban Vinai is the largest gathering of Hmong in the world. The tragic events of war and global politics have led to this artificial urbanization of the Hmong with dizzying speed. Traditionally, the Hmong lived in small mountaintop villages in the forbidding terrain of northern Laos where they tended their animals and grew dry rice and corn in fields cleared from the forest. F.M. Savina reported that the Hmong in Laos “do not seem to like big settlements. They prefer to live in little groups making up hamlets rather than real villages” (1930:182). A peaceful mountain people who kept to themselves, they had little contact with even the lowland-dwelling Lao, much less the rest of the world, until they were pulled into the war in Southeast Asia. In the 1960s they were recruited by the CIA and trained by the Green Berets as anticommunist guerilla fighters.³ In proportion to their population, they suffered casualties 10 times higher than those of Americans who fought in Vietnam (Cerquone 1986). When U.S. forces withdrew in 1975, Laos col-

lapsed and came under the rule of a government hostile to the Hmong who were viewed as collaborators with the hated enemy. Thousands fled their beloved mountain homes to seek asylum in Camp Ban Vinai, just across the Mekong in Thailand. Almost overnight they were thrown into a densely populated camp with no time to develop the adaptive cultural traditions and folkways, not to mention garbage disposal systems, that societies in the West have had centuries to evolve. It is any wonder, then, that there would be severe environmental health problems in Ban Vinai?

Moreover, there is no running water or adequate sewage disposal in the camp. The camp commander lists the water shortage as one of the major problems. Water has to be carried long distances in buckets balanced on shoulder yokes or in 10-gallon cans strapped to the back, a job usually done by teenagers. Sewage disposal is also a chronic problem. There are not enough pit toilets for the camp population. The latrines are distributed unevenly throughout the camp and are clustered together in long rows—convenient if you happen to live close to a cluster but the trade-off is the overwhelming stench. Because there is a shortage of toilets, they are kept locked and families have to obtain keys from the camp administration. Keys get lost, and there are never enough keys to go around, particularly for all the children. Further, you need to bring along a bucket of water to flush the shallow pit, water that is scarce and has to be carried on the back of some family member. Obviously, there are many disincentives for using the pit toilets; the stench alone is often a deterrent. Because gaining access to and using the pit toilets is a rather complex operation, most small children (one-fourth the population) simply cannot manage.

I go into detail about the camp toilets in order to give an infrastructural explanation for what has become a topos in reports about Ban Vinai from Western journalists and visiting relief workers. Ban Vinai is notorious for the image of refugees relieving themselves in the open space. This act, so shocking to “sophisticated” sensibilities, functions discursively as a sign of “the primitive.” Before I left Bangkok en route to Ban Vinai, I heard stories about this behavior from other aid workers and came across this motif in written reports as well as oral anecdotes. This recurrent image is psychologically and rhetorically interesting for what it reveals about our discursive projections of the Other. My observations are that the Hmong are a very modest people. The act does not occur with the frequency the stories imply. However, you have only to spend three days and nights in the camp in order to understand the environmental circumstances that produce such behavior even occasionally. Living in

the camp with the refugees and experiencing these environmental constraints and indignities was instructive for me.

The following excerpt from an unpublished report written by an agency health worker is representative:

The first week I arrived in Ban Vinai, a refugee city, a city without discipline, I strolled around the camp and realized the important need for basic health education. No one looks after the children playing cheerfully in the streams. The streams in which they defecate, take a bath, and throw garbage including drainage from houses and toilets. The refugees use sticks for cleaning after defecation and throw them behind the toilets. When it rains, the sewage goes into the streams. Also, a lot of children wear nothing when it rains.

Instead of blaming the Hmong for the poor health conditions, our performance company situated the problem in the environmental setting. Instead of didactic health messages instructing the Hmong to change their behavior, we developed performances that would stimulate critical awareness about the camp environment, particularly how it differed from the natural mountain villages of the Hmong in Laos. Once their radically changed living conditions could be brought to consciousness through performance, the Hmong might understand the need for changing some of their habits to adapt to this altered situation. Such a line of thinking was not alien to them. One man offered me an environmental explanation for the high suicide rate in Ban Vinai. He argued that, in their homeland, family tensions and pressures could be relieved by the troubled person leaving home temporarily to stay with relatives or friends in the next village until the situation cooled down. Without this outlet in Ban Vinai, pressures sometimes mount until suicide seems the only escape. Also, there is a traditional Hmong proverb that encourages adjustment to change of venue: "When you cross a river, take off your shoes/When you move to another place, you must change your headman" (Conquergood 1986).

We mounted a series of performances focused on the problem of garbage in the camp (figures 14, 15, 16). The first thing we had to do was problematize "garbage." In a traditional Hmong village, garbage would not be the problem it was in Ban Vinai. If all disposable waste is organic, and you live in a small hamlet on a windswept mountain slope, then pitching waste out the door is not a problem. It becomes instant feed for



Figure 14: The Garbage Troll (standing, left) performs during Garbage Theme Month 1985. (Photo by Dwight Conquergood: Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives)

the household pigs or is biodegradably reabsorbed into the natural ecology of the environment. Within the context of a crowded refugee camp, however, traditional ways of waste disposal entail radically different consequences. We wanted to get this message across without demeaning the people, suggesting that they were dirty.

Our “Garbage Theme” month featured Mother Clean in one of our most successful scenarios. Drawing on the *poj ntxoog* evil ogre character from Hmong folklore, we created an ugly Garbage Troll in soiled ragged clothes and a mask plastered with bits of garbage and dirt (figure 14). The Garbage Troll would lumber into the center of the playing space and begin dramatizing the behavior we wanted to discourage—peeling eggs and other food and throwing the waste on the ground, picking up dirty food from the ground and putting it into his mouth, and so forth. After a few minutes of this improvisation, the tiger would charge on stage and rebuke the troll for such unseemly behavior. The tiger would growl and snarl and pounce at the impassive troll, all the while making verbally

explicit how bad this behavior was. The tiger would give up and leave but then the pig would run out on stage and fuss at the troll for his disgusting conduct. The young performer who played our pig was a gifted clown and there would be much farcical business between the pig and the Garbage Troll until the troll drove the pig away. Then the chicken would follow suit and sagely admonish the troll about the environmental consequences of his behavior and how he would make children sick by throwing garbage all about. The troll would respond by throwing more garbage on the ground and at the chicken, driving the latter away.

From a considerable distance, Mother Clean would slowly sweep toward the dirty Garbage Troll. The children forming a circle around the playing space would have to open up their ranks to permit Mother Clean's passage. They would call out, warning her to beware of the nasty Garbage Troll. But Mother Clean would be unaware of the danger; absorbed in sweet thoughts she would sing to herself and dance as daintily as her bulk would permit. The children in the audience would increase the volume of their warning cries until Mother Clean heard and caught sight of the Garbage Troll. Unafraid, slowly, triumphantly she would sweep toward the nasty troll huddling in the dirt making menacing noises. She'd reach down, pull him up by his hands, then, in a moment of redemptive grace, remove his dirt-face mask and wash his face and hands. Transformed, the troll and Mother Clean danced as music was played from our battery-operated cassette player. Tiger, pig, and chicken rushed back on stage to dance and sing with Mother Clean and the redeemed troll.

Our health workers, wearing sandwich-board posters with the health theme boldly lettered, would join the circle, and Mother Clean would slowly spell out and read the poster proverbs for those in the audience who were nonliterate (figures 15 & 16). She would talk and invite comment and discussion about the theme.

The theme we developed in proverb form and painted on the sandwich-board posters was this:

Thaum peb nyob pem roob cua thiab nag
Tshoob yam khoom qias neeg pov tseg.
Tam sim no muaj neeg coob coob nyob hauv zos vib nai,
Peb txhua leej txhua tus yuav xyuam xim
Cheb yam khoom qias neeg kom huv si

[When you lived in the mountains
 The wind and the rain cleaned the garbage.



Figures 15 and 16: Health workers wearing sandwich-board posters join the performance circle. Mother Clean slowly spells out and reads the garbage theme proverbs for those in the audience who are nonliterate. (Photos by Dwight Conquergood: Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives)

Now with so many people in Ban Vinai
We all must be careful to clean up the garbage]

Mother Clean would lovingly amplify the message of the proverb, explaining how a small village on a mountain slope with plenty of space for everyone could absorb organic refuse naturally through the elements of wind and rain. She pointed out that Ban Vinai is very different from the mountaintop villages in which the Hmong used to live. Consequently, customs and habits, particularly regarding garbage, needed to change accordingly. She exhorted a change in behavior without degrading the people whom she was trying to persuade, locating responsibility in the environmental circumstances. Everyone could agree that indeed Ban Vinai was very different from their former home. After establishing that premise, Mother Clean then could make the point about the need for adaptive response to this new situation.

This scenario was staged three or four times a week, each time in a different section of the camp. In this way we could reach most of the



camp population in a month's time. Each day we would find a wide place in the road, or a clearing between houses, and use that empty space for the performance. One of the company members would walk around the area with a bullhorn announcing the performance. The performances were so popular that we sometimes had crowd control problems, with people pressing in so close that there was no room for the performers to move. One of the company members, usually the one who made the initial announcements over the bullhorn, would serve as "house manager." He would draw a large circle on the ground with a pointed stick and declare that area the players' space, off-limits to curious children. This strategy worked, except for the occasional dog that wandered on stage.

It was hard work performing in the open air under the tropical sun. I admired the dedication of the refugee performers. I was particularly touched by the young man who played Mother Clean. Lee Neng (his name means "human being" in Hmong) was malarial and every month or so would run a fever, have a stomachache, and pass blood in his urine.

I insisted that he not perform during these bouts and proposed that we use an understudy when he was sick. Besides, the roles of the pig, chicken, and tiger were passed around among the company members. But Lee Neng knew that he had a special rapport with the children and that his character Niam Tsev Huv was doing good in the camp, helping the little children so that they would not get sick so often. He said it made him feel very good when he was Niam Tsev Huv and he refused to surrender the role, even when he was ill. Sometimes he was so weak he could barely be heard. I would give him aspirin and lighten the performance schedule when I knew he was feverish.

We included a participatory dimension to the performances by teaching health and sanitation songs to the children. Initially, young children performers were trained as role models who traveled around the camp with our troupe, singing and dancing the sanitation songs (figure 17). However, we incurred “labor problems” with the young actors when their parents complained about the taxing performance schedule. We discontinued the Chorus of Children and used members of the performance company, particularly the young women, as sanitation song leaders.

The children of the camp loved to learn and sing these sanitation songs. They particularly enjoyed a call and response style of singing in which the audience would alternate the singing of verses with a leader, Mother Clean or one of the refugee health workers. We put some of the songs on cassette tapes, and distributed them throughout the camp in that way as well. Most of the Hmong have access to battery-operated cassette players because many of them correspond with relatives resettled in the West by sending cassettes through the mail. I also gave cassettes of these songs to the “Hilltribe Broadcast Program,” Radio Thailand. Later, when I toured their studios and facilities in Chiang Mai and interviewed the Hmong broadcasters, they reported that the Ban Vinai Health Songs were very popular with their listening audience.

Here is a sample health song composed for our campaign:

Yog koj mus yos hav zoov tsam ysov tom
Yog koj tsis ntxuav muag ntxuav tes, taw ibce
Koj yuav tau kab mob
Yog koj mus torn tej hav tsaub liab koj yuav tau mob

[If you play in the jungle
The Tiger will bite you
If you don't wash your hands, face, and body
You will fall ill]



Figure 17: The Chorus of Children singing and dancing sanitation songs. (Photo by Dwight Conquergood: Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives)

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Another sanitation song, “Using the Latrine,” turned out to be one of the most durable songs in the repertoire. Mother Clean led a parade of 40 singing children throughout the camp, with the message visually reinforced on posters that graphically depicted the appropriate behavior (figure 18). There was follow-up to the parade with activities such as coloring pictures and a game called “Take Your Small Brother or Sister to the Latrine.” Once again, reaching and involving the children was an important way of communicating with adults.

Mother Clean was the anchor for the performance company. A variety of performance materials and activities could be organized around her character. She seemed to embody something very appealing to the

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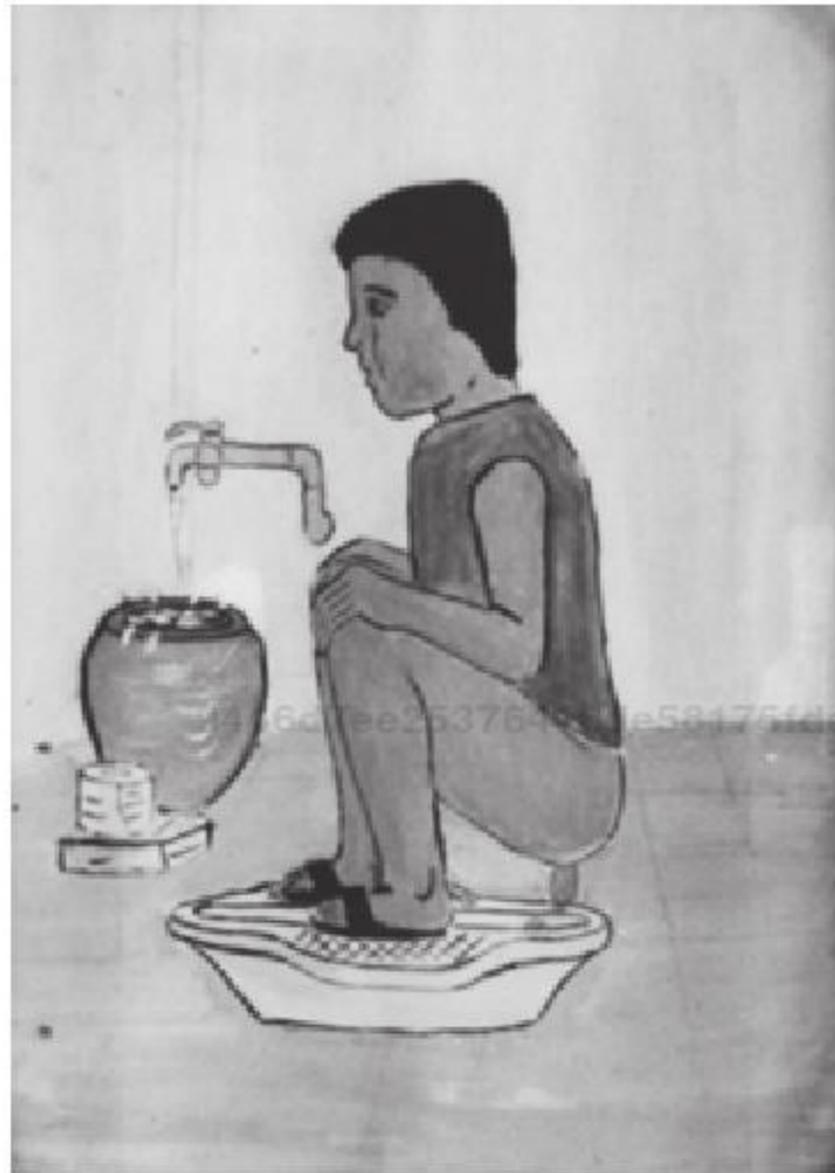


Figure 18: One of the vividly illustrated posters carried by Mother Clean and the performance company in the 1987 Using the Latrine Parade. (Photo by Dwight Conquergood: Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives)

Hmong. Adults as well as small children were delighted by her messages. I will never forget the image of a very thin, elderly man doubled over his walking stick with uncontrollable laughter during Mother Clean's performance. His neighbors told me they had not seen him laugh in a long time.

Expatriate Health Professionals and the Hmong: Perceptions of Difference, Disorder, Dirt, and Danger

The more I learned about the history and cultural dynamics of the camp, the more I came to believe that the expatriate health professionals needed consciousness-raising messages as much as the Hmong. The Hmong are perceived by Western officials and visiting journalists as the causal, producing agents of the unsanitary and unhealthy conditions in the camp. Instead of seeing the Hmong as struggling within a constraining context of historical, political, and economic forces that have reduced them from proud, independent, mountain people to landless refugees, the Hmong are blamed for their miserable condition. In her brilliant and incisive

analysis of refugee assistance programs, Barbara Harrell-Bond notes this sad pattern: “[I]t is alarming to observe that assistance programmes are dominated by an ethos in which the victims of mass exodus are treated as the villains” (1986:305). It is easier to scapegoat than to historicize a complex problem.

I began to collect the phrases used regularly to describe the Hmong by agency officials who worked in Ban Vinai. The word I heard most often was “filthy,” followed closely by “dirty,” and often part of a cluster of terms that included “scabies,” “abscesses,” “feces,” and “piles of garbage.” A phrase regularly employed to cover a multitude of perceived sanitation sins was the following, “They’re one step out of the Stone Age, you know.” A meaning-packed word heard about the Hmong almost every day was “difficult,” and its ramified derivatives: “difficult to work with,” “the most difficult group,” “set in their ways,” “rigid,” “stubborn,” “you cannot get through to them,” “backward.” One dedicated humanitarian agency employee who had worked with the Hmong for several years told me that “the hand of God is on this place,” but as for the Hmong living here, “they’re a fearful lot . . . you cannot work with them.” These perceptions surface in official discourse as well. Senator Alan Simpson, ranking minority member of the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Affairs, visited Ban Vinai for a day during the time of my fieldwork. He introduced a new metaphor into this complex of discursive denigrations of the Hmong. He called the Hmong “the most indigestible group in society” (1987:4). Ambassador Jonathan Moore, the new U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs, was more diplomatic when, in a 1987 interview, he singled out the Hmong as “the people with special problems” (1987:5).

The dialectic between the perception of “difference” and “dirt” is interesting. I suggest that so much focus on the “dirtiness” and “difficulty” of the Hmong is actually an expression of Western expatriates’ uneasiness when confronted with Difference, the Other. A Western aid official’s encounter with the Hmong is a confrontation with radical difference—in cosmology, worldview, ethos, texture of everyday life. The difference is exacerbated if the relief workers are devout Christians. The three relief agencies that have been in charge of the camp hospital have all been Christian organizations which have perceived the animism of the Hmong as “devil worship.”

For medical health officials with a professional commitment to the tenets of Western science, the equally strong Hmong belief in spirits and shamans challenges fundamental Western assumptions about the nature of the world. What is frustrating for agency workers is that the accep-

tance and cooperation of the Hmong are essential for the successful delivery of health care programs and services. The Hmong are the clear majority in Camp Ban Vinai, of course, and they continue to control their symbolic universe. Much to the distress of agency workers, they have not acquiesced to the new scientific epistemology presented to them as a “superior” form of knowledge. Visible affirmations of their traditional way of understanding the world are displayed everywhere. Here are excerpts from a report by Dr. Ronald Munger, an epidemiologist who did research in Ban Vinai:

The striking issue in regard to traditional Hmong health practices is how visible these practices are in Ban Vinai Refugee camp in Thailand. [. . .] Shamanism was widely practiced. [. . .] There were other more common everyday rituals which reflected pervading belief in the spirits in every aspect of life. Ritual figures or heads of sacrificed animals set on poles were common. Wooden boards on the floor at the doorway of a home were intended to confuse unwanted spirits and prevent them from entering the house. [. . .] Pleasing the spirits was a primary goal. For example, bracelets, necklaces, and other devices were often placed on babies and small children to contain the spirit of that person and avoid its loss. [. . .] Many Hmong homes [. . .] contained small altars with the items needed to interact with spirits. There were buffalo horns [. . .] rings and rattles used during rituals. (1984)

All this display of “difference” and “strangeness” is quite dramatic to Western eyes and makes a vivid impression. Unfortunately, as Tzvetan Todorov reminds us, “The first, spontaneous reaction with regard to the stranger is to imagine him as inferior, since he is different from us” (Todorov 1984, 76). All too easily, “difference is corrupted into inequality” (Todorov 1984, 146).

Mary Douglas’ ideas about the social relativity and symbolic functions of dirt help explain how “Difference” and “Dirt” are conjoined in perceptions of the Hmong. Inspired by William James’ insight that dirt is “matter out of place” (Douglas 1966, 164), she argues:

[D]irt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder. [. . .] Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment. (Douglas 1966, 2)

Perceptions of what is clean and unclean are contextually variable and culturally specific. Habits of cleanliness and rites of purification are the manifest expressions and protections of deep structures and fundamental classificatory schemes that maintain order and help hold a society together. People and actions that disturb order, violate categories, mess up the system are branded unclean: “The unclear is the unclean” (Turner 1967, 97). Labeling someone or something “dirty” is a way of controlling perceived anomalies, incongruities, contradictions, ambiguities—all that does not fit into our categories, and therefore threatens cherished principles. “Dirt,” then, functions as the mediating term between “Difference” and “Danger.” It is the term that loads the perception of “Difference” with a moral imperative, and enables the move from description to action, from “is” to “ought.” Defining something as unhealthy, harmful, dangerous establishes the premise for “moving in,” for control, making it “licit to intervene [. . .] in order to exercise the rights of guardianship [. . .] to impose ‘the good’ on others” (Todorov 1984, 150). Perception, language, and politics cathect in the encounter with the Other: “the perception of the other and that of symbolic (or semiotic) behavior intersect” (Todorov 1984, 157; see also Foucault 1973; Said 1979).

The communication between expatriate camp officials and the refugees in Ban Vinai is so clouded by the perceptual transformations which I call the Difference-Disorder-Dirt-Danger Sliding Continuum, that other explanations for the poor health conditions of the camp get filtered out. I quote a revealing passage from one of the monthly reports submitted to the Bangkok office by a Ban Vinai health officer:

Three refugees in Center Five had just died before my arrival. [. . .] We walked around that area. It was muddy; piled with garbage, sticks thrown behind toilets and sludge appeared from place to place. [Agency] garbage pits and sewage treatment lagoons were situated above and close to the buildings. “It’s a horrible smell when the wind blows especially from that garbage pit down to our houses, sometimes we can’t eat anymore,” [a refugee said]. [. . .] [He] asked me to convey this problem to [the agency], hoping we could move the pits to another place. However, [the agency] can’t move it at all because of the limitations of land and budget.

This is a remarkable passage. After the obligatory fecal imagery of the toilets, mud, sludge, and ooze, there is almost a recognition scene. The health official notes the “garbage pits” and “sewage treatment lagoons”

his agency has situated dangerously close to the living quarters. The refugee accompanying him on this site tour follows up on the perception and complains. We are presented with a marvelous glimpse of a refugee talking back to a camp official, resisting the unhealthy and degrading circumstances in which he and his people are caught. The responsibility for the problem almost gets shifted from the refugees to the environment, with the expatriate agencies even held accountable for contributing to the creation of a harmful scene.

This rupture in the discursive text about refugees gets sealed off quickly, however. Scarcely a page later, the perceptual blinders are back in place: “Even though some have had public health training, it is evident that the training has had little effect—their homes are untidy and stuffy and their children are dirty. They have no picture of community.” We are comfortably refocused on the dirtiness of the refugees. This ideology of blaming the victims, and thereby legitimizing domination and control over them, is displayed transparently in the final section of the report, ominously subtitled “Submission for Discipline”:

We all realize that even though lots of refugees have been trained about hygiene and sanitation by volags [voluntary agencies], they still behave as they used to. [. . .] No refugees really take care of the environment. [. . .] They live freely wandering around without any responsibility.

In my own opinion it'll take a long time to change their habits which detract from their health. One thing that might help is a 'system of discipline.' [. . .] For example, the refugees can be told what will happen if they throw garbage everywhere, defecate into the streams, etc.

It's an idea that we might think about carefully and which might work in the future.

This text is paradigmatic of the documents produced by the bureaucracy and institutional apparatus of refugee relief agencies. It is an avatar of the twin themes of discursive power and institutional control that Michel Foucault discussed in *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1973) and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977). Because the “limitation of land and budget” forecloses the consideration of infrastructural change in the camp environment, attention is diverted to the “change [of] their habits which detract from their good health.” Refugee subjects are discursively represented in a way that reduces them to the unhealthy and/or passive Other who is to be managed, administered, and if need be, changed. Their resistance, inter-

preted as recalcitrance, only legitimizes and further sustains the institutional power and authority that are enacted upon them. Harrell-Bond deconstructs the strange, self-reinforcing logic that underpins refugee programs in Africa where she did fieldwork: "Often interpretations of compassion seem to define those in need as helpless, and then work in ways which makes sure that they are useless" (Harrell-Bond 1986, 82).

One of the motives that would prompt doctors and nurses to volunteer for stressful work in an alien, harsh environment is concern for the refugees' souls as well as their physical bodies. I heard horror story after horror story from the refugees about people who went to the hospital for treatment, but before being admitted had their spirit-strings cut from their wrists by a nurse because "the strings were unsanitary and carried germs." Doctors confidently cut off neck-rings that held the life-souls of babies intact. Instead of working in cooperation with the shamans, they did everything to disconfirm them and undermine their authority. Shamans were regarded as "witch doctors." Here are the views of a Finnish nurse who worked in Ban Vinai: "They have their bark and root medicines and rites to appease the spirits. Most of it is worthless, and some of it is positively harmful" (Evans 1983, 110). Is it any wonder that the Hmong community regarded the camp hospital as the last choice of available health care options? In the local hierarchy of values, consulting a shaman or herbalist, or purchasing medicine available in the Thai market just outside the entrance to the camp, was much preferred and more prestigious than going to the camp hospital. The refugees told me that only the very poorest people who had no relatives or resources whatsoever would subject themselves to the camp hospital treatment. To say that the camp hospital was underutilized would be an understatement.

As I critique my work in the camp I realize that I should have developed more consciousness-raising performances specifically for the expatriate health professionals. They needed to develop a critical awareness about health problems in the camp at least as much as did the Hmong. Directing most of the performances to the Hmong resulted in a one-sided communication campaign and subtly reinforced the prevailing notion that the Hmong were primarily responsible for the bad conditions.

I did develop one performance event that was designed especially for the agency health workers, the *IRC Health and Sanitation Celebration* (figures 19–21). All the voluntary agency personnel were invited to a showcase of skits from the refugee performance company culminating in a shared meal. The ostensible purpose of this event was to let the other agency workers know what we were doing so that they would not be surprised if they came across one of our health shows in the camp. The implicit agenda was to promote better understanding of Hmong culture

and traditions. To this end, we capped the series of performance sketches by bringing a Hmong shaman on stage who enacted a traditional soul-calling ceremony of blessing and tied string around the wrists of expatriate personnel who voluntarily came up to the stage (figure 21). Given the history of hostility between shamans and the hospital, this was a radical move. Those who participated in this intercultural performance found it deeply moving. However, they were a small, self-selected group who were already the most open-minded. Most of the expatriate guests politely remained in their seats but observed attentively. The most dogmatic agency workers—for example, the Christian nurse who refused to allow any Thai calendars in her ward because they had pictures of the Buddha—did not even attend this event.

I should have been more assiduous in attempts to reach the expatriate personnel who were most ethnocentric in their dealings with the Hmong. My sympathies were with the refugees. My interests and energies were devoted to understanding and working with the Hmong. It was easier to identify with the Hmong; the dogmatic Christians became the Other for me.

It is important to speak out against the repressive practices of some refugee relief agencies, however, in the interest of searching for a solution to this sad situation, I do not want to substitute one scapegoat for another. I agree with Harrell-Bond that “it is unproductive to blame” the agency fieldworkers for the enormous communication breakdowns that occur in refugee camps. By nature a refugee camp is a highly volatile, stressful, politically intense, multicultural arena, usually located in a harsh environment. In matters of communication and intercultural sensitivity, relief workers “are not trained. Within the agency bureaucracy they are not rewarded for involving themselves with individuals. In fact, fieldworkers are often warned against ‘getting involved’” (1986:305). The agency workers I met in Ban Vinai were all dedicated, caring people. Even though they commuted to the camp from a Thai village an hour away, their living conditions there were quite basic. Many of the workers were volunteers, working in the camp at considerable personal sacrifice. The problem cannot be so easily contained at the level of the agency personnel. The root of the problem goes much deeper into institutional bureaucratic practices and the ideologies that empower and sustain them.

The ideal is for the two cultures, refugees’ and relief workers’, to enter into a productive and mutually invigorating dialog, with neither side dominating or winning out, but both replenishing one another (see Bakhtin 1981). Intercultural performance can enable this kind of dia-

IRC Health and Sanitation Celebration

THEME

When you lived in the Mountains
The Wind and the Rain cleaned the Garbage.
Now with so many people in Ban Vinai
We all must be careful to clean up the Garbage

Thaum peb nyob pem roob cua thiab nag
Tshoob yam khoom qias neeg pov tseg.
Tam sim no muaj neeg coob coob myob hauv zos vib nai,
Peb txhua leej txhua tus yuav xyuam xim
Cheb yam khoom qias neeg kom huv si

PROGRAM

1. SCENARIO—"Mother Clean and the Garbage Troll"—*Niam Tsev Huv*
2. SANDWICH BOARD DISPLAY OF POSTERS (thanks to JSRC)
3. DANCING FOOD—Singing Vegetables, Meat, and Fruit—*Yam Qav Noj Muaj Zog*
4. CHORUS OF CHILDREN Tiny tots sing and dance a medley of sanitation songs
5. PANTOMIME—Enactment of Theme Message
6. STORY-BOARD THEATRE—*Nyam Huv Ntxim Siab*—"Houscleaning is Wonderful!" (a story adapted from the Yao the Orphan cycle of Hmong tales)
7. DEMONSTRATION OF GAME—*Yam Khoom Qhia Neeg*—"Flee the Garbage Dragon!"
8. SAMPLE BROADCAST AUDIOTAPE
9. *Hu Plig Khi Tes* Traditional Hmong Ceremony of Blessing and String-Tying for participants, workers, and guests of IRC. The ceremony will be performed by Thoj Txooj Neeb, Hmong shaman
10. EVERYONE EAT AND ENJOY!

Figure 19: Program for the 1985 Health and Sanitation Celebration sponsored by the International Rescue Committee.



Figures 20 and 21: Singing and dancing zucchini and squash encourage children to eat their vegetables in the “Nutrition Show” for the 1985 Health and Sanitation Celebration. (Photos by Dwight Conquergood: Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives)

logical exchange between Self and Other. Eugenio Barba talks about performance as “barter”:

Otherness is our point of departure. Imagine two very different tribes, each on their own side of the river. Each tribe can live for itself, talk about the other, praise or slander it. But every time one of them rows over to the other shore it is to exchange something. One does not row over to teach, to enlighten, to entertain, but rather to give and take: a handful of salt for a scrap of cloth. [. . .] Otherness is our meeting point. (Barba 1986, 161)

As a medium of exchange, performance draws us to the margins, the borders between Self and Other. Bakhtin affirms: “The most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries” (Bakhtin 1986, 2). Conceived of as barter, a site of exchange, performance is a key to understanding “how the deeply different can be deeply known without becoming any less different” (Geertz 1983:48). The value of the exchange is in the encounter, the relations that are produced, not the objects: “It is



the act of exchanging that gives value to that which is exchanged, and not the opposite” (Barba 1986, 268).

Postscript

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ebrary

I returned to Camp Ban Vinai for a brief follow-up visit in September 1987, anxious to see what had become of Mother Clean and the Ban Vinai Performance Company during the two years since my departure. IRC had hired a Thai university graduate who worked with me on the health education program and she was to take over the project after I left. Although she left IRC to work for another agency in the camp, Mother Clean and the performance approach to working with refugees survived this transfer to another agency. I was delighted to see that Mother Clean had been fully integrated into the culture of Camp Ban Vinai. Literacy textbooks produced in the camp print shop were illustrated with images of Mother Clean (figure 23). Mother Clean hand puppets were made in the camp and used for entertainment and instruction (figure 24). Mother

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Figure 22: A Hmong shaman stands on stage and prepares to tie spirit-strings around the wrists of Western agency relief workers attending the Health and Sanitation Celebration. (Photo by Lw Vang)

Clean puzzles delighted children (figure 25). The ultimate test was that Mother Clean had been invited by the Hmong leaders to perform at the New Year Festivities, the most important and elaborate celebration of Hmong culture.

The character had been through three reincarnations and several performers in the two years I had been gone. Two bamboo frames and costumes had been worn out by heavy use. Her yarn hair was more purple than I had remembered it, but other than that she looked very much the same as when I left in 1985. I was pleased to see her again, as well as the young man who currently performed her. Nuanjan Charnwiwatana, the Thai worker in charge of the program after I left, told me that during her change of employment from IRC to another agency, there was a period of time when Mother Clean did not perform. She said that children would come to the IRC office in camp and ask worriedly, "Where is Mama Clean? Is Mama Clean sick?" And they had begun to ask about Mother Clean's children. Construction was underway during my visit for a child-sized Mother Clean, and the performance company talked of eventually having a Mother Clean family. Mother Clean's success as a



Figure 23: By 1987 Mother Clean is used to illustration a literacy textbook designed for the refugees in Camp Ban Vinai. (Photo by Dwight Conquergood: Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives)

communicator had reached personnel in other refugee camps, and I was told that she had been cloned for some of these.

A new participatory theatre strategy was highly successful: Mother Clean now made home visits. The performers were quite confident with the character and could improvise lines that directly addressed the problems of a particular household or neighborhood in the camp. These home visits also involved a great deal of interaction between Mother Clean and her hosts. The home visits were still highly entertaining because Mother Clean would have to maneuver her considerable bulk through the crowded living quarters and underneath low-hanging thatched eaves. This required a good deal of awkward bending and turning on Mother Clean's part and sometimes she would get stuck in a narrow passageway, to the glee of the onlookers.

It was heartening to see Mother Clean still being performed by Hmong actors, supporting Hmong identity, and blending with Hmong cultural traditions which still flourished in the camp. My return visit was celebrated by a shamanic performance. Hmong friends positioned me on a shaman's bench in front of his altar, tied me with a cord to a live pig, while the shaman circled me chanting and beating a gong. The pig's



Figure 24: A big sister uses a Mother Clean hand puppet to entertain and teach her brother about healthy living in the camp (1987). (Photo by Dwight Conquergood: Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives)

souls were released on my behalf through a deft cut at the throat, while the shaman covered his face with a dark veil and entered ecstatic trance, leaping back and forth between the bench and the ground.

Conditions had not improved in the camp since 1985. If anything, the camp was even more tense. There was a new camp commander who imposed more rules and restrictions. The presence of soldiers was greater. Throughout my stay during 1985 I was never stopped by the military. My second day in camp during the return visit I was challenged by a patrol. The camp was even more crowded, particularly with “illegals,” estimated to be as many as 10,000. Still, it was gratifying to see the Mother Clean character bringing some joy to the camp inmates, particularly the children, while attempting to address in a positive way the difficult situation.

NOTES

1. More than 100 Hmong refugees, almost all men, have died suddenly. Autopsy reports show no cause of death (see Holtan 1984; Munger 1986).
2. *Helping Health Workers Learn* should be read as a model of praxis. It is



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Figure 25: A Mother Clean puzzle made by refugee craftspeople in Camp Ban Vinai (1987). (Photo by Dwight Conquergood: Courtesy of Northwestern University Archives)

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ebrary designed for village health workers, but it has much to say about action and reflection, the development of a critical consciousness. Although the authors draw extensively on the methods of Freire, they provide an incisive critique of his work. I recommend this book particularly for academics whose social and critical theories get abstracted from the lived struggles of poor people.

3. Through the Freedom of Information Act a CIA film depicting the recruitment, training, and guerilla warfare of the Hmong in Laos is now available. This media text documents how the Hmong were recruited and used by the CIA during the war in Southeast Asia. It sets forth vividly the political-historical circumstances that led ultimately to the Hmong becoming refugees.

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ACT II

Water rites/rights

In Act II we will consider “water as life” and as a human right. We will enter acts of activism by water democracy advocates and their struggle to protect public water systems from corporate privatization. Woven throughout this section are excerpts from a staged performance in Chapel Hill, North Carolina that dramatized how water rites and rituals animate our daily lives across the globe.

SCENE ONE: “THEN DO IT!”

Upstage left and right are two large screens. Projected on each screen is the image of two Ghanaian activists standing with villagers at a locked water pump in a town in the Northern region of Ghana called Savelugu. The Recorder stands downstage between the stage right screen and a two-level platform where a man and woman representing water activists are sitting. The spotlight focuses on the platforms as the recorder takes a seat next to the activists and begins her interview.

RECORDER¹ What can people of conscience do about this water privatization situation in Africa and around the world?

MAN You so-called free countries are based on democratic principles, yet you don’t know what your governments are doing. I mean what they are really doing and the influence they have on these corporations and international financial institutions that push this privatization issue.

WOMAN You need to find alternative sources of information beyond your own borders and learn about yourselves; you need to stop saying things are so bad and begin to worry your politicians – call them, write to them, picket their offices, sign petitions, let them know you don’t like them, don’t vote for them, and campaign against them.

MAN If you want to do something, donate regularly to international rights groups and stakeholders in this struggle for economic justice and water

democracy – we all need your money to do our work. Better yet, get involved and join them. But the best thing you can do is to be informed and to teach – teach your husbands, wives, children, parents, friends ... It's those everyday acts of resistance that build and matter and make change happen.

WOMAN Don't let people say ignorant things to you about the world beyond your own borders. Correct them, teach them! You say you are going to do a performance? Then do it!

(Blackout on the interview island. The lights now come up on three dancers and a man standing centerstage. The dancers perform symbolic movements to his speech in response to the controversial question, Why is Africa so Poor?)

Inspired by my fieldwork in Ghana on the human right to water, I directed a performance entitled *Water Rites* on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Studio Six, for five nights in March 2006. The posters and announcements for *Water Rites* described it as “a multi-media performance on the politics and poetics of water.” *Water Rites* explored water democracy and our human relationship with water through a montage of digital imagery, comic satire, dramatic monologue, and stylized movement. *Water Rites* reflected how we all perform “water rites” in our everyday lives and how these rites variously pervade our lives and culture. *Water Rites* performed the questions: What is your first memory of water? Does anyone have the right to own water? Are water wars still taking place in the twenty-first century? What is the connection between local water and global profit? Included in the announcement for the show was the 1995 quote from Ismail Serageldin (former vice president of the World Bank, 1995): “If the wars of the twentieth century were fought over oil, the wars of this century will be fought over water.”

In weaving together performance, fieldwork data, personal reflection, and theoretical analysis, Act II becomes a multi-cited, multi-vocal, and multi-spatial account of the human right to water, water activism, and everyday water rituals.

The field – water is life

I returned to Ghana five months after our performance ended, but while the performance ended, the fieldwork did not; the show was over, but the water struggle continued. One of the first people I went to see when I got to Accra was Al-Hassan Adam, a long-time friend and a water and environmental activist. I met him in his office at Civic Response.² There were stacks

of *The Insight*³ newspaper on his desk and on the large table across the room. The newspapers were scattered alongside various files, pamphlets, and other documents. Batik curtains, framing the windows, were decorated in brown and black Adinkra symbols.⁴ On a wall next to the curtains were a series of photographs from the 2003 World Water Council in Kyoto. Written on a board across from Al-Hassan's desk were sketches of an outline, and across the top were the words: "What are the main issues that concern the poor in health and health insurance?" Below it were written the words "quality," "attitude of staff," "cost," "distance," "information." On the wall next to the door was a large poster calendar with a picture of a Ghanaian man in a yellow uniform sitting on what looked like a blue tractor transporting a large cargo of white boxes on the back of the truck. Above the image was written: "Aviance: We take care ... you take off – Ghana LTD – An Aviance Member." On another desk under the window was a very old Dell desktop computer. Al-Hassan sat at his desk during our conversation and began by describing what first inspired his commitment to social justice.

"It was music. The music. Listening to Bob Marley shaped my ideas on society. It's all about the totality of the music," he said.

"It begins with Bob Marley ..."

"If you listen to Bob Marley's *Talkin' Blues*, it's all about complete struggle. He talks about freedom fighters and, when they come, who is going to stand up. I mean *Talkin' Blues* is a whole picture. It's a complete picture of living a life of resistance. It's inspiring."

Al-Hassan continued to express how living inside the lyrical content of music becomes a powerful force in shaping our thinking about life and politics, and then he added a second influence that inspired his activism – his teacher. His secondary school (high school) teacher was a "very different kind of teacher." He taught his students about social movements and the relationship between theatre and public protest. While most of the other school groups were based on "fun clubs," his teacher was staging political plays and encouraged the students to read about the politics and liberation struggles in various countries.

Al-Hassan smiled and said, "My teacher is your namesake. His name is Suhuyini Mbang-ba.

Although my name is spelled *Soyini* and Al-Hassan's teacher's name is spelled *Suhuyini*, it is a male and female name that is pronounced the same and meaning "one heart" in the Dagbani language.

"He is one of the people who openly denounced religion; then he changed his name to Suhuyini. His name was Mohammad Yakobu – that was his Islamic name. He changed to Suhuyini Mbang-ba through his

self-development and realization. He no longer identified with a religious name. He needed to have his own identity.”

I asked, “Was it difficult for him? Did many people resent him for changing his name?”

Al-Hassan smiled and said, “My teacher was an interesting character; although he personally rejected Islam . . . in terms of community, he was the fellow who helped the most to shape his Islamic community. He had the respect of the community. He was the first elected assemblyman. And he won. He set up women’s groups in the community. He also set up drama groups in the community and started a drama group in the schools.”

Impressed by Al-Hassan’s affection for Suhuyini, I commented, “He sounds like such a remarkable individual. I can see he means a great deal to you.”

“I mean he is an amazing fellow. He’s a friend and a teacher I really cherish. I am who I am today because of that guy. I remember how his house was my second house. There were all kinds of books there. The guy invested all his money in buying books. His colleagues had all kinds of electronic gadgets and stuff like that. But he had his books, and we would go to his house, and it was a library. So I had access to all these books. So I was just privileged to have met him. He lives in Gambia now and is still active writing about political issues for international magazines. He speaks Arabic, French, English and several African languages such as Dagbani, Twi, and Hausa.”

“Suhuyini was a high school teacher,” I said, “who changed his name against the status quo because he had his own sense of identity, but at the same time that didn’t mean that he didn’t respect Islam. He sounds like a remarkable person.”

“Yes,” said Al-Hassan, “He absolutely respected Islam. He was one of the major contributors to the mosque.”

“And he was a dramatist,” I said.

“Yes, he was a dramatist.”

Al-Hassan then expanded on the idea of drama relative to social justice by recounting a different place and time: the international stage at the 2003 World Water Council in Kyoto, Japan. Al-Hassan attended the forum to represent Ghana and its coalition against water privatization. There was scheduled to be a very important keynote presentation given by the former IMF Managing Director. The representative was scheduled to launch a report that basically explained, according to Al-Hassan, “how to finance water.” The report was intended to focus on “how the private sector can now go to public funds and then use public funds to finance water.” There were anti-privatization activists from all over the world – Asia, Latin

America, Africa, and the United States – who, when they found out in advance about the report, decided they must do something about it. Al-Hassan said, “We were really a rainbow.” On the eve of the keynote address, the activists held their own meeting and decided to protest the World Bank report.

“How were all of you going to protest against the report?” I asked.

“In the big meeting hall where the report was to be given, there were going to be high officials and important people. It was organized by the World Water Council. One of the Japanese ministers for water was there, the South African minister for water and forest, ministers and development ministers, and everybody was there who is supposed to matter – the water chief executives, water activists, water technocrats – everybody was going to be there. So we activists had to dress well so we could get into the hall and not look suspicious. We did not want them to be aware of our plan.”

“So you dressed up like them, and it was a disguise so they wouldn’t recognize all of you as activists?” I asked.

“Exactly! We made ‘lie meters’ to stage our protest. We hid them under our coats so, as we entered the hall, no one could see them.”

I was amused. “Lie meters?”

“Yes,” said Al-Hassan. “The lie meters were made out of cardboard . . . we painted a red, orange, and brown arc. Attached to the bottom of the Meter were small bells. There were about five of us who went into the hall with the lie meters under our coats. We stood in five different sections so that we would be at strategic points in the room. When the World Bank fellow read his report and each time he told a lie, all of us would shake the meter and point the arrow in the direction of one of the colors. For the small lies, the meter would shake and go to brown; for the bigger lies, the meter would shake and go to yellow; for the biggest lies, the meter would shake and go to red. We had a fellow who signaled the color and the time to point in order to be sure we were all shaking at the same time and on the same point. One of the protestors would shine a light on him; he would then signal us to shake and move the meter on a color. All five of us would move the meter at the same time and on the same color.”

“Did anyone try to stop you? Did the speaker try to stop you?”

Al-Hassan shook his head, “No, he couldn’t. He was shocked. They all were absolutely shocked.”

“Did he finish his speech?” I asked.

“He started to fumble. The Japanese minister tried to persuade us to stop. We said we must speak to the issues. We spoke into the microphones and began asking questions and speaking to the issues of privatization. We had

six people stationed and there were two mikes: three people at one side of the mike and three people on the other side of the mike. We really prepared and did our homework for this. We knew what we were doing. We had met and we had planned and rehearsed our presentation very carefully. We let them know that all of us there ... we represent so many people and you people are not representing anybody anymore on this count of lies. We want to have a dialogue – we did not come here to just listen to a report being read to us. After all, this report took one year to prepare, and this is the first time we are hearing it, so we want a dialogue. They said they would give us fifteen minutes! ‘We are giving you fifteen minutes.’ We said, ‘You can’t use one year to write a report and give us fifteen minutes to respond to it; so this is not fair and this is not democratic! We denounce this meeting and we denounce your report! We don’t recognize your report!’”

“This was a historic moment,” I said. “What happened next?”

“We had two big banners that said, ‘People Before Profit!’ and ‘Water Cannot Be Sold!’ We went to the stage and covered the front of the stage with the banners and we started chanting ‘Water for life, not for profits.’ And then we just covered the whole platform. Nobody sees them again.”

What lingers and remains in our stories and lives when our clearest and most important memories of social justice are inseparable from performance? When performance is political and politics is defined and ordered through art? The beginnings of Al-Hassan’s commitment to equity and activism were through performance – reggae music and Bob Marley, school dramas and his teacher Suhuyini Mbang-ba.

The protest at the World Water Forum becomes a genealogical thread and testament of political beginnings expressed through performance and as a method of intervention and praxis. Al-Hassan’s narrative is another contribution to how performance and politics become reciprocal partners in generating and nurturing the social consciousness of a community of individuals, and how, in turn, these individuals and communities make more performances in the continuum and spiraling forward of social justice.

The performance at the World Water Forum was powerful because it was tactical at several levels. First, it relied heavily on *surprise* for its effectiveness. Surprise held a twofold purpose: it was both a maneuver to assure the activists would get into the space of the hall, and it was also a means to shock and therefore to bring greater attention to themselves. Surprise also served as an important device because it added to the quality of spectacle by startling and jolting the audience. To enact surprise is to harness attention. You can hardly look away at a surprise. When you are jolted, your attention

is focused and captured by the jolt. They needed to shock the audience into an entirely unexpected register and mode of attention, quite different from what was happening before they entered the hall. Without this initial shock, it would have been more difficult to punctuate the moment. As Al-Hassan stated, the activists wanted the “big shots” attending the meeting to be caught “unawares” to ironically provoke them into the greatest possible awareness of their presence.

Second, in succeeding to surprise the audience, the element of shock was complemented by a theatrics of *inversion*. The group of activists literally created a reversal of positions relative to controlling the discourse of water privatization and how that discourse was now framed. The gentleman from the World Bank who represents the most powerful economic institution in the world was now usurped by people who most likely will never possess, control, or manage an iota of the amount of capital he dealt with at the Bank. The tenacity and will of the activists displaced the speaker in an act where subaltern voices silenced – in a particular moment in time – a voice from the high ground of world finance. This inversion that contributed to “globalization from below” was no small inversion maneuver. The tactic also inverted the form and content of the discourse from speaker – audience to agitprop performance happening, full of the theatrics of costume, props, cues, dramatic effect, and the passion to reverse and reinvent power arrangements.

Third, inversion was enabled by *design* – a well conceived plan for a specific function and purpose. The performance was methodically arranged: from the coordination of what would be worn, the graphics of the “lie meter,” the synchronization of the ringing bells, the timing of the flashlight cues, to the climactic moment of mounting the stage and dropping the banner to literally and figuratively mask the panel as they “disappeared” from sight and hearing under the excessive appearance and boldness of the banner as both prop and signification of “water cannot be sold.”

The event and its components of *surprise*, *inversion*, and *design* transformed a diverse group of internationalists’ activists into a momentary community of mutually empowering comrades. The privatization ideology, by the sheer force of the performance, was suspended, relinquishing the last word to the activists. The event unleashed the possibility of more performance from below to be remembered and revived.

Bowan Mubarak, political economy, and everyday water rituals

My friend Bowan is to meet me in front of the ING office after my visit with Patience. I’m sitting on a concrete bench waiting for him to come up the



2.1: Al-Hassan speaking at a water rights meeting

road. It is a very clear and sunny day – not too hot – and my view from the bench is a typical admixture of sights and sounds for an Accra afternoon. A small lizard, her back a rainbow of orange, red, yellow, and brown stripes, keeps me company as she hurries back and forth playfully along the edge of the bench, stopping and starting again to look back at me. The yard in front is a spectrum of green light from the trees and bushes wrapped around the red dirt road leading out to the street. Across the street, towering above it, is a larger-than-life billboard sign of a black woman with long straightened hair and bright, pearly teeth. She is smiling and advertising hair relaxer. The street below is thick with traffic. Timeworn trucks, trotros, and taxis join old dilapidated cars and new expensive ones to meet at the stop light where street vendors and beggars converge hoping the riders will be generous enough and patient enough to spare them some change. I see Bowan walking up the road; I wave to him. It has been a while since I last saw him. Six months is too long to be away from Ghana. Bowan has casually told me his history before, but today we will talk in more detail and I will put his memories of water on tape. He takes a seat along the bench and we decide to remain outside under the backdrop of the shade trees, the little lizard, and Accra traffic. Bowan begins his water story with the death of his father in November 1982 and then his move shortly after to live with his grandmother.

“I lived in a house in a neighborhood where there was no running water. We had no running water in the house. We had no running water in the neighborhood. So we had to walk probably thirty minutes to get water. So every morning, as a child, I remember we would be woken up at 4 a.m. in the morning to go fetch water for the household. And getting to the point of water did not guarantee access to water.”

“How old were you when you had to get up at 4 a.m. to fetch water?” I asked.

“I was about nine. We withdrew water from a dam, an open dam ... an open dam which is open to cattle, open to pigs, open to all kinds of insects and reptiles, open to kids swimming in it. The water was treated with chlorine and chemicals. So that was the water we used to go fetch. You were just lucky that people who fell into those reservoirs from time to time did not have guinea worm. There are still people today that must walk to the dam and get water ... And it becomes more difficult during the dry season; the dry season is hot, less moisture is in the atmosphere, and sometimes these dams just dry up. So you must walk long distances to other dams that still have water in them. You fetch water from these dams, and it's like coffee with cream!”

“What do you mean?”

“It's like coffee with milk added.”

“It is brown water?”

“Yes, it's brown.”

Ghana is second only to the Sudan for guinea worm infection, and therefore it is an ongoing distress for people who fetch untreated water. This small parasitic worm, *Dracunculus medinensis*, grows and matures under human flesh. People become infected when they come into contact with water that contains a tiny flea infected with the larvae of the guinea worm. Immature worms pierce the intestinal wall and grow into adult worms and mate. The male worms die after mating, and the females travel through the body, maturing to a length as long as three feet. They usually research the lower limbs and settle just beneath the surface of the skin. The worms cause burning, swelling, and painful blisters. Those suffering with guinea worm will go into the water to ease the pain of the blisters, where the blisters burst releasing millions of larvae and another generation of worms. In the water, the larvae are swallowed by small water fleas, and the cycle is repeated.

In this water that Bowan walked miles to fetch were chemicals to treat bacteria from animals and waste matter, but the chemical treatment did not guarantee the absence of guinea worm. Sanitized water was pumped to

certain residential areas, but it usually did not reach all the areas due to the distance from the water source and the low pressure level of the pumps. As a result, some people walked to the central water-processing point to fetch water, where there was always a very long queue at the standpipe, even for those who arrived as early as 4 a.m. Many people spent their entire day waiting and did not get a bucket of water. Bowan did not want to miss school so he, like so many others who could not wait half the day for water at the central processing point, traveled to the reservoir to dig out buckets of “brown water.” The water problem was further compounded because many of the children could not reach it. They relied on adults who were willing to rope the buckets and take time to draw water for them. The reservoirs resembled large concrete boxes with a large opening at the top that were open to just about everything, even falling children.

“Children were always falling into the reservoir. Grownups that could see them jumped down and brought them out. I witnessed many kids of my age, at that time between nine, ten, eleven, twelve, and many adults falling in because you are bending over, struggling to draw water.”

“Yes and then those who fell would climb out and people still fetched water from the same source,” I said.

Bowan shook his head, saying, “People still fetch water from it and go home and this was the water we drank, this was the water we used for washing, this was the water we used for bathing, everything ... I couldn’t get morning sleep. I went to school very tired. The afternoon, when we closed at about one o’clock from school and went home, we went back again for water.”

“You’re going back to get water again the second time?” I asked.

“Yes, because you need to get water for the household and to live.”

Bowan was fortunate because he only had to walk about two miles back and forth twice a day. The journey to find water for many others across the global South is much further. This all changed for Bowan when he reached twelve years of age and went to live with his mother, a community health nurse and midwife in Paga. Bowan was relieved because there was a borehole nearby.

“I was so relieved, so, so relieved when you could just walk out and then draw water, come in, no queue, no struggles, and that was very comforting for me.”

But Bowan’s comfort and relief changed when he had to leave Paga and attend secondary school further away. There was only one borehole near the area of the school and all the students and the community members drew water from this same borehole. Other boreholes that were further away

from the school were not working, therefore all the residents were forced to go to the school's boreholes to fetch water. This meant 600 to 800 students drew water from the borehole as well as residents from the surrounding area. Bowan went back to the routine of his childhood. He would go in the early morning to queue and draw water or wait until midnight or past midnight when everyone else had gone to sleep.

"What made it even worse," said Bowan, "is that at the junior level in school you have to fetch water for your senior who is in the upper class and you have to fetch water for yourself. So at night, midnight, you had to go to the borehole, fetch water, come put it down for your senior, and then fetch one for yourself, and there were times the teachers would require that you fetch to their houses. So, after classes, you could fetch water to about three teachers. And each bucket of water you spent about an hour or two hours getting to the house of the teacher."

But everything changed for Bowan years later when he attended the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi. It was a different experience. He had running water *inside* for the first time.

"You could go to the shower ... shower in the morning, shower in the afternoon. Showers inside!!!! So we had running water and it was just amazing," said Bowan.

"You had a shower, but you didn't have hot water. You didn't care about it being cold all the time," I said.

"No. We didn't care that the water was not regular either. There were times when there wouldn't be any water for a day or two, but it was still an amazing experience to have flowing water inside. Getting water to run four days in a week was great – Ah, just like being in heaven."

I asked Bowan about harvesting water. He said he remembered during his childhood when his grandmother and many others tried to harvest water.

"We didn't have big reservoirs to store water that could last for even two weeks. We had smaller drums or containers in which you store water and we used this water for about a week or two. Then it would run out after that."

If you wanted to harvest the rain, it meant constructing a reservoir and many small families did not have the resources to build a reservoir that could hold water until the next rainy season. These families, if they could afford it, purchased several small drums that stored enough water for two weeks to a month, depending on the size and number of the drums. But they still worried about the dry season when they could not readily replenish the drums; moreover the drums could not hold the amount of water needed. There were a few families with roof gutters that collected water for storage

for six months, sometimes up to a year. The few families that had the resources for roof gutters sometimes sold their water to others who did not have the resources. But as Bowan said to me, “If they can walk within thirty minutes, a mile or two to get water from an open dam, ground water for free, why wouldn’t they walk? They would.”

A reflection ... a political economy of water

There are two questions that consistently arise when I talk about water in Ghana. First. What is government doing with all the money given to them in aid to provide water for their people? Second. Since the public water system is doing such a poor job in getting clean potable water to all its citizens, why shouldn’t they privatize? What must be understood is that public water systems are not without their own levels of corruption and incompetence, but these problems have been perpetuated and exacerbated in the push for privatization. It is a tragic contradiction that with more money and with more aid problems that were supposed to be solved have conversely magnified. I remember being in Ghana a year before I began preparations for *Water Rites* and asking Al-Hassan about the problem with the Ghana Water Company (GWC). For Al-Hassan and many others, the Ghana Water Company is not completely to blame. The problem can be traced back to the mid 1980s and early 1990s. The water company was in such debt from international loans it could not match the devaluation of Ghana currency with the interest from the loans – hundreds of millions of dollars. The government and GWC were so burdened by the loans, they could not invest the capital needed to develop and sustain the personnel and infrastructure to provide an effective water system. The government and World Bank called in a private company to manage water. “They made a bad situation worse,” according to Al-Hassan. GWC had its problems, but it was still coping, beginning to make progress step by step, despite its problems. But, through the conditions of the World Bank, the private company was called in to manage water. I remember Al-Hassan saying once, “They failed miserably. You give the public utility a bad name and then set out to hang it.”

When I asked why the private company failed, the general response was that they didn’t know what was needed or how to properly manage it. It seems that GWC may have had its problems dealing with training and expertise, developing infrastructure, and combating corruption, and certainly all this made progress slow, but they were still on a path, a path that was filled with obstacles but a path nonetheless that was building toward

something. But the privatization ideology intercepted progress in the name of “management” and it not only did not work. It made matters worse.⁵

Al-Hassan and other friends in the water movement feel the government under debt relief is creating a better situation in that they are coming clear of some of the strain and are therefore able to absolve some of the debt from GWC. However, they fear the conditions of much of this relief are to privatize through companies associated with the World Bank.

I remember saying to Al-Hassan that although debt relief is a good thing and a hard-won fight, the cynic in me can't help but feel like it is still so little so late. Al-Hassan replied by saying that “What is baffling is that this relief wasn't offered when the public company was struggling to manage the water system, before private companies with a World Bank mandate came in and made bigger problems. It is speculative economics; that is all it is, speculation.”

“Speculation,” I said, “isn't that a bad word?”

Al-Hassan took a deep breath and shook his head: “Running down countries and then turning around and trying to privatize. Privatization will work. It will work, and it will work very well, for some. The middle class and upper classes will get water seven days a week. The poor will not.”

The water activist Maggie Black states:

Public utilities have a poor record in the developing world for delivering water supplies and sanitation. In the early 1990s the idea that “water is an economic good” was co-opted by international exponents of the neoliberal agenda and their corporate allies. Privatization of utilities – and contracts to the burgeoning water industry – was supposed to make water services efficient and expanded to the poor. The strategy failed.⁶

What is a political economy of water relative to neoliberal policies? The ideology of neoliberalism is a belief system, a philosophy, and a body of ideas that neocons hold as right, true, and genuinely in the best interest of society. It is the way the world should work for all. It is the means to a better future for all. The ideology of neoliberalism is not intended to foster discrimination, oppression, or make the poor poorer. However, the problem is that the policies have done just that. The belief that rugged individualism and free markets will extend their reach and wealth will trickle down to those deserving and hardworking poor has not come to fruition. As neocons hold small government sacred, health, education, and subsistence for the poor are cut; as they revere private profit, industries are denaturalized, and protections for public utilities and native industries are deregulated; as they are devoted to free trade, the result is that corporate

monopolies grow while fair trade and tariffs that protect poorer countries are abandoned. There are three primary factors that undergird a political economy of water and become core issues for water democracy activists.

First. In the past, local water services used by the poor included small-scale, informal entrepreneurs such as donkey-cart sellers, flatbed water transporters, and various forms of communal water distribution. These modest means served local people long before structural adjustment programs and the push for corporate privatization; however, they are generally invisible and discounted in favor of an ideology of price-driven efficiency that promotes private ownership and good governance.⁷ Maggie Black asserts that “for all the billions of dollars the World Bank has invested in water supply and sanitation – about 14 percent of its budget since its inception – most of the benefits have accrued to transnational construction companies and the largest local industries.” She goes on to note that about “less than 1 percent has gone into small-scale ventures that do something for the seriously water and sanitation deprived.”⁸

Second. In the neoliberal push for good governance, a contradiction arises in that good governance “requires transparency, accountability, technical and bureaucratic expertise, as well as the power and authority of the State to regulate private companies in the interest of public good.” This is all obstructed by the machinations of corporate capital and its practices of rewarding certain amenable state officials and “undermining the State as guardian, regulator, service provider, and manager of its public water system.”⁹

Third. The poor and most deprived of water and sanitation have suffered the most over the past decades because, with increased cost recovery as a mandate for regulatory reform under privatization, profits must be made conditions of capitalism. Conditions under World Bank lending led to a 95 percent increase in water tariffs in May 2001.¹⁰ Tariff increases greatly affect poorer populations because their incomes already go disproportionately to pay for water. This increases the fear that unregulated privatization will result in water being denied the poor through profit-driven tariffication.¹¹

Planning the performance – Chapel Hill, North Carolina – March 2006

I hoped the performance would be one that inspired as well as disturbed how we think about water, the worldwide quest for water, and how the lack of it pervades the everyday lives of countless individuals on this planet. I hoped the performance would evocatively represent a semblance of what is felt, lived, and expressed through the narratives of Bowan and Al-Hassan

and so many others I met during my fieldwork. I hoped the performance would shed light on the forces of neoliberalism and local struggles for water justice. And, finally, from a group of students, I hoped to build a performance community. *Water Rites* was as much a pedagogical experiment for this group of students as it was a staged performance for an audience. My aim was to develop a performance community as they built a show. It was again the process/product dyad where the process is more the point – the journey over the destination. Therefore, the end product of the show would be only as good as what my students *learned* about water and how well and deeply felt they learned it *together*. Instead of director, I saw my role explicitly as a teacher–director. For a start this meant students must have a love affair with water during this process. They must acquaint themselves with water anew and differently with feelings of reverence and believing that water is precious. They must emotionally learn to love water. And, even more, they must care about how *each other* learns to love water before they can truthfully perform what is ultimately about the political economy of water: public water over private water; water as a human right over water as an economic good; the local donkey-cart seller over corporate business. Furthermore, I wanted the students to take a step beyond the “resource identity” attached to water in order to convey the view expressed by some water advocates that the discourse of resource with its history of conservation often neglects concerns of community access, questions of ownership, and the cultural practices and symbolic meanings of water.¹² Resource identity has become more and more problematic, particularly as it relates to water. We need to embrace water beyond the language of conservation.

The argument, according to Linton and many others in the water justice movement, is that water as resource grew out of the conservation movement and is therefore grounded in technical efficiency or the “gospel of efficiency” such that its disposition was rendered a technical rather than a political problem.

The ideology of progress dictates that what is seen as a more culturally sophisticated use of nature always trumps a less sophisticated use. This has two aspects: First, *when something is recognized by “us” as a resource, it gets taken away from others who are not smart enough or sophisticated enough to recognize its value in the same way that “we” do* [emphasis mine]. Second, when something is recognized as a resource, it is understood . . . and the practice of resource management is meant to ensure that it gets put to its most “economical” use.¹³

The students would enter the fuller realms of water beyond resource identity because they must enter the politically volatile machinations of water that are so often hidden by such discourse. But, even before the

politics and economy of water justice and injustice could be felt – embodied and performed – for the stage, I also wanted to offer another idea. It is the idea of water as sacred because, as Linton states, “if water is a sacred substance, a gift from God, a human right, lifeblood of the environment, it is likely to be respected and treated in a manner quite different from its treatment as raw material, a commodity, or a resource.”¹⁴ Margaret H. Ferris, the theologian and environmentalist, extends the idea of the sacred through her description of “Blue Theology,” stating that as Ecotheology asserts “the whole world is important and loved by God, Blue Theology identifies water as important and loved by God, both for its intrinsic value and also for its instrumental value to all creatures and ecological systems on Earth.” There are over 600 citations of water in the Old and New Testament in accounts of creation, flood narratives, the Exodus, the blessing of Baptism, women at the well, wanderers in the wilderness, and purification. As water is recorded as a blessing, its withdrawal is recorded as a curse or punishment. As a blessing, God provides water to the Israelites in the desert by commanding Moses to strike a rock so that water will pour out and save the people. Water is God’s gift that saves the people from certain death.¹⁵ However, the absence of water becomes a curse; if the Israelites betray God, he will “shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the land will yield no fruit; then you will perish quickly off the good land that the Lord is giving you.”¹⁶

In West African and black Diaspora beliefs of Yoruba religious tradition, water is to be revered as it holds all of creation in balance. Water is the perfect element in its power to sustain life, destroy life, and renew life. Water *is* life in Yoruba tradition and is characterized by the female energy and fecundity of specific orishas (or female deities). Angela Jackson beautifully illustrates the power of water, relative to Yoruba religion, in the play *Shango Diaspora*. A demoralized young woman named the “Water Girl” feels diminished and hopeless because she allowed herself to be overtaken by her love for Shango, the god of fire, who burned her, took her power, and left her broken and lost. The “Sisters of Sympathy” nurse her wounds and lead her on a journey to meet the “WaterMother” who is Yemoja. It is the WaterMother who reminds the Water Girl that she has a name and her name is Water, the Water names of the orishas: “Oba. Water. Oya. Water. Oshun. Water. Omi.” Yemoja, WaterMother, reminds the girl that she is water and can be more powerful than all the elements, even fire. Yemoja’s water awakening ceremony is also a naming ceremony. The Water Girl now knows herself and can claim the strength of her name: “Oba, Oya, Oshun, Omi or Ms.Waters!” As the ceremony comes to a close, the

transformed Ms. Waters turns to the WaterMother to claim her power, the power of water:

I am as you are. My face is your face. Your face is my power and my grace. I am a simple being believing in small rituals. Bathwater flung out of tubs into the streets of Soweto. The child's Saturday night gaiety, a lake in a cold flat. I am a simple being believing in small rituals. Lovers who bathe after Creation. Mine is a merciful killing/the cotton chillsoft cloth, unwanted kittens hidden in my blue velvet gelee. Out of each family I have taken a son, testing his method, his trim muscle against the drift, I taste his marrow. And hold his music in my eyes. Until I untie the tides and old slave bones sing while scavengers swoop and swallow songless air. Mine is a merciful killing. The serious suicide's quiet celebration. Ballooning lungs that fatten the chest to bursting. Feel the water fill the mouth. Feel the water fill the nostrils. Feel the water rise, cover the black iris of the eyes.¹⁷

This passage reflects black Diaspora life in relation to water as creation and death. Water is both minute and monumental in the everyday rhythms of black narrative and history. Jackson is marking water rites across time and geography: from the small innocence of urban child's play where bathwater becomes a lake in a cold flat to the monumental and "merciful killing" of Africans on trans-Atlantic slave ships. Water is mythic and water is life. The challenge is to teach about water as politics and survival as it resonates through the deeply spiritual and existential.

Performance journal: teaching about water

My fieldwork is based on the political economy of water in the context of the developing world. But the politics and economics of water are inseparable – in the field and on the stage – from water's mythic proportions within rituals of human survival and within ceremonies of cultural beliefs. In order for the performance to embody and perform the polemics of water justice, my students must begin by engaging the spirituality of water. They must begin by loving water.

Performance journal

January 17, 2006 – Tuesday evening at 12:40 am – after the second rehearsal
Before I can teach about the politics of water – I must teach about the spirit of Water. Before there is politics, I really believe there is the soul.

We are all water and water is all of us: water is living, changing, and responsive.

To believe this was the purpose of tonight's rehearsal.

A reflection ... the circle

There are eighteen of us. We are all sitting together on the floor in a large circle. The room is dark. On the floor in front of each of us is a candle. The only light in the room is the flame from each of our candles. I ask the performers to breathe deeply and look into the flame. I say to them: "Feel the quiet in the room and focus on the flame. Look into the light of the flame and how it moves against the darkness." I stop speaking and the room is quiet. We enjoy the quiet and the flame for a few more moments. I look around and the students are all focused, making the transition from the noisiness and busyness of the day into this temporality of a water rite rehearsal.

A reflection of a reflection ... what we must know about water

First: Water is ancient. Water is life. Water has a history older than humankind. We must never know a world without water.

Second: Water has long held spiritual value – rituals, ceremonies, and worship practices – the poetics of water to bless, to create, to change, and to transform. Water practices mark and generate cultural change.

Third: Water destroys: the flood, the storm, the oceans, rivers and lakes – water is to be feared.

Fourth: Odorless, colorless, flavorless. Two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen. Human beings cannot make water without the causes of nature. What other element can change itself into so many forms: vapor, ice, rain, snow, steam, crystal, fog, water ...

Fifth: The divine circularity of the hydrological cycles – the sun, the rain, the clouds, the earth, the rivers, the oceans in perfect rotation – if this perfect cycle were disrupted, it would destroy the planet more completely than the explosion of any nuclear arsenal.¹⁸

Sixth: Water is responsive. Water responds to human emotion.

In order for my students to care about water as a human right, in order for them to grasp the political economy of water, and in order for them to realize that water relates to the macro processes of nation states and global flows, they must value the small story. I want them to value how macro structures are so fully evident in the small stories that we tell of our lives. For this, politics must partner with emotion. To make a performance about the global politics of water, the cast must first enter deeply into the small stories and believe that water intrinsically matters.

From rumination back to reflection ...

I break the silence: "Please, look into the flame, be still, and feel quiet. Now close your eyes." Two advanced graduate students in performance studies,

Annis Clark (technical director) and Elizabeth Nelson (assistant director), were invaluable to the making of the performance read from Masaru Emoto's *The Hidden Message of Water*. I marked the section and asked them to alternate lines and passages.

ANNISSA Water takes in information. Water responds to information.

ELIZABETH The adult body is 70 percent water. At human conception, a fertilized egg is 96 percent water. At birth, the baby is 80 percent. As the child grows and develops, the percentage drops and stabilizes at 70 percent.

ANNISSA The fundamental principles of Hado medicine are vibrations and resonance. When the cellular vibrations in different parts of the body are disturbed due to various reasons, our body can make a wrong turn. When this situation occurs, a new external vibration can be given to the disturbed cell so as to resonate with it; thus, its intrinsic vibration is restored. This is Hado medicine in a nutshell.

ELIZABETH Water carries vibration, the source of energy.

ANNISSA A human body has many organs, which are made up of cells. Cells are made up of molecules, and molecules are made up of atoms, and atoms are made up of subatomic particles.

ELIZABETH A person is pronounced dead when the heart stops beating ... vibration is life itself.

ANNISSA In Japanese the KANJI character for life includes the part meaning "beating" connoting rhythm, vibration, wave fluctuation.

ELIZABETH Giving Attention is a Way of Giving Energy.

ANNISSA The hardest thing for life is to be ignored and given no attention.

ELIZABETH KOTODAMA – spirit of words.

ANNISSA MUNTU – power of words.

ELIZABETH Water is sensitive, and it responds to what we say. When we send good Hado to water by saying positive words to it, it will show us beautiful crystals. Also, our prayers send out energy and change the quality of the water. By offering prayers to water, we send Hado to the water, and such water gains the power to potentially answer our prayers.

ANNISSA Imagining means that we are praying for the final result. The image I am discussing here is our hope. It is a form of positive information. As we repeat information with strong words, water will naturally help us.

ELIZABETH I am not a man of religion, nor do I want to praise religions unnecessarily. However, the prayers used for a long time by a religion have strong Hado energy. If we pray and affirm undoubtedly, we will be blessed with a strong power.

ANNISSA Sound and Water – We are all water. Music affects the frequency (current, fluctuation, vibration) of water, this means that sound affects the frequency of water – sound affects the cells in our body that are made up of water.

ELIZABETH We must recover our desire to treat water with Respect.

ANNISSA If we dialogue with water lovingly and with respect, water will change. Water in your body will change.

ELIZABETH A woman named Kazue Kato was known as an activist of women's liberation and a politician in Japan. She lived to be 104 years old. In an interview on her hundredth birthday, she was asked, "What is your secret to longevity?" She answered, "I have ten experiences a day that touch my heart. That is my secret to longevity."

ANNISSA We must pay respect to water, feel love and gratitude, and receive vibrations with a positive attitude. Then water changes, you change, and I change. Because both you and I are water.

A transgression ... the field – Tamale, December 2004, with Iliasu Adam

I'm in Tamale, Northern Ghana and Iliasu has just arrived for a visit and to talk more about his development work building boreholes in communities across the Northern region. Yesterday evening he told me about the process of building boreholes and how his NGO employs the services of people with a special gift who communicate with water.

"Iliasu, tell me again about the water finders? Before you begin building pumps, you will employ the services of a waterfinder?"

"Yes, before we can build boreholes, we must locate the water underground. We ask the community about previous sources and then we rely on those individuals with natural body chemistry – those who respond to water. They hold a pendulum and find the water. They walk with a pendulum, and when he gets near water, the pendulum starts dangling; when he gets closer, it dangles more. When he reaches the nucleus of the water, it moves the fastest."

Intrigued, I asked, "A pendulum? How would you describe it?"

"It's a string with a small rock tied to it."

"A string and a rock."

"As far as I know," said Iliasu, "it is beyond scientific understanding, at least for now. There are some who don't use the rock and string. They use two sticks that they hold to their chest. When they come near a water source, the two sticks begin to move together ... when they walk closer and closer to the water, the sticks move closer together until they come together."

"This is extraordinary," I said. "This is the method you use to locate water for the boreholes?"

Iliasu said gently, “Some people have natural body chemistry. Water responds to them.”

“Water responds to them,” I said quietly.

“Yes,” he said. “Water responds to them and they respond to water.”

“This is the method that has worked through time,” I said.

With calm reassurance Iliasu said, “It works for us. We have built forty boreholes so far and it has worked thirty-nine times out of the forty. Some people have a God-given talent to communicate with water.”

“Yes,” I said. “I’m beginning to realize this.”

With a half-smile he said, “This is not science fiction. There is nothing supernatural. You must have the body chemistry. It is what some people do.”

An assertion ...

The performance must be a process of putting flesh onto the issues of water. We are performing embodied knowledges about water. This asserts, according to Bryant Alexander, “the body as a conduit of being, the body as the materiality of presence, the body as the nexus of need, and the body as a site of knowing.”¹⁹ Therefore, water as a resource is too incomplete to perform; water as politics needs beauty.



2.2: On the way to Savelugu

For performance, we must emotionalize water. Whether there is scientific evidence that water is responsive to human beings and language is not the point. Whether learning to love the intrinsic value of water is New Age or what some consider “tree-hugging silliness” is not the point. The point is for a political and beautiful performance about water, for all that water is inherently, in the course of human history and existence. The performance must capture water as life and that to love life is to love the divine gift of water.

End of journal.

A reflection ...

In the contested space of ethnographic inquiry there is a myriad of small stories located in the “everyday” and constituted by a political economy that cannot be ignored. These micro moments within the everyday – rituals of belonging, symbolic acts of resistance, customary gestures of affection, and the small stories circling within other small stories – ancient and new, written and told – bring not only flesh, blood, and bone to discourses of democracy, globalization, and empire, but they bring extended dimensions of accuracy, specificity, and passion to the macro economies of global networks. The performatives of feeling – sensing bodies and small stories can unlock the truths of material reality as much as (sometimes more than) focused examinations on the superstructures of state and nation. Therefore, in this sense, a political economy of water resonates with Foucault when he stated: “The control of society over individuals is not conducted only through consciousness or ideology but also in the body and with the body. For capitalist society biopolitics is most important, the biological, the somatic, the corporeal.”²⁰ He goes on to state, “The social body is comprised by power’s machine and developed in its virtuality.”²¹ The creation, accumulation, and distribution of wealth affects not only the operations of nations and states but the small, intimate spaces that shelter us, how we make culture, remember our past, and create our futures. In this day and age, can you be an economist without some basic understanding of culture and how it is produced? Can you be a cultural critic without some basic understanding of economics and the processes of political economy? Amílcar Cabral reminds us there is a “strong, dependent, and reciprocal relationship existing between the *cultural situation* and the *economic* (and political) *situation* in the behavior of human societies. In fact, culture is always in the life of a society (open or closed), the more or less conscious result of the economic and political activities of that society.”²²

Foucault and Cabral, biopolitics and embodied realities, culture and economy lead us to certain facts that are both political and emotional – macro and micro. The fact is that more than one billion people lack access to clean affordable water and about two billion lack access to sanitation. The fact is that in the urban areas of Ghana, only 40 percent of the population have a water tap that is flowing; 78 percent of the poor in urban areas do not have piped water. The fact is that treated water is available only to about 65 percent in urban areas and only about 35 percent in rural areas. The fact is that water-borne diseases kill one child every eight seconds and that in sub-Saharan Africa, 70 percent of deaths and diseases are due to the lack of clean and accessible water. The majority of women and children in rural areas travel miles in the morning and evening for water that remains infected with water-borne diseases. The World Health Organization reports that the daily requirement for water is twenty to forty liters a day per person. In Ghana, for those without a piped water system, purchasing three buckets or eighteen liters of water a day can cost between 10 and 20 percent of their daily income. The fact is that over 5 million people a year die from illnesses linked to unsafe drinking water, unclean domestic environments, and improper sanitation – they are mostly under five years of age. At any time over half the population of the developing world suffers from diseases associated with water and sanitation.

The field – the small story – December 2004 – Tamale, Ghana

Issah said he would pick me up from the lodge at about 9 a.m. so we could make our trip to Savelugu, a town about a thirty-minute drive from where I was staying in Tamale. Issah is always very prompt, so I rushed back to the lodge from my morning walk through the familiar roads and markets of Tamale to meet him. I got up early that morning. It had been over a year since I was in Northern Ghana alone. This is the part of the country I most want to return to when I am away, yet the people of Tamale and the Northern region are also the most disparaged of all the regions where I have worked, traveled, and lived in Ghana. The Northern area is known as the most economically deprived because of its history of being a labor camp during the colonial period where education, infrastructural development, and social services were nonexistent. The marginalization of the North and Northerners continued long after colonialism in the hearts and minds of what many Northerners refer to as “our friends in the South.”

When Issah arrived he was smiling. He had brought wedding pictures of him and his wife Rashida. They had been married for over a year and

although I had spoken with Rashida by telephone on several occasions, I had not met her in person. Issah was very proud to show me pictures of his wedding and his beautiful wife. His married life had not slowed down his activist work or his studies, but inspired him even more. Rashida was also committed to human rights work and was completing a Master's degree in Development Studies. Issah was still directing a steadfast and relentless campaign on the human rights of women and girls, teaching human rights awareness in the elementary and high schools to young children, intervening in domestic disputes, taking abusers to court, and completing his law school degree so he could better serve, as he says, "the rights of the most vulnerable – woman and children." I asked him how he was balancing being a relatively new husband, his activist work, and his law school studies. He said, "We must do what is needed." I remember speaking with Issah on my last trip to Ghana about his fight against female incision. Although rarely practiced in other parts of the country and outlawed by the state, there remain sections of the North where babies, young girls, and women are still being incised. Issah's first response was: "Female genital mutilation is what it should be called because females are being mutilated with such a practice."

I commented, "I know you are working hard to put an end to it."

"It must be stopped now. It is very, very painful. It does great harm and damage to the body. Some have gotten very, very sick and died."

"But how can you really stop it?"

"We live here. We are from here and because the community knows we defend the rights of women and girls, they will come to us for help when these mutilations occur or when they are about to occur. We also actively seek the people out who are doing this."

"What happens to them?"

"We try to talk to them. We try to teach the families and the practitioners about the harm caused. We wage a campaign to enlighten the community. But you must understand. FGM is against the law."

"Have there been cases where people went to jail?"

"If those who practice it refuse to listen and will not be convinced they are wrong. We report them to the authorities and seek justice. We try to teach them and indoctrinate them into a new understanding, but if they continue to mutilate females, then they must be punished."

"Can you remember a specific instance?"

"Yes. There was an old woman about seventy years. She had been mutilating females all her life. She knew no other way. It was tradition. For her it was the right thing to do. We tried and tried to enlighten her, but

she continued to practice FGM. We reported her, prosecuted her, and she went to prison. She was old, and didn't know any better, but she had to be punished because what she was doing is very harmful to females, to our culture, and the practice must be stopped."

"What happened to her?"

"We kept up with her in prison. We watched over her and continued to visit with her and rehabilitate her regarding FGM. She finally realized she must stop. The practice is against the law, and she had no other choice. She works for us now in the campaign. She is very good and credible in convincing other older women to stop the practice. We were successful with her in this instance, but we are not successful every time. There is much work to be done."

I gathered my bags and we headed out for Savelugu. The Northern region of Ghana is plagued with water problems related to sanitation, access, and distribution. The town of Savelugu has a population of about 20,000 and holds the highest infestation of guinea worm in the country. Guinea worm and other forms of sickness, death, and disease associated with water motivated the citizens of Savelugu to make a bold and courageous stand by taking control of their water system. This stand resulted in the people of Savelugu managing and distributing their own water. During the drive, I thought about the attention and international acclaim Savelugu had recently received for uniting their community and taking control of their own water distribution system. The Ghanaian cultural critic and documentary film-maker Kwesi Awusu had just completed a documentary commissioned by Oxfam International entitled *Water is Life*, examining the water crises in Ghana where the Savelugu story was prominently included. The film exposed, with clarity and force, the struggle for sanitation and for clean potable water in Ghana and included selected individuals who are at the forefront of the water struggle. When I spoke to Kwesi about the documentary, he told me that it was not an easy film to make because he wanted to tell a comprehensive story about water in Ghana that necessarily carried him to different parts of the country. He wanted the documentary to tell the urgent story, but it also needed to be hopeful in communicating the need to respond and effect change. He was inspired by what happened in Savelugu and wanted to present Savelugu's story of self-determination.

As we were nearing the town, I saw a hand-painted sign on the side of the road: "SAVELUGU." I asked Issah if we could stop so I could take a picture of it. As I was getting out of the car, an old man on a bicycle passed by; a child was riding on the handlebars. They waved and said "Savelugu." I wondered how many "abrunis" before me had stopped on the side of the

road to take a picture of the famous town that beat the system and, against all odds, took control of its own water. When I got back in the car, Issah told me we were going to the council hall to meet the head of the Water Board. Issah had also arranged for me to meet the rest of the Board members and the women who were in charge of distributing water at the standpipes.

“Don’t worry, I’ve arranged it. You will meet with all the people who had a major part in bringing water to Savelugu.”

When we reached the council hall we met the chairman of the Board, who greeted us. The chairman led us to a room where Issah and I were to meet three other members of the Water Board. The room was sparse, with one desk in the center of the floor and a few chairs. The electricity was not working that day, but the sun from the windows brought in a natural warm light. What I learned was that Savelugu did what so many other communities around the world hope for, and that is to control their own water. They mobilized themselves and formed the Savelugu Water Board, making sure community members were represented from all areas of the town to influence decisions and shape policy. After a decision is made, the Board must present it to the citizens for a vote. The Board developed a proposal and a clear design of how they planned to distribute water. They went to the Ghana Water Company and made arrangements for training and purchasing water in bulk. The Water Company benefited because they were getting paid up front while community members were responsible for their own distribution and pipes. All the Board wanted from the company was the water and the training. The next step was to make sure the pipes were built in very strategic locations to assure fair distribution. The local NGO Institute for Policy Alternatives²³ as well as international charities, such as UNICEF, GLOBAL 2000, and World Vision, were instrumental in obtaining the infrastructure the town needed to build the piping and the pump connecting the main water source to Savelugu. The charities also helped pay for the water company to train community members in the technologies of water and distribution. The Board then set up an “order of payment” to guarantee that everyone paid a small sum for their water and all monies paid went back into the system to sustain it. By taking over distribution, the people of Savelugu were able to save water and reduce waste. The Water Board, with community input, determined tariffs; moreover, the tariffs were cross-subsidized, making water affordable for everyone, even for the very poorest in the community.

I was told that their water distribution system was successful. But I must keep in mind that sometimes even with the standpipes there are times when the water does not flow.

This was startling. "I thought water flowed in Savelugu all the time now."

"No," said the chairman, "it only flows from the pipes at certain cycles. When it is our turn ... It is still better than it ever was before because before we relied only on the ponds for water. Now we can expect to get water from the pumps at least a few times a month and try to store it or harvest it from the rain when the pumps don't flow."

As the men left, three women entered. They had been waiting outside on the veranda. Mariama Alhassan, Mariama Seidu, and Afishetu Alhassan. Issah explained my work to them in Dagbani and why I was there in Savelugu.

"How is water distributed in Savelugu?" I asked.

Mrs. Seidu was quick to answer, "We have pipes placed at certain areas in the town. People have a schedule and a certain time that their family or a representative of their family can come to the pipes for water. Each family is allotted a certain amount of water, depending on how many of them are in the household. We must do this so everyone will have his or her fair share of water."

When community members come for water they are charged a specific tariff for the amount they need. Tariffs are then collected and recorded in a water accounting ledger. The family must then sign off for the water next to their name or mark. This procedure is to verify with the inspectors and the Water Board that the family has received their water and paid for it. To double-check the transaction, there is also a meter on the main pump into the town that indicates how much water has flowed from the pumps and how much money should have been collected.

"The three of you work at the pumps throughout the day?" I asked.

"We have shifts," said Mrs. Alhassan. "We are at the pumps for half the day and then the next half of the day the next person comes. We work in shifts and each distributor is responsible for the people getting the proper amount of water they need and paying the right price for it. We must make sure our books are accurate and true and that water is not wasted and that everyone who is supposed to get their water from the pipe, gets the water they need."

"Are there ever any problems with people not wanting to pay for water or trying to get more water than they are supposed to have?" I asked.

All the women then began looking at me amused and started shaking their heads: "No, no, no!" they exclaimed with humor and surprise.

"I know the tariffs are small but what if someone cannot afford to pay even the small price of the water?" I asked.

"They get the money from someone," said Mrs. Seidu. "Somebody will have it for them or they can get it from the Water Board ... this is not a

problem. It has not been a problem. People will pay for the water because the price is small and they budget for it.”

“What was it like before the pumps and before you distributed your own water?”

The women start laughing and shaking their heads. Mrs. Alhassan throws up her hands and speaks: “We spent all our time thinking about water. In the dry season, it was bad. We must worry about where to find it and how far we must walk to get it. We fetch water from the pond in the morning so our children can bathe and we can cook and clean for the day. We then go back to fetch at night so we can have it for the evening, for dinner, and for wash up. We worried about getting water all the time.”

Mrs. Seidu raises her skirt and shows me her guinea worm scar. I lean over and rub my hand against the scar. It has partially healed and left a raised discolored mark, like someone who has been deeply cut on the leg. She tells me, “I had guinea worm. Too many people around here get it from the pond water. I was sick for a long time. I got it from fetching water. We worry all the time about the children.”

Disturbed by the mark on her leg, I asked, “What would it be like for you if you had water *inside* your house all the time and it flowed hot and cold, and you could reach for the tap anytime you wanted it and get as much water – even hot water – whenever you wanted, right inside your own house?”

The women started laughing and clapping their hands. Mrs. Seidu stood up from the table and starting dancing. Mrs. Alhassan raised her voice and said, “I would not be sick! I would feel too good. No headaches, no worries. We would be too happy! Hah! Too happy, like the people in the city!”

SCENE TWO: THE SENSE OF BEING PRESENT

A way of life for the 20 percent of the earth’s people who use 80 percent of the planet’s resources will dispossess 80 percent of its people of their just share of the resources and eventually destroy the planet. We cannot survive as a species if greed is privileged and protected and the economics of the greedy set the rules for how we live and die.²⁴ (Vandana Shiva)

To create for the stage the living performances of everyday remembrances, imaginings, and deeply felt encounters of ethnographic fieldwork is a radical act of translation.²⁵ Doing performance ethnography is a radical act of translation because it not only constitutes the ethics and the responsibility of representation – “how a people are represented is how they are treated”²⁶ – the symbiotic relationship between macro and micro forces, the always

unresolved engagement with “Otherness,” the geopolitical gap between those of us who freely come and go and those who stay, but all this and more must be translated multi-dimensionally for the stage, in/for the public – a public translation which “the Other” more than likely will never cross the ocean to see. And at still another level of translation is the factor of verisimilitude. In the labor of staging ethnography, verisimilitude by replication is not the goal, but how well the enliveness of the metonym works, that is “reasoning part-to-part over synecdoche, reasoning part-to-whole.”²⁷

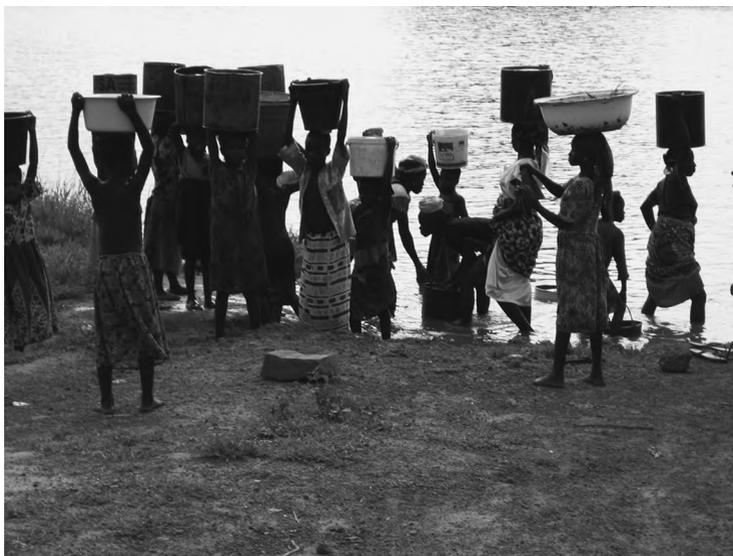
This means the idea of replicating what happened in the field must be replaced by the idea that the performance is actually comprised of and, in fact, can be understood as a metonym – I present to you but an element to represent a greater whole that is but a part of an even greater whole that is the world of the field. It is really about the metonym and how well we can re-present, embellish, and honor *elements* of that world – encapsulations and their reverberations – to make the audience feel a *sense of being present* within a greater part of a whole that is the dynamic experienced in the field. Therefore, my deepest ethical dilemma in staging ethnographic data is not the absence of the Other who cannot be there to see the show but how and by what means I can make the audience that *is* there feel a *sense of being present* with the Other in the Other’s actual absence. What metonymic elements within the thick description of ethnographic habitation and co-performance from a field far away can I create and stage to form a metonymic expression – a part of a world – that re-presents and represents the Other’s subjectivity and the social/political/psychological formations of that subjectivity beautifully, memorably, and disturbingly to the point where my audience feels present with Others in their world – in performance? Moreover, how can I create a performance where the audience is both inspired and disturbed by feeling/being present in that world? This ethnographic *sense of being present* is not the same but a complement to “theatrical presence”²⁸ – a shared temporality, an “aura” and vulnerability of aliveness, of being there together with the performers – this ethnographic presence is adding a *reversal* to theatrical presence. The live performance thrives on the shared space and time and the living moment between spectator and performers: *You are right here with me now, before my very eyes*. It also thrives on the transcendence of that very sharing of space and time: *You, the performer, exceed this common aliveness we share in space and time to become something and to do something extraordinary within the distinctive frame of a performance – the song, the dance, the story, the joke, the tightrope, the character – you are both here and not here*. And, finally, the live performance thrives on vulnerability and risk that the tension of the “here/not here” will

be shattered by the *mistake* – and therefore leaving us nervous – embarrassed – with only “the here.” *You cannot fumble a line, miss a step, forget the joke, fall from the tightrope, because you will shatter the “not here,” i.e., the extraordinary, the heightened mode of performance. We are spectators to the distinction of the “here/not here” and the promise that the distinction will remain intact, in place, and undisturbed.*

The reversal of theatrical presence is an ethnographic presence that brings to the “here/not here” the added spatial dimension of the “there.” The simultaneity of here/not here is augmented by another simultaneous aliveness of a shared time but of a different space, a space that is “over there” far from the theatre hall: *Your living world is represented here with me at this time and exists at this time that I sit here watching the performance; but you are not here in this space, you are there in that space – the there space of Ghana.* In other words, it is the theatrics of live performance that are employed to bring the “there” *here* so the audience may feel a sense of *being there*. *You are there far away right now; but, I feel a sense of being over there with you and being present there in your world as you are absent in mine.*

Being present, in this ethnographic sense, intensifies empathy by adding something more to “I feel your pain.” It is the sense of being transported to a place where you begin to feel the pain of a *location* – an affect of space. Because ethnography is always grounded in a specific “location” and what goes on inside that location, the place of that location becomes a “practiced space.”²⁹ From location to place to space comes a range of experiences, inventions, memories, and desires where human beings make a place into a space – a living organism comprised of immeasurable meaning and emotions.

In performance ethnography, we empathize with individuals in the spaces they help make and that in turn help make them. The ethnographic sense of presence is empathic in that you feel the joy and pain of individuals. Others are always and already attached to a space, the space that generates, affects, and harbors emotion. The space, therefore, is not a neutral place but an emotional landscape, an organism of human activity and emotion. To feel a sense of presence is to enter the myriad of yearnings that constitute a space. Also, this ethnographic *scene of being present* is not a move toward Derrida’s “metaphysics of presence”³⁰ as a hierarchy of truth, but toward an ephemeral moment where distinct pieces, distinct phenomena – metonymic ontologies – combine and converge to momentarily transport you to a time and space you have never been before and in a way that haunts you – in a way that impresses you.³¹ Epiphany is key here; *presence* is impressive because the convergence and arrangement of all elements in this moment



2.3: Women and children at pond fetching water in Savelugu

create a phenomenon – a complex of signification – that is particular to this convergence/arrangement, thereby invoking a new experience, a sudden understanding or realization that is quintessentially geographic. In the ethnographic sense of presence the realization is always linked to a new and different space, a different geography.

The performance – short of water

It was August 2005. Eight months had passed since my last visit to Savelugu with Issah in December of 2004. I returned to follow up on the progress of the water distribution system and to speak again with Mariama, Afishetu, and Mariama. Issah picked me up as usual that morning from the lodge. He had an even brighter smile on his face than at our last meeting in December. He told me the news that he and Rashida were expecting a baby.

With the good news, we set out for Savelugu. On the drive, we began talking about our last trip and the pride of the Savelugu community in managing their water system. We were both very interested to get back and witness how the town was succeeding since our last visit. When we finally arrived, we were told that “all the pumps were locked.” The water was not flowing from any of the pumps. People had gone back to the pond to fetch

water. What Issah and I discovered that August day when we arrived in Savelugu is captured in the following segment of *Water Rites*.

Staging the scene

Live footage and enlarged images of men, women, and children in action and fetching brown water from a pond are projected on the two large screens hanging upstage right and left of the stage. The footage being projected is the video recording I taped that day in August when Issah and I visited a pond in Savelugu. The large screens give the appearance of “framing” the stage and wrapping the audience inside the moving images so the audience feels the pervasiveness of the projections as if they are nearly inside the screen, inside the images and action being projected, giving them a *sense of being present* inside the pond.

There are two Recorders, R₁ and R₂, who narrate the actions unfolding that are simultaneously projected on the two screens.

- R₁ Issah and I are leaving Tamale on our way to Savelugu.
- R₂ The last time I was there it was still a model of community control. The people had negotiated with civil society, the public water company, and the government to take control of their own water.
- R₁ I am coming back now to see Mariama, Afishetu, and Mariama, women who worked at the pumps, overseeing the distribution of water.
- R₂ Issah and I arrive. The women have been waiting for me, and with smiles and laughter, they come to the car. We greet each other with warm embraces.
- R₁ In this moment it feels like there has been no passage of time between now and when I last saw them. It feels amazingly empowering to be here, with them, now.
- R₂ They want to take me to the water pumps right away.
- R₁ It is a bit odd to see the pumps before sitting down to talk. But I follow.
- R₂ Now I realize the urgency. The pumps are locked. There is no flowing water in any of the standpipes of Savelugu. The only available water is from the nearest pond or dam.
- R₁ We will go: Issah, Mariama, Afishetu, Mariama, and Mariama’s son Ibrahim – we will go to the pond. I want to see for myself how they collect their water – most of the people of Savelugu never had tap water in their homes or private bathrooms with flushing toilets.
- R₂ We arrive. We walk a small distance to the pond.
- R₁ On the way, I see a woman scooping water from a hole in the ground.

- R2 She has been scooping water from this small hole with quickness and determination, all the while being very careful not to spill the preciousness of her labor.
- R1 We walk further down the path and come to the pond. There are men, women, and children all gathered.
- R2 Three boys on a donkey are working feverishly hard filling large barrels with water they've tied to the donkey's back. They are going to sell the water for a small and reasonable price.
- R1 Enough for their labor and their lives and for those who do not come to the pond.
- R2 These boys fetch water from the pond six times a day.
- R1 When all the barrels are finally filled to capacity, they begin to pull the donkey out of the pond.
- R2 But the donkey cannot withstand the weight.
- R1 The donkey falls forward.
- R2 Water pours out from all the barrels.
- R1 & R2 (*Repeat in succession.*) The boys start again.
- R1 People gather at the pond: women with large buckets and plastic containers – some balancing the water on their heads, others on a long wooden cart –
- R2 There is a man with one arm who steps behind a container because he doesn't want me to see him fetch water –
- R1 There are small children who carry buckets half their size and double their weight – one child on one side of the bucket, another on the other side.
- R2 This water, here where I stand, every drop is a necessity for life.
- R1 This water that is valued here – that is the arbiter between life and death – is not clean.
- R2 It is mud-brown.
- R1 This water requires sterilization under fire in a large metal pot before it can be consumed.
- R2 Over 5 million people a year die from illnesses linked to unsafe drinking water, unclean domestic environments, and improper sanitation.
- R1 They are mostly under five years of age.
- R2 At any time over half the population in the developing world suffers from one or more of six diseases associated with water and sanitation.
- R1 Diarrhea.
- R2 Ascarsis.

- R1 Guinea worm.
- R2 Hookworm.
- R1 Schistosomiasis.
- R2 Trachoma.
- R1 Later that day, Iliasu came by my flat in Tamale.
- R2 I told him I had been to Savelugu earlier. I told him about the scene at the pond.
- R1 I told him that as we were leaving the pond – the irony of cosmic opposites boasted and teased because all of a sudden it began pouring down rain – loud and torrential rain.
- R2 Iliasu took a deep breath. He spoke about harvesting rainwater and the initiatives he and others were making to preserve water and build hand pumps.
- R1 I asked him what happened to Savelugu. During my last trip, the standpipes were flowing, but now they are locked. What happened to the local control and distribution of water that international water activists fight for and that Savelugu made happen? Is this what the down cycle is like when it is not Savelugu's turn for water?
- R2 Iliasu said: "It is not just communities, municipalities, and nation states gaining control and efficiency that are at the root of this problem of water.
- R1 The problem is Development and the effects the global economy has on Development.
- R2 You can't talk about getting at the root cause of water unless you are ready to talk about global capitalism.
- R1 And about ownership, distribution, and profit on an international scale.
- R2 Iliasu said: "We don't have water in Savelugu because to service this region of Ghana equitably and fairly
- R1 it will take 14 million gallons of water a day
- R2 and three major artery pumps connected to one of Ghana's main water sources.
- R1 Right now he said:
- R2 Two pumps together supplied 4.5 million gallons of water (*Pause*) but only one pump is working.
- R1 We are one pump
- R2 and over 2 million gallons
- R1 short of water
- R2 short of water.

Both the images and sounds from the pond filled the theatre. The voices of men, women, and children were heard as well as the sounds of water splashing and being scooped and poured. The projection of the boys at the pond that day with their donkey filling up large barrels of mud-brown pond water was displayed larger than life on the two screens. As the audience listened to the varying sounds of the pond and the narration of that moment by the Recorders, they also watched, on screen, the three boys struggle to steady the donkey as they tied large barrels on the donkey's back. They saw the boys cover the large barrels with plastic and tie a string around them. They witnessed the boys struggle to pull the donkey out of the water. Then the donkey's leg buckled under from the pressure and he fell as water poured out from the barrel. They witnessed the boys start all over again. Watching the audience watching the pond at Savelugu felt surreal as though I was not only "here/not here/there" but also "here again" inside the "there" moments of the pond – in addition to the "here/not here" of live performance, and *a sense of being present* in the "there" moments of the pond at Savelugu, I kept remembering back to the day I was *actually there* and how it felt to be there for the first time, in that original moment. It was during the final performances when I began to realize and pay attention to the double sensation of *a sense of being there*, both within the immediacy of the audience and the *remembrance of being there* at the pond. I also realized that what I hoped for the audience is what we hope for in the work of performance ethnography, is that the audience feels some semblance, some fragment, some *sense*, of what it felt like for you when you were *inside* the "there."

The field picking up where the performance ends – August 2004

When we all returned from the pond and the rain started to pour, Mariama, Afishetu, and Mariama told Issah and me to go on ahead; they would meet us back at the center shortly. There was something they needed to do. Issah and I stood at the door. It was raining down sheets of water; you could hardly see in front of you because the pouring rain cast a blurry haze upon everything. The irony of fetching water from a dirty pond and floods of rainwater unabashedly pouring down before me was incomprehensible as we stood at the door. The rain was loud and angry and seemed to beat down on the concrete surface of the veranda with a vengeance.

On the drive back from Savelugu, Issah looked straight ahead at the road. We were both uncharacteristically quiet on the way back to Tamale. When there is so much to consider, when an experience catches you off guard and expectations have turned into a lingering and sad wanting, sometimes the

weight of quietness grips you and it is all that you can give in those moments. Issah was deep in thought at the wheel of the car. We had been riding for about ten minutes without speaking when Issah softly spoke as though we were in the middle of a conversation – the silent conversation we were both having in our heads:

“Water is rationed between Savelugu and Tamale, and it’s being rationed between the surrounding towns. There are competing demands for water. Savelugu can claim some amount of water but not enough for everyone. Each town and community is rationed a portion of water. They give a portion to one place at one period of time and another place at a different period of time. The places take turns for water. It is a problem of low pressure. Those areas that are uphill and further away from the booster station are suffering. It is difficult to pump water to those areas. The pressure is too low. The machinery does not have the capacity to pump enough water to those areas.”

“What will it take to get the infrastructure or the machines that are needed?”

“It will take the will of the government to do what needs to be done. They need to set priorities. Water needs to be a priority.”

“Do you think if they privatize people of Savelugu will get water consistently?”

“No. The people of Savelugu will not be able to afford the tariffs private companies will charge, besides government must be made to do what is right and necessary to provide the people with water. Water is a human right. Nobody should take over the public access and management of public water but the public. The government must assure that all of its people have the right to water. Water is life and not a profit-making commodity.”

As we were pulling up to the lodge, it was still pouring down rain, and I suddenly realized why the women had asked us to go on ahead. It was so they could gather buckets to harvest the rain water.

Iliasu’s visit

Later that night, as I was waiting for Iliasu to come for a visit so we could talk more about water, I was still thinking about the difference between my very first trip to Savelugu and the irony of the rain that morning. I wrote my thoughts in my field journal:

Savelugu won their water battle, it was proof that privatization was not the ultimate remedy for efficiency and getting water to people, but today people were at the pond fetching dirty water ... two pumps and 10 million gallons short of water is yet another world water travesty. The people of Savelugu did all they could do to get water to their town. They did it step by step, methodically, and they put their plan

in motion. It was like clockwork and people were getting the water they needed. Something is very, very wrong.

When Iliasu finally arrived, I shared the thoughts of my journal entry with him, and he calmly responded by saying “Yes. This is why you cannot separate water from the politics of development.”

“What do you mean?”

“First, as a nation we must stop dealing in party politics – partisan politics. One president gets in office with his people and he changes the plans and operations of the fellow before him. We cannot make sustained progress if we do not have stable governance to address issues like water. This party rivalry is making our people suffer and the government useless to the people whose security depends on it, like the security of access to water. We need continuity and a consistent commitment to set forth a development agenda. Not a government in flux with plans that is here today and gone tomorrow. Government must make a serious long-range commitment to issues of development in this country, and water is just one of the issues.”

“How is this done?”

“We need experts from all the parties to come together. Experts must come together in specific fields such as health care, education, and water. Each field meets and shares ideas with other experts in that field – no matter their party affiliation or what region of the country they come from. They must all bring their knowledge together at the table and develop a plan. They must then develop a course and strategy of how the plan will be implemented. If they need more experts to do this, then they seek greater advice and counsel. But all this takes people coming together with the expertise and crossing party lines.”

“Government needs to bring experts together like the people of Savelugu did when they planed their agenda for water?”

Iliasu is adamant, “It is a development problem. Government must address it within a larger development agenda.”

“If they don’t get it right, would you be in favor of privatization?” I asked, knowing the answer but wanting to hear it in Iliasu’s own words.

He spoke strongly, “Privatization will never work in Ghana. It has failed in other parts of the world. It is not an option. We have a government and a public utilities system that we must make accountable.”

The performance – the donkey-cart seller

The performance intends to personalize young men who sell water by situating them as subjects within their own story and narrative history.

This donkey-cart seller is a composite character named Ibrahim who gives us a glimpse of what it means to sell water from the back of a donkey. I wrote the Ibrahim monologue from information and experiences gathered in the field over the years pertaining to donkey-cart sellers, guinea worm, and how families manage through the perils of water access. The small story of Ibrahim brought a name, history, desire, and specificity to the prior image of the boy on screen. It was intended to more fully narrate and imagine the inner lives of those who sell water off the backs of donkeys and the consequences of their labor.

Staging the scene

Projected on the two large screens are four sequential images from photographs I took that day at the pond of a young donkey-cart seller. He is a boy about the age of fourteen years. In various images he stands with his donkey. Each image fades into the next as the following monologue is performed. The character, Ibrahim, stands on a platform just below the screen. His shadow is cast over half the screen. The second screen projects the same sequence of images, and seated below it are R1 and R2 focused on the screen as they take notes in their journals. The boy Ibrahim enters the platform upstage left and speaks.

My name is Ibrahim, I'm from Savelugu,
 I'm fourteen years old and I sell water.
 I'm what the people call a "donkey-cart water seller."
 I go down to the pond every day with my donkey and I fetch water.
 My younger brother goes with me.
 We travel about five miles every day, back and forth, to the pond.
 We sell water to the people here.
 There are other donkey-cart water sellers, but *we* are the best!
 Some of the old people and the sick people can't carry the water or walk to
 fetch it;
 And the people who take care of them are too busy – the pond is too far!
 Sometimes the pond will dry up, and we have to search for water.
 My brothers and me are very, very happy because we have our own donkey.
 We are blessed to have this donkey.
 We get up in the morning before the sun and we get a rope and we tie the
 rope to many, many buckets around the donkey's back. Then we start
 our first walk to the pond.
 Me, my brother, and the donkey get inside the pond where the water is full
 and plenty.

My brother fills up the bowls and pours water in the buckets that we have fastened to the donkey's back. I hold the donkey very, very carefully so the donkey won't slide and fall down and spill the water back into the pond.

The water is heavy.

My brother pours and pours and I hold on ...

When the buckets are all filled and my little brother's back is tired, we leave the pond.

We start the journey with our donkey to sell water to the people who need it.

When the water is sold, we go back to the pond and we start all over again ...

I hold onto the donkey and my brother fills up the buckets.

We fetch water from the pond six times a day.

My mother worries that my brother and me will get the guinea worm from the water.

Many people around here have gotten guinea worm from the water.

But we have not gotten any guinea worm, not yet.

My mother has guinea worm and my little sister.

My little sister was sick for a long, long time.

You are very blessed when you don't get guinea worm because you can keep working and fetching water and making money to live.

They pulled the worm out of my little sister's leg and in a few days she felt better.

Oh, it was a big, long guinea worm.

It looked longer and bigger than my little sister's leg.

My mother said she could not fetch water anymore. So, it's just my brother and me.

If I get guinea worm, I will worry.

Who will hold the donkey?

My mother told me that when she was a young girl they had plenty, plenty water –

Water flowed from the pipes. Oh! From the pipes, everyday!

They bathed, and washed, and drank, and never got sick –

No tired back, no guinea worm, no worry.

When my mother was a young girl fresh, clean water flowed from the pipes.

Not any more.

The pond scene was a community water rite. It was embodied and embedded in the practices of daily life. It was simultaneously routine,

extraordinary, ludic, and tragic. One must fetch water every day – several times in a day – because one must also stay alive. This is not a matter of choice, and, as a result, it is both routine and monumental. The pond is a survival point, and its extraordinary routine-ness requires daily rituals where friendship, familiarity, and play take form. I witnessed children playing together, women joyfully sharing local stories, men jokingly competing for the attention of women. In this presence of the ludic is the tragic: guinea worm, the dry season, brown water, and the endless burden of worrying about access to water and the toll it takes on one's body and one's mind. It brings us back to the small and monumental story in performance that serves as the metonym for the weight of water in Savelugu and the innumerable ponds across the globe.

The day Issah and I went to the pond there was a group of women that arrived with a flat-board wagon they pulled to the pond, carrying two large metal barrels of water. As they pulled the flat-board closer to the edge of the pond, two other women spotted them ahead. They waved to the women pulling the load and began laughing and talking. The two ran to the sides of the board to help the other women bring the barrels in closer to the water. All the women were laughing and talking as they pulled the flat-board along the water's edge. Two of the women who pulled the flat-board wagon climbed up on the board and circled around the larger barrels on top. The other two women went knee-deep into the pond each with plastic buckets they filled with water and then handed them to the women standing on the board. The four women, in repetitive and rhythmic motion of bending, filling, lifting, and pouring, were talking and laughing with each other throughout their labor. They spotted me with my camera and then started shaking their heads and pointing with more laughter, in a gesture I interpreted as, "Isn't she silly." I smiled at them, shook my head, and shrugged my shoulders in a gesture of "Yes, I do feel silly with this camera and these bags, losing balance and tripping over my feet with every step, as you work pulling flat-board wagons and pouring water to live." I shrugged my shoulders and put the camera down. They saw my embarrassment, then waved at me, smiled, and immediately went back to their lifting, pouring, and conversation. When the man with one arm saw me and hid behind a cart, I put my camera away and asked Issah to let him know the camera was now packed away. He came out from behind the water cart and began fetching water with the other men who then started joking with him for hiding from the camera. He began laughing with the men, then he smiled and nodded his head at me in appreciation for putting away the camera. It was one of those moments where the ethnographer feels foolish and small

and foreign against the magnitude of what Others must do within the challenges and demands of their home places. At this writing, the man who did not want to be seen on camera is more than likely still fetching water from the pond, and the women are more than likely still pulling enormously heavy flat-board wagons, and the donkey is more than likely still stumbling under the weight of water when the pipes are locked in Savelugu. Or am I guilty, in the sentiment of Johannes Fabian, of *fixing the Other in Time*? The imperialist gaze that denies coevalness, agency, and a living dynamic presence of the Other is beyond the stagnant moment of the ethnographic report and observation. Right now I might also discuss the noble purpose of my work that requires that I carry a camera, or I might write on and on to demonstrate how self-reflexive I am about my positionality and the very, very fraught and complicated presence of “the camera” in fieldwork, but I cannot because who I am and why I was there on that day still feels small and awkward – even now in the memory of that very particular moment as people fetch and worry over water for their survival.

My *sense of being present* at the pond, when the women pointed and laughed and when the man with one arm hid behind a water container, was overcome by feelings of awkwardness and embarrassment for what felt like the spectacle of my video camera and the canvas bag dangling across my shoulder bursting with field journals, tape recorders, sunglasses, maps, and insect repellent – the intrusive voyeur making exotica of a people’s everyday survival practices. As the donkey could no longer hold the weight of the water and the barrel spilled from the wagon, the only assistance I offered was to tape-record it for visual consumption for an academic audience thousands of miles away.

It is the body-to-body engagement in the field that is the mark of ethnographic method in all its entanglements of necessity and purpose on one hand and awkwardness and shame on the other. I did feel shame when the man seeing me wanted to hide: it was his shame for having one arm to fetch water, and it was my shame for making him feel ashamed. As ethnographers we understand we must carry our camera and our fieldwork gear on our body. It comes with the territory. We are in the field to do good work. We want to feel that our work matters. But those moments of “feeling like a fool”³² always slip in and out of our work, just as those slippery moments of inspiration and purposefulness do. Feeling like a fool and feeling purposeful will alternate like waves, in varying levels and tensions, one upon the other. But what is for sure is that in fieldwork one must live with both – feeling foolish and feeling inspired. The tension must always remain unresolved because it is that very tension that keeps us circumspect

about our intrusions, and concerned that our voyeurism is not gratuitous. Feeling like a fool and shame prevent our purposeful aims and our heartfelt inspiration from being grander or more sought out than the well-being of the Othered lives we interact with body to body.

The very tension between shame and purposefulness that is not simply unresolved but required for the ethnographer is the opposite case for the audience and reader. Because, in the ethnographic *sense of being present*, we hope to “transport” the audience from here to there, we do not want them to feel like fools or feel ashamed for *being there*. I do not want my audience to feel like intrusive voyeurs. However, for me, I know these tensions keep me mindful of the dignity of the people who belong to a place because if I am not conscious of what it feels like to be foolish, if I am oblivious to feelings of shame, what will prevent me from producing representations and performances that are foolish and shameful? I am acutely aware of the fact that I have felt ashamed in the field and I have felt foolish, and I try to pay attention to the oncoming threats of each so I don’t fall over the edge of either – sometimes I lose balance and fall, and sometimes I maintain my balance and continue cautiously along the edge. When these moments occur it is this acute awareness that causes me to pay even greater attention to how I am representing Others in my work, in what form and by what means. There can be no image anywhere in my work of the man who hid behind the container; it would shame him and, as a result, it would shame me and my audience. However, there is a different ethical choice as it relates to feeling like a fool. I will represent work that casts me as a fool, if it sheds greater light on Others, on my purpose, or on *the sense of being present*, because I am ultimately in control and responsible for all three. I determine which is the priority – a foolish representation of myself for the greater aims of purpose and a *sense of being present*. I hold the authority to make the choice. But to use my authority as ethnographer/director to present Others as foolish, or to cause my audience to feel foolish as witnesses would be ethically problematic and, moreover, it would be a performance failure. The ethnographic sense of being present is to travel to another world (inside the temporality of performance) without shame and without feeling foolish (at least in this instance) because the aim is empathy and a sense of what it means to belong there, in that location. The ethnographic sense of being present is ultimately about a *simulation* of belonging. The simulation of belonging is a glimpse, a remnant, a fleeting sensation of what it means to fetch water all morning with your donkey and then pull the stumbling donkey from mud-brown water as your labor spills back into the pond and you must start all over again. The simulation enters into what it means to

worry about getting sick with guinea worm at fourteen years old because you can't miss a day of fetching water. An unencumbered path from the ethnographer's foolishness, awkwardness, and shame must be cleared away for empathy and for the audience to embrace simulations of belonging at the pond that day.

SCENE THREE: THE AIM TO PROVOKE

The big question is: Should water be available and affordable to all or affordable only to a few privileged households? It is feared that the privatization of water, if not carefully managed, can result in water being denied the poor through profit-driven tariffication ... those in favor of privatization have argued that most Ghanaians are willing to pay for good water but this argument misses the crucial point, which is that most Ghanaians may be willing to pay but they cannot afford to pay! OUR MINDS SHOULD FOCUS ON AFFORDABILITY NOT WILLINGNESS!! In poor areas ... shallow hand-dug wells have become important sources of drinking water. Some of these wells are situated near large open drains and some are very close to pit latrines with a high possibility of leakage and seepage. In the cities, the poor are not unaware of the health implications of drinking water from shallow wells but, given the current tariff levels, they hardly have any choice. In rural areas, even among a few communities that have access to boreholes for their water supply, many have gone back to the use of river water, stagnant ponds, and shallow untreated hand-dug wells because of the prohibitive maintenance and operation costs that these communities are expected to bear through the imposition of user fees.³³

(Rudolf Amenga-Etego)

From *the sense of being present*, we now move to *the aim to provoke* that comes with un-ease and a desire to "respond back" at what is being presented before us. It was time to contrast two worlds of water consumption and the implications of different water cultures: how some get their drinking water from a dirty pond is very different from how some of us get it from bottled water. Just as the pond scene reflected how drinking water is consumed in one part of the world, it was time to make a contrast with how drinking water is consumed in another part of the world. The performance was going to address the idea of different water cultures and the problem of inequity.

Water cultures involve day-to-day experiences that include physical spaces, objects, and bodies that constitute patterns of use or inconspicuous consumption. Water cultures involve people's habits and expectations, as well as their emotional, affective, aesthetic, and spiritual values and beliefs, like washing a baby in the public market, fetching water from a local pond, or pulling fallen children from a well. As the extraordinary (un)spectacular dimensions of daily life – the small stories – were performed onstage and in

the field, they were also specific “rituals of water use that have become, to a great extent, routine, inconspicuous consumption.”³⁴

The comparison between “first” world and “third” world water is both striking and ironic. The plastic water bottle of the former in contrast to the community standpipe of the latter (or the pond, or whatever it takes to harvest water during the rainy season) are worlds apart. This is also true in many cases with the developing-world city versus the developing-world village. The irony is that the semiotics of the water bottle industry attempt to give the illusion of a natural source – a spring, well, or pond in a mysterious place, i.e., the illusion of an original water source deriving directly from nature that is earthly pure and crystal-mountain pristine – which masks the hidden abode of corporate processes and profit.

The glass and plastic bottles that hold the *illusion* of a natural source are at one end of the water spectrum while guinea-worm-infested ponds that are the *reality* of a natural source are at the other. The “nature” illusion of the former constitutes labor processes of management, marketing, and profit, while the “nature” reality of the latter constitutes labor processes of finding, fetching, loss, and disease.

The performance intended to represent and trouble the idea of nature’s water source coming from a bottle by presenting water as an embryonic force of creation, a mystic ideal of nature, and a desired commodity.

In one scene from *Water Rites*, sounds of water splashing rise and the Savelugu pond is projected on both screens. As the sounds of water rise to a high pitch, the actors onstage simultaneously rise from their islands as if they were moving through water. Feeling the opposing force of the water, the actors rise and begin to search among countless plastic water bottles covering the stage floor. Each actor is sorting and searching among the various bottles to find the *special one* that will take them back to the natural spring – a utopian water haven. They read the various labels on the bottles and examine the size and shape of the bottles until they find the one they want. When each actor finds the “right” water bottle, they reach to the floor against the force of the water and lie down on the stage floor holding the bottle in various semi-fetal positions with their backs to the audience, resting in the womb of water.

The actors moved through water to convey its cosmic force and how we are encompassed by water in the womb before birth, as well as by rivers, lakes, and oceans on earth. The search for the water bottles juxtaposed water as a natural force in contrast to the commercialism (and elitism) of water bottle brands. The image of the actors lying on the stage floor – or at the bottom of the ocean – holding the water bottles in a fetal position brings the

audience back to the stark contrast between the dependence of the planet on water, for life and human conception on one hand, and the “evolution” of water in capitalist production in the desire to buy purified water for health or as a convenient luxury on the other.

The performance – the three myths of privatization

The stage is set with two islands. One island is juxtaposed or in contrast to the other to give the effect of opposites. On the island stage right, projected on the screen is a powerpoint demonstration entitled “Three Myths of Privatization.” A male character, Mr. Big, representing corporate water business, stands on a platform just downstage of the powerpoint image. Mr. Big is standing in position ready to give his powerpoint presentation on the Myths of Privatization. Sitting in a circle below Mr. Big are enthusiastic but rather recalcitrant students. The young students are confused by Mr. Big’s presentation and ask him a series of questions. They are eager to learn but need clarification on the many contradictions within Mr. Big’s presentation. Standing stage right of Mr. Big is his sentinel. The sentinel is a fierce and ominous-looking character. She gives the appearance of being more threatening than Mr. Big. When the students begin to frustrate Mr. Big with their questions, Mr. Big signals to the sentinel to stop them. She stops them by giving them a look and a gesture to sit down. This is enough for them to sit back down and keep quiet, for they fear her power even more than they fear Mr. Big. The scene is performed with great exaggeration.

MR. BIG Good Evening. My Name is Mr. Big. Tonight I shall present for you *THE THREE MYTHS OF P-R-I-V-A-T-I-Z-A-T-I-O-N*. Let me introduce myself. My name is “humanity.” I am a human being. I believe that all human beings have the right to life, to liberty, and to *WATER* ... Water ... I love water. I think all God’s children should have water. God and I have a lot in common. We are both *providers*. God provides the water but not the pipes.

Then I step in as your Pipe-Provider: Great BIG Pipes with great BIG Water.

Clean, safe, *AFFORDABLE* water. I believe that water is a human right. And because it is a human right, I believe in the sanctity, the efficiency, and the humanity of *ownership* and the private sector. (*Interruption*)

TRACY A. Mr. Big, oh Mr. Big: You mean “privatization”?

MR. BIG Well, yes. Of course, this is a presentation on *THE THREE MYTHS OF PRIVATIZATION!*

TRACY A. (*Very rebellious against Mr. Big*) This provocation that is privatization. The public sector demands people before profit 'cause price is the pollution in these water wars. Water lords juxtaposed with water serfs. We must recover our desire to treat water with respect!

MR. BIG (*Looking down on her with disdain*) YOU ARE A PROBLEM.

TRACY A (*Still talking back*) Right side, cold water! Left side, hot!

(*The sentinel snaps her fingers and gives Tracy a threatening stare. Tracy reluctantly sits down.*)

MR. BIG (*Straightens himself up and gets back into "presentation mode."*) Privatization is a *complex* phenomenon. Water is a *complex* phenomenon. BUT! When we put them together – oh, it is oh so *easy*.
(*A second interruption*)

ASHLEY (*Earnestly concerned and frustrated*) They say that one third of Africa's people live under scarce water conditions. They say that thirty liters of water a day is what you need to survive. And then they tell me that the average US citizen uses five hundred liters of water a day? What is wrong with my country I wonder? They say that sanitation is the key. They say that 80 percent of sickness comes from water. They say that in certain areas 80 percent of the pollution destroying water comes from untreated human wastes!

MR. BIG (*Jumps to console her.*) Of course it is terrible! terrible! terrible! This is why we must help those people, make life better for them. I know what is best for them.

ASHLEY (*Interrupting*) But Mr. Big, oh, Mr. Big –

MR. BIG Too many questions. (*Sentinel steps out and stares at Ashley. Ashley is intimidated by her presence and sits back down.*) I shall now recite the *THE THREE MYTHS OF PRIVITIZATION!* MYTH NUMBER ONE: "PROFIT BEFORE PEOPLE." Reeecidulous! We believe in EFFICIENCY! – Organized water delivery driven by the competitive forces of the market. In Privatization, Efficiency is not an *option* – it's a *requirement*. When people can't develop and manage their own water systems – we develop and manage for them! *Efficiency* – it makes everyone happy! And they will thank us for it! Cherry Picking? Did I hear someone say Cherry Picking – giving to the rich who can pay, only to take from the poor who cannot – oh! Not nice AT All! Never!

SHANNON (*Interrupts very meekly.*) But what about the shareholders! Don't, don't they de-de-demand a profit?

MR. BIG (*Barks back!*) Are you being difficult, Young Lady?

SHANNON (*Startled by his anger*) Oh, nononononononono!

MR. BIG I will not answer that on the grounds that it may intimidate me!

KERSTIN (*Recalcitrant and forceful*) The fundamental issue is that the poor are not profitable. God provided the water but not the pipes. Not to be confused with God, but that pyramid of power, those big rich countries, that WTO, that IMF, they swoop in with their pipes and their pumps and their technology and INSIST that THIS is the way to do it. Don't get in our way, or we will mess you up! You want help? Here it is. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth my friend because this horse is sick and untrustworthy, but it's a horse nonetheless. (*Sentinel steps forward ... Kerstin sits down.*)

MR. BIG (*Ignoring Kerstin*) MYTH NUMBER TWO: LACK OF TRANSPARENCY. Hah! As if I had anything to hide! We have been accused of making private agreements with governments and politicians. We have been accused of not listening to the LOCAL people, not recognizing their own local water systems, or not including them in negotiations, OF NOT BEING DEMOCRATIC!!!

CRISTINA G (*Stands up and speaks boldly.*) Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink ... el agua es del pueblo, carajo! The water's of the people, dammit!! (*Sentinel steps toward Cristina, and she sits.*)

MR. BIG MYTH NUMBER THREE: CONDITIONALITIES. Number three is a terrible, terrible myth – we have been accused of attaching “strings” to international aid, to loans, to debt relief – they accuse us of such crass, such miserable, such deplorable methods of *forcibly* implementing water privatization. As if anyone *wouldn't* want to privatize in the first place. They say we demand water privatization in return for aid, debt relief, loans ... oh, the things we have to put up with ...

MELORA (*Frustrated with the sentinel and Mr. Big, Melora rises and speaks.*) But wait! There is something wrong here! You are not telling the whole truth! There is more to ...

(The others join Melora and speak in protest at Mr. Big's presentation. They are about to rise from their seats. The powerpoint presentation ends. The sentinel signals for Mr. Big to leave, and he runs off the stage. The sentinel stands on the platform and takes his place. The protesting students turn to the FunkyBreakdown Café and freeze.)

FunkyBreakdown café

On the island stage left of Mr. Big are a group of slam poets who will deconstruct the claims of Mr. Big in their own vernacular poetics. They are all relaxing on the platforms in various casual, “super cool” poses. They are urbane and irreverent. They are watching and listening to Mr. Big from the opposite side of the stage at their poetry slam scene. They have been listening to the entire Mr. Big presentation and also listening to the sentinel and the students. Although they gesture at the absurdity of Mr. Big, they are calm and unaffected by his claims. They wait their chance to speak. The lights go down on the Mr. Big scene and come up on the FunkyBreakdown Poets. Still sitting in their “super cool” positions as the lights come up, one of the poets, Marie, comes downstage to introduce them: “Welcome to the spoken word FunkyBreakdown Café!” One by one the poets come centerstage to riff on water. The following poem by Tracy Walker serves as one example.

The performer, Tracy Walker, comes downstage from the “FunkyBreakdown Café” and speaks out to the audience. The poem is performed in the rhythm and cadence of a spoken-word poet. She gestures every line and with detailed, flowing movements playfully and critically enacts her satire on bottled water.

Disdain, Sapphire Hills, Poland Spring, Spring Mills, Mountain Glacier,
Mountain Valley, Crystal Geysers, Perrier, Aquarian, Aqua Fiji,
Appalachian, Alpine,

America!

Our bottled water lines betray our privilege.

We buy evian-evi-expensive \$2, \$3, \$5 bottles thinkin’ we gettin’ shit from
some nymph in a natural spring somewhere.

Somewhere, some nymph handing out some natural life elixir ...

No one wants to think, I mean, you all might not want to think that 25 percent
of those nymphs look a lot like your kitchen sink.

We have flavored water, sparkling water, vitamin water, energy water, and
designer water sold in glass containers.

While America has top quality drinking water at our finger tips!

We buy plastic bottles to take our sips.

We buy plastic bottles to have our water fresh / our water clean / our water
pure / our water
natural.

Our thirst for quote PURITY is our country’s drive for quote PURITY.

Our flight from mental poverty when we ignore our tapped water privilege ...

as we are so privileged when we drink our bottled water.

Now ... I want to make a statement about privilege.

Privilege is just another word for degree of separation, of remove.

We are so removed from want, from true want for the necessities of life that we claim brand loyalty for the necessities of life.

We can claim brand loyalty to our source of survival like we claim fidelity to a football team, that's why we are privileged.

Our privilege is as marketed as our bodies have become and both slip most easily into civil invisibility ...

We are picky about our water. We ARE. I am.

I have a bottled water brand preference and I WILL exercise my right to buy that brand.

That's privilege. This is privilege. But this is America.

What we must know is that our privilege has costs, and those corporations will take water from foreign lands to feed our inclination toward brand filtration.

To maintain our disbelief in our own water quality and the healing powers of purified labeling.

They will push the privatized privilege on foreign lands until water itself seems like a privilege for those who can afford to pay for it.

Water? A Privilege?

The Mr. Big/FunkyBreakdown segment was in sharp contrast to the Savelugu/Ibrahim segment. Here, we now turn from the *sense of being present* toward the *aim to provoke*. The *aim to provoke* in that we wanted the audience to make judgments, choose a side, begin to feel oppositional to/with the polemics being performed. First, our purpose was not so much to stir compassion or empathy for individuals and their location through a *sense of being present* as it was to stir critique, evaluation, and judgment, and to stand outside *presence* as self-aware respondents evaluating ideas. Second, the fourth wall was blatantly mocked and traversed as Mr. Big and the Funky Poets acknowledged and often pandered to the audience, performatively ridiculed, and deconstructed the notion of crossing over into another and different realm of meaning and action. The actors crossed over with playfulness and braggadocio, leaving the audience no fourth wall of illusion to enter.

Provocation replaces *presence* by interrupting empathy for argument. It was a matter of juxtaposing presence with provocation throughout the

scene that formed its dramatic rhythm. Specific to Mr. Big/Funky Poet's scene, *the aim to provoke* relied on the central modes of *parody and satire*. In replacing presence, parody and satire stirred provocation and served the dual purpose of also resisting and avoiding didacticism. The purpose of the Mr. Big/FunkyBreakdown scene was to present the basic arguments against the corporate privatization of water without falling into didacticism.

Mr. Big and the Funky Poets made political points about water privatization and the inequity of access and affordability that compose the gulf between developing world countries and those draining the world water supply. The challenge was how to make political points and be an effective advocate for water democracy without preaching a soapbox harangue. The use of parody/satire is often the way out of this problem. If parody is "ironic conversion" and "imitation with a critical difference,"³⁵ then Mr. Big played classic parody as irony, imitation, and inversion to both establish key arguments against corporate privatization – what he called "myths" – and, moreover, to justify them. Through irony and inversion, Mr. Big substantiates the very arguments he rails against. Mr. Big's language and style in promoting privatization are theatrically framed to promote the opposite intent. Through theatrical ridicule, the "Three Myths" are formed to inform the audience that they are not myths at all.

The juxtaposition of the FunkyBreakdown side by side and sequentially following Mr. Big contrasted the high with the low, reminiscent of the boardroom with the street, the technology of powerpoint with the orality of vernacular poets, the illogic of the more powerful with the imagination of the less powerful. The juxtaposition of the two islands punctuated Mr. Big's pro-privatization parody performance against the funky poets anti-privatization satiric one. The poets were not, like in the case of Mr. Big, embodying ridicule or acting ridiculous (as Mr. Big called the Myths ridiculous) but, instead, the poets were performing sarcasm or acting sarcastically as they named and described the ridiculous. The poets were less of a comic imitation and burlesque exaggeration (as Mr. Big) and more of an excessive boast of insulting histrionics. The poets enacting toward Mr. Big what Henry Louis Gates refers to, in the African American tradition of signifying and insult, as "troping a dope."³⁶

The Mr. Big and FunkyBreakdown scenes, through parody/satire and juxtaposition, served as a house of mirrors to distort, exaggerate, magnify, reflect, as well as resemble the realities experienced in the field as they relate

to water business. This segment needed to communicate truthfully and theatrically realities thousands of miles away and make them piercingly relevant and up close.

While Mr. Big explicitly parodies the three Myths of Privatization, the FunkyBreakdown Poets were to implicitly communicate points of information realized during fieldwork. First, market ideology is like a religion. People believe in their hearts and minds that it is the supreme being of economic and material existence and no real alternatives can match the unrelenting faith in the market. Second, when the rising tide of water scarcity became an international issue in the 1990s, it was understood as a dwindling commodity that must succumb to the laws of supply and demand. Third, the private water industry justified their efforts in taking over public water systems, claiming public water systems were wasteful and inefficient in delivering water and sanitation. Fourth, as the water industry attempted to displace public water systems, they did not recognize the informal water systems poor people had in place in their own communities. The donkey-cart sellers and the various mechanisms poor people used to sell and distribute their water were ignored *and* disrupted. As Issah said to me in the car on the way to back from Savelugu: “Instead of supporting local people who have struggled but still operated and survived for years and years in providing water for themselves, these businesses make no attempt to provide support or structures to help improve the mechanism they already have in place. Instead, they end up doing just the opposite by making life even harder and undermining them.”

There were three added “lessons” from the field performed in the Mr. Big scene within the “Myths of Privatization” that were essential. First, private companies have a legal obligation to their shareholders, thousands of miles away, to make profits. These profits are seldom reinvested back into the local water system to benefit local people. Second, the contracts between private companies and government officials are not transparent. They are developed and agreed upon behind closed doors without input from local communities. As a result, these companies follow the practice of cherry-picking where they service water for the most affluent areas and leave the public sector to service the poorest areas. Third, privatization is commonly tied to conditions. Aid, international loans, and debt relief are granted only if certain free market policies, such as water privatization, are agreed upon, even though many of the policies “have plunged the world’s poorest people further into poverty.”³⁷

SCENE FOUR: WHO AM I IN ALL THIS? OR, THE (JUXTA)
POSITION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHER

*Dear Journal,
University of Ghana
Legon – Accra, Ghana, West Africa
October 12, 1998*

There is no water in my flat – the pipes are dry. There’s no water left in my storage containers. There’s no water anywhere here in Legon. I can’t find water and it’s a bit scary. How many storage containers will it take for me to never run out of clean water again? They warned us at the Fulbright orientation about the pipes drying up, but I never thought it would go on this long. Kweku has a friend in Dzowulu who keeps a large reservoir of water. He said he thinks his friend will share his water. Hopefully, the water will be flowing from the pipes in the next few days. I worry how the students here are managing. How do people live day-to-day worrying about how they will get water?

I have never known water to disappear.

Waiting for water ...

In performing the poetics and polemics of water and representing seminal moments of fieldwork, it was important that I address my own positionality. Where was I in all this controversy over water? It was important to reveal moments of my own fraught position and internal struggles in the field as well as in making the performance. This brings me again to the notion of juxtaposition. Throughout the show, the juxtapositions of various symbols, texts, ideas, and opposites were positioned and placed “side by side” to create different and new meanings and sensations for the performers and the audience. Juxtaposition and the side-by-side arrangements are a proximic of both closeness and contrast. What is different about an element is further emphasized by its nearness or closeness to its opposite. But, just as physical juxtaposition was employed, there were moments where psychological juxtaposition also became important. The example that follows is the psychological binary within the inner world of the ethnographer herself represented by R1 and R2. R1 was downstage center speaking directly to the audience, and R2 was upstage on a platform speaking directly to R1. This physical juxtaposition underscored a psychological juxtaposition within the binary of the ethnographic self that knows *and* the ethnographic self that questions her own knowing in an attempt to provoke a truer reckoning with one’s own intentions. In this instance “self-reflexivity” was performed, and it evolved into a drama of inner conflict – one self battling with the intentions of the Other self.

The performance – the ethnographer speaks to herself

(Recorder One comes downstage and begins speaking to the audience as Recorder Two stands on a platform upstage observing her.)

- RI In KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, they arrested Mr. Sule and put him in a prison cell. He had stolen water.³⁸
- R2 What happened?
- RI Mr. Sule earned 100 rand a month selling water, but eventually he could not afford to pay the water bill. He also had to pay for food and shelter for his family and school fees for his children. His family needed water and he could no longer stand by and watch his children beg for it. Mr. Sule made an illegal connection to the supply pipe. When it was discovered, the police came and put him in jail.
- R2 What does Mr. Sule have to do with you? What are you doing here in Ghana?
- RI It's about water ... I need to know more ... I need to do ...
- R2 (*Mockingly*) Water ... I need to know ... I need to do ... What is it you need to know ... to do?
- RI There are big people with big money who want to own the water.
- R2 And???
- RI AND they want to *sell* it!
- R2 AND???
- RI AND they want to manage it and make a *profit*!
- R2 ANNNNNND???
- RI AND there will be people who can NOT afford to pay for it!
- R2 Ohhhhhhhh ... But, what has that got to do with you, nosey woman! Stay out of other people's business. PROFIT and PRIVATIZATION have always been the twins of progress! You know what they say: "God provided the water, but not the pipes."
- RI There will be people who can NOT afford to pay for it!!
- R2 Read my lips: (*Emphasizes each word.*) W A T E R B U S I N E S S – m-a-n-a-g-e-m-e-n-t // d-I-s-t-r-I-b-u-t-I-o-n // m-a-I-n-t-e-n-a-n-c-e // s-a-n-I-t-a-t-I-o-n. PIPES! PIPES! PIPES! Water is not free!
- RI (*Preachy*) Water Can Not Be Owned! Water is a public good. The public will manage it, the public should profit from it, the public ...
- R2 (*She laughs.*) The public/Shmub-lic! ... Hah! (*As if reading a headline, then becomes very, very sarcastic.*) The public in the Developing World Economies, oh that public has been VERY successful, so *efficient*, so *honest* and SO concerned about the public good – Yes, yes, getting

water to allllllll the people allllll the time, concerned about allllll its poor citizens, never an ounce of corruption or waste or just NOT knowing what the hell they're doing ... yes, *leave* it to the governments of these countries, after all they have done SO well (*Dramatic change in attitude*) ... done *soooo* well –

- R1 You don't understand. You haven't been paying attention to ... it is ... it is ... let me explain ... the problem is ...
- R2 The PROBLEM is the public sector has done so well as the water pipes break down everywhere, as the water collectors take money from the people and put that money in their *own* pockets, as the government water companies overcharge, mischarge, undercharge, or don't charge for water they mismanage while all the while making a messy waste of natural resources. Some people around here haven't had water flowing from their pipes in weeks! Months!
- R1 You are not looking below the surface! You don't know what you're talking about. You don't know anything ... It is more complex, it's more complex ...
- R2 (*Mocking in a high voice*) "It's more complex, it's more complex ..."
Maybe if the Big people come, with their Big plans, and their Big money, and their Big pipes, and their Big teams, and their Big, Big, Big, Big promises, maybe people in this country can get some water ... clean, fresh, EFFICIENT water.
- R1 You don't understand what is really going on. You are missing the point. You don't understand.
- R2 Then make me understand! Help me understand! Tell me what I need to know and do! Tell me the TRUTH! You are here taking up space and getting in the way ... Tell me what is the truth and what needs to be done ...
- R1 (*Grasping for words and thinking hard*) The truth is ... The problem ... hm ... It is complex ...
- R2 (*Exasperated*) What is COMPLEX!
- R1 I'm learning ... It's here, I've got to get to ... I'm here ... I will be here.
- R2 Learn what you came here to learn! Don't give me slogans and platitudes! I am so tired of slogans and platitudes! Can you say something different and more? Recorder! There is no replacement for water! NO Replacement.
- R1 & R2 There is more to know here ... I will be here ...
- R1 I will be here
- R2 I will be here ... WE

R1 WE

R2 We must.

R1 & R2 We must.

A reflection ... *aim to provoke*

Dialectic theatre and the Brechtian idea that “art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it” were motivating factors in our *aim to provoke*.³⁹ The belief that theatre provokes self-reflection and critical awareness was the philosophy guiding our *aim to provoke*. We wanted to bring forth argument and counter catharsis. The notion of catharsis, as a means of transforming complex, disruptive, political ideas through expressions that leave the audience purged and complacent, was countered through parody and satire. We wanted the audience to be disturbed by the political economy of Third World water.

We placed inside each audience member’s program a listing of organizations with varying degrees of water politics and commitments: charities, NGOs, international institutions, and local activist groups. This list was a place to start for those who felt they wanted to know more or do more about water justice and access on a local, national, or international scale. Ideally, the performance hoped to provoke audience members to become part of a worldwide water movement – this was the highest aim – while, at the same time, keeping in mind that *Water Rites* was a performance and not a social rally. Therefore, *the aim to provoke* was not only about joining a movement or organization. We hoped to also provoke people to learn more about the political economy of water locally and globally, to complicate their needs and notions about bottled water, and to stir up interests in the cultural and symbolic uses of water.

The aim to provoke was not exclusively directed toward the audience and their response, but it was also part of our process as a performance community. We provoked each other. The performers enacted with and for each other invocations and provocations at several levels: the provocations expressed by water activists that the students were exposed to as they learned about water; their own provocations that evolved during rehearsal discussions on the politics of water and through their process of developing *Water Rites*; and, finally, my own internal provocations that I was battling with as the ethnographer/director. For example, Mr. Big as a representative of big business provoked his stage listeners to echo the questions that water activists ask and to reflect the activists’ major critiques. The FunkyBreakdown poets provoked by Mr. Big enacted the students’ own responses to water through

their spoken-word poetry as they learned more and more about the issues. And, finally, my internal provocations were embodied in the battle between R1 and R2 as I questioned my ethnographic intentions. Why include this personal level of provocation with the other standpoints of provocation? First, there were claims made about water, and I must be accountable for how and in what form those claims are made. Second, because the performance constituted a highly subjective and polemical view that was generated by my research and the interpretation of my research, to acknowledge this fact is to acknowledge that whether right or wrong – clear or unclear – it is not a neutral reflection of a phenomenon but my own subjective and biased interpretation.

To include my own inner conflict is to reach into and display the psychic dilemma that plagues most ethnographers who are provoked by their own inner questions and turmoil around issues of position, ethics, truth, etc. *The aim to provoke* was the aim to show and tell, enact and communicate a “response” with the hope the audience would feel compelled to do more, to learn more, think more, and effect change about water.

Coda: August 2008

I was visiting Kwesi Pratt at the office of *The Insight* newspaper, when Al-Hassan arrived. We arranged to meet and discuss the latest developments concerning the public water movement. Al-Hassan said that as a result of the mass demonstrations against privatization, the private companies withdrew. However, the World Bank then provided loans for foreign companies to acquire management contracts to manage the day-to-day operations of the Ghana Water Company. As a consequence, in 2006, a consortium comprised of a Dutch and a South African company signed a five-year contract to manage the GWC. Al-Hassan said, “This is simply another form of privatization, except the companies have nothing to lose because they have no investment. The management company is responsible for servicing water to eighty-two water systems in the country. It is not working. Accra was without water for more than a month, and water flowing through the pipes is inconsistent throughout the country. Yet the price of water has increased by 66 percent within the last two years.” Al-Hassan said Savelugu remains a model for community water distribution, but if they have no water coming into the area to distribute, what can they do?

Al-Hassan continues to work full-time nationally and internationally on water. In 2007 at the World Social Forum, The African Water Network was launched. Al-Hassan was appointed the coordinator. The Network held

their general meeting in Kenya where twenty-four African countries participated.

After speaking with Al-Hassan, on my way home to East Legon I remembered the early days of my fieldwork and a particular water rite I witnessed years ago at a trotro stop. I was standing at the trotro stop trying to get a bus back home. It was so hot that day. I could hardly breathe, and nothing could quench the thirst. Every trotro that passed by was filled with people packed together, crushed inside, trying to get where they needed to go – a stream of dilapidated, old vans full of exhaust fumes, sweaty bodies, overbearing heat, and smells ... Everything felt so crowded and so dirty that day. I was hot and tired and missing my home in the USA and feeling very much like the Ugly American. As I waited, hoping a trotro would come so I could squeeze into one empty seat and get back to the quiet and solitude of my flat in Legon, I looked down the road a bit and saw a woman sitting over a bucket of soapy water. There was a child at her feet; she undressed the child and then placed him in the bucket of water. She was bathing the child in the public market place ... “Quiet and solitude” for her are a different reality than they are for me. I was transfixed by what was more than just a woman bathing a child outside in a hot crowded market, but how the ordinary – how the day-to-day – is so strong and impeccably resilient against the facts of its own reality. As I watched the woman and child, suddenly an old man, appearing to be mad – his hair matted, half-dressed with very dirty clothes – walked up to the woman. Without the least concern, she simply brushed him away with a wave of her hand and continued to bathe the child. The man, undeterred – very dirty – stumbled toward the bucket and began taking off his clothes as he attempted to step into the soapy water with the baby. Immediately, two young men standing next to me at the trotro stop quickly walked over to the old man and with such sincere gentleness and gracious respect helped the man put his clothes on and then guided him back down the road. The woman paid no mind to the old man ... no mind to anyone or anything else around her – kept her willful attention on her child and their ritual. For much of the global South, specifically Africa, dirt is a fact and a symbol: dirty people having dirty children with dirty faces, wearing dirty clothes. Dwight Conquergood stated: “Labeling someone or something ‘dirty’ is a way of controlling perceived anomalies, incongruities, contradictions, ambiguities – all that does not fit into our categories, and therefore, threatens cherished principles. Dirt, then, functions as the mediating term between ‘Difference’ and ‘Danger’.”⁴⁰ We know that dirt is to be got rid of, but we tend to forget that dirt will dwell where water is inaccessible. Nor do we remember that when

sanitation systems are impaired or nonexistent, dirt embraces disease. The Other bodies, the loathsome bodies – the dirty body, the disfigured body, the sick body, the body that smells of refuse, the body that oozes, excretes, and cannot shelter its waste, the bodies grotesquely “out of place”⁴¹ – are the bodies that wrenching poverty will breed in its abominable lack. Disgust encircles these bodies with visceral loathing and fear – fear of nearness and the threat of contamination, loathing for the failure of these bodies to keep themselves out of sight. Dirt is a factor of economic and political conditions but, as a tactical deflection, is generally cast as a moral flaw. But in this small moment on a hot day in a crowded African market a woman bathes her child, a Water Rite – Resistant and Real.

NOTES

1. The scene was adapted from my fieldwork interviews.
2. *The Civic Response* mission statement defines its function as “a multi-purpose citizenship centre that organizes citizen forums and engagements that allow development of empowering perspectives and actions on a wide range of development issues. It also supports democratic civic activism through ad hoc information, advice, guidance and support (IAGS) clinics and by provision of affordable support services to self-organised citizens’ groups.”
3. *The Insight* is a bi-weekly, leftist, independent, alternative newspaper that serves as a radical check for greed and corruption throughout levels of power in Ghana as well as for national and international structures of neoliberal policies.
4. Adinkra Symbols are a philosophical writing system of about sixty-three abstract, artistic shapes originally created by the Akan of Ghana and the Gyaman of the Ivory Coast in West Africa that represent concepts, aphorisms, and cultural history.
5. One of the greatest challenges for the GWC was that the rural to urban migration overburdened the water system. People from the rural areas are creating an overwhelming influx of urban population, requiring the GWC to extend its water supply in these areas.
6. Black, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Water*, p. 68.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Rudolf N. Amenga-Etego, spokesman for Ghana’s National Coalition Against the Privatization of Water.
12. This criticism based on the social implications expressed in the language of water as a natural resource draws on the work of Maggie Black; Linton, “The Social Nature of Natural Resources”; and Holland, *The Water Business*.
13. Linton.

14. Ibid.
15. Ferris, "When the Well Runs Dry."
16. Ibid.
17. Jackson, "Shango Diaspora," p. 351.
18. Black, p. 9.
19. Alexander, "Performance and Pedagogy," p. 27.
20. Quoted in Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. 24–30.
21. Ibid.
22. Cabral, "Return to the Source," p. 261.
23. The Institute for Policy Alternatives (IPA) defines its mission as "a public policy think-tank whose vision is to be the center of excellence for practice – research interfaces and citizen engagement on alternative policy analysis, development, and pro-poor advocacy. IPA has as its mission the promotion of policy alternatives in Africa by combining the efforts of researchers with those of practitioners to establish perspectives, experiences, and new, more engaging paradigms for development that focus on the rights of citizens and communities. IPA also supports Ghanaian policy makers and practitioners to undertake development research, learning, and practice, thereby giving meaning, intellectual relevance, and empirical challenge to those involved in policy development and advocacy." www.ipaghana.org/index.php/organisational_profile, accessed January, 2009.
24. Shiva, *Water Wars*, pp. xiv–xv.
25. Madison, "Staging Fieldwork," pp. 397–418; Madison, *Critical Ethnography*, p. 1.
26. Stuart Hall's sentiment expressed in a public lecture on the campus of Chapel Hill in 1997, speaking about the power of representation and misrepresentation as a consequence of how individuals, groups, and communities are treated by others, particularly those in power.
27. Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography Strategies."
28. Davis and Postlewait, *Theatricality* 2004, pp. 1–39.
29. Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.
30. Referring to Jacques Derrida's critique of presence and the refutation of a "Metaphysics of Presence" where to be present before another denotes a true self, a perfect one-to-one connection to the other's thoughts, feelings, and meanings. He problematizes this presence as divine and constituting an unarguable meaning, and refutes "presence" as a truth or a transcendental signifier that cannot be altered and denied.
31. Jackson, "Genealogies of Performance Studies," pp. 73–86.
32. The idea that the ethnographer is the foreigner and persistent questioner – the one who does not know – and therefore is always searching for answers and insights among those who are native to the locale and who do know, resulting in this knower and known position leaving the ethnographer, in some instances, feeling and looking foolish.
33. Amenga-Etego, "National CAP," p. 1.
34. Anthony Giddens, quoted in Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience*, pp. 7–8.

35. Hutcheon, *Theory of Parody*.
36. Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*.
37. Hall and Lobina, *Pipe Dreams*.
38. Holland, p. 65.
39. Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*.
40. Conquergood, "Health Theatre," p. 197.
41. Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*. See also Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.