

# PERFORMANCE STUDIES

## An introduction

Third edition

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Media editor – Sara Brady

First published 2002  
by Routledge

Reprinted 2003 (twice)  
Second edition published 2006  
by Routledge

This third edition published 2013  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*  
Schechner, Richard, 1934–  
Performance studies : an introduction / Richard Schechner and Sara Brady. – 3rd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Theater—Anthropological aspects. 2. Rites and ceremonies.
3. Performing arts. I. Brady, Sara. II. Title.

PN2041.A57S34 2012

792—dc23

2012019299

ISBN: 978-0-415-50230-6 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-415-50231-3 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-203-12516-8 (ebk)

Typeset in Perpetua

by Keystroke, Station Road, Codsall, Wolverhampton

To

**Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett**

**Peggy Phelan**

**Diana Taylor**

## PERFORMANCE

Usually people say that a truly artistic show will always be unique,  
impossible to be repeated: never will the same actors,  
in the same play, produce the same show.

Theatre is Life.

People also say that, in life, we never really do anything  
for the first time, always repeating  
past experiences, habits, rituals, conventions.

Life is Theatre.

Richard Schechner, with his sensibility and intelligence,  
leads us to explore the limits between Life and Theatre,  
which he calls Performance. With his knowledge,  
he allows us to discover other thinkers,  
stimulating us to have our own thoughts.

Augusto Boal

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# PREFACE

Whoever cannot seek  
the unforeseen sees nothing,  
for the known way  
is an impasse.

Heraclitus, Fragment 7  
(Brooks Haxton, translator)

Performance studies – as a practice, a theory, an academic discipline – is dynamic, unfinishable. Whatever it is, it wasn't exactly that before and it won't be exactly that again. Therefore, a textbook of performance studies can only be a snapshot or, at best, a few moments of moving action "taken" during a specific span of historically conditioned time. The book you hold in your hands was first published in 2002, revised for a second edition in 2006, and revised again for this "media edition" of 2013. The revisions are crucial updates both in terms of further locating where performance studies came from, where it is, and where it might be going and in terms of helping those using the book gain full advantage of the many links to the internet and other digital media. People, and the societies people create, are actually cyborgs, hybrid beings interacting with and extended by mediated data. We swim in a sea of mediated data. We breathe data, we take it into our bodies, we become one with it. This book offers one way of navigating that sea, of enjoying the swim.

In *Performance Studies – An Introduction* I address both those already involved in performance studies and those who want to learn more about performance studies. Performance studies is unsettled, open, diverse, and multiple in its methods, themes, objects of study, and persons. It is a field without fences. It is "inter" – interdisciplinary, intercultural, and (I hope) interesting. To be "inter" is to exist between, on the way from something toward something else. Being "inter" is exploring the liminal – participating in an ongoing workshop.

The reference list at the end of the text includes every writing I have consulted or cited, as well as key writings of persons who are mentioned in the text. Some of these writings are ancient, some contemporary – the range is from classics to newspaper articles and internet sites. There are some discrepancies between dates of first publication or composition given in the main body of the book and the dates

given in the reference list. For the most part, in compiling the reference list I selected editions and translations that I feel are readable and available. My goal is to provide an extensive, if not comprehensive, set of writings that in some way characterizes the field of performance studies as I am in the process of envisioning it.

Of course, as I hoped when I wrote the first edition of *Performance Studies – An Introduction*, I want this book to generate broad-ranging courses that "introduce" students to . . . what? Well, to life as experienced from the perspective of performance. My goal is to show how performance studies is a way to investigate and to understand the world in its ceaseless becoming.

What's new in this edition? The whole book has been revised – but especially the first chapter, "What Is Performance Studies?" and the last chapter, "Global and Intercultural Performances." Even more decisively, this edition is enhanced with a new companion website for students and teachers. The site features a variety of resources that will be updated regularly so that students and faculty can experience an ongoing relationship between the core ideas of *Performance Studies – An Introduction* and materials that respond to and make the most of new media.

The online resources are:

- short videos featuring Richard Schechner discussing his approach to performance studies and explaining key ideas;
- PowerPoint files corresponding to each chapter that instructors can use in class and students can use to study/review material;
- links to websites relevant to chapter content for further study of chosen topics such as the historical avant-garde or performance anthropology;
- links to videos of performances mentioned in the textbook;

## PREFACE

- links to clips demonstrating the theories discussed in the textbook;
- tutorials on key topics such as the methodologies and research tools of performance studies;
- an interactive glossary with a flashcard feature of key terms and biographies;
- activities for use in class;
- assignments for writing and fieldwork;
- quizzes and discussion questions designed to stimulate critical thinking;
- sample syllabi;
- a wiki for instructors to exchange ideas about teaching performance studies.

These online resources make *Performance Studies – An Introduction* an ideal text for a broad range of courses from introductory and core curriculum undergraduate courses to advanced graduate school courses. These courses can be taught across the disciplines of the arts, social sciences, and humanities. Just as *Performance Studies – An Introduction* was the first major textbook to introduce both undergraduates and graduate students to the field of performance studies, the new media-enhanced third edition features resources that can be regularly updated to help instructors make theoretical concepts fresh to students at all levels.

The companion website begins on a home page with tabs for instructors and students to login, allowing the site to offer different interfaces depending on the visitor's status.

I thank Sara Brady for conceiving and executing the interactive companion website that characterizes the third edition of *Performance Studies – An Introduction*. She connects my writing to many nodes of active thought surging through the internet; she makes this book *perform* in ways that “just writing” cannot do. Brady's input is not limited to the media components of this book. She sat with me as we went over the written text, page by page, making a number of suggestions for improvement, most of which I happily accepted.

I want this book to be useful to those already involved in performance studies while stimulating others to become involved. As I emphasize in the text that follows, performance studies remains unsettled, open, diverse, and multiple in its methods, themes, subjects arts, and persons. I hope this book will lead to new courses in performance studies. Not only courses concerning one or another aspect of performance studies, but broad-ranging courses serving as an “introduction” – but to what? Well, to life. My goal is nothing less than making performance studies a method of analysis, a way to understand the world in its ceaseless becoming, and a necessary tool for living.

Richard Schechner  
New York  
2012

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No one knows better than an editor (which I am) that writing a book is a collective effort. Truly, it takes a village. At Routledge, I thank Moira Taylor, Talia Rodgers, and Ben Piggott. And, also at Routledge, I thank those who proofread, type-set, designed, manufactured, and marketed this book. And I thank the very many who, for decades and in cultures all around the world, keep teaching me, entertaining me, and sharing their knowledge with me – these many in their diversity are guiding my thinking and practice.

I thank Professor Carol Martin, my wife and life partner, for her critical attention to my thinking and writing.

I thank Mariellen Sandford, the Associate Editor of *TDR*, a journal I've edited – with Mariellen's steadfast assistance – for many years and which embodies the history, the changes, and the ongoing presence of performance studies. I also thank the Consortium Editors and Contributing Editors of *TDR*.

I thank my colleagues in the Performance Studies Department at New York University, especially Diana Taylor and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, good friends, intellectual companions, and clear-eyed critics.

The publishers would like to thank those individuals and organisations who have been kind enough to allow their material to be reproduced herein. Every effort has been made to seek permission to reproduce copyright material before

And, most emphatically, I thank the myriad students I have taught since 1957, the first day I met a freshman “Communications Skills” class at the University of Iowa, to the most recent crop of MAs and PhDs at NYU. Many who once were students are now professors and professional artists all around the world. We keep in touch; we are a community. The Talmud correctly asserts: “Much have I learned from my teachers; even more from my colleagues; but most of all from my students.”

I thank my dear children, Samuel MacIntosh Schechner and Sophia Martin Schechner.

And I thank the many artists who have worked with me as I directed and devised performances at professional theatres and universities in the USA, Europe, and Asia; and with groups that I founded, co-founded, or led: the East End Players, the Free Southern Theatre, the New Orleans Group, The Performance Group, and East Coast Artists.

I live in the intersection where personal, artistic, and intellectual paths meet. It's a very busy roadway.

Richard Schechner  
New York, 2012

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## Margin icons



When this icon appears next to a passage or a text box, you can find suggestions for a relevant 'Talk About' discussion question on the website.



This icon indicates that the idea or topic in question is the subject of one of Richard Schechner's online videos, giving his own take on the book's main themes.

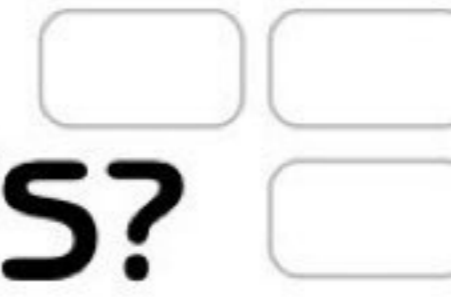
The Classroom Activity icon shows that there is a writing assignment, group activity or performance project on the website relating to this topic.



The website has a suite of hyperlinks, leading to more information about all of the key figures and concepts marked by this icon.



# 1 WHAT IS PERFORMANCE STUDIES?



## Introducing this book, this field, and me

The book you hold in your hand is “an” introduction to performance studies. There are others, and that suits me just fine. The one overriding and underlying assumption of performance studies is that the field is open. There is no finality to performance studies, either theoretically or operationally. There are many voices, themes, opinions, methods, and subjects. As I will show in [Chapter 2](#), anything and everything can be studied “as” performance. But this does not mean performance studies as an academic discipline lacks specific subjects and questions that it focuses on. Theoretically, performance studies is wide open; practically, it has developed in a certain way, which I will discuss in this chapter.

Nor does openness mean there are no values. People want, need, and use standards by which to live, write, think, and act. As individuals and as parts of communities and nations people participate and interact with other people, other species, the planet, and whatever else is out there. But the values that guide people are not “natural,” transcendent, timeless, God-given, or inalienable. Values belong to ideology, science, the arts, religion, politics, and other areas of human endeavor and inquiry. Values are hard-won and contingent, changing over time according to social and historical circumstances. Values are a function of cultures, groups, and individuals. Values can be used to protect and liberate or to control and oppress. In fact, the difference between what is “liberty” and what is “oppression” depends a lot on where you are coming from.

This book embodies the values, theories, and practices of a certain field of scholarship as understood by one particular person in the eighth decade of his life. This person is a Jewish Hindu Buddhist atheist living in New York City, married, and the father of two children. He is a university professor in the Performance Studies Department of New York University and the Editor of *TDR: The Journal of Performance Studies*. He directs plays, writes essays and books, lectures, and leads workshops. He has traveled and worked in many parts of the world. Who I am is not irrelevant. I will be leading you on a journey. You ought to know a little about your guide.

Because performance studies is so broad-ranging and open to new possibilities, no one can actually grasp its totality or press all its vastness and variety into a single book. My points of departure are my own teaching, research, artistic practice, and life experiences. But I am not limited by these. I will offer ideas far from my center, some even contrary to my values and opinions.

## The boxes

Before going on, I want to point out a feature of this book. My text includes no quotations, citations, or notes. Ideas are drawn from many sources, but the written voice is my own. I hope this gives the reader a smoother ride than many scholarly texts. At the same time, I want my readers to hear many voices. The boxes offer alternative and supplementary opinions and interruptions. The boxes open the conversation in ways I cannot do alone. The boxes are hyperlinks enacting some of the diversity of performance studies. I want the effect to be of a seminar with many hands raised or of a computer desktop with many open windows.

## What makes performance studies special

Performances are actions. As a discipline, performance studies takes actions very seriously in four ways. First, behavior is the “object of study” of performance studies. Although performance studies scholars use the “archive” extensively – what’s in books, photographs, the archaeological record, historical remains, etc. – their dedicated focus is on the “repertory,” namely, what people do in the activity of their doing it. Second, artistic practice is a big part of the performance studies project. A number of performance studies scholars are also practicing artists working in the avant-garde, in community-based performance, and



elsewhere; others have mastered a variety of non-Western and Western traditional forms. The relationship between studying performance and doing performance is integral. Third, fieldwork as “participant observation” is a much-prized method adapted from anthropology and put to new uses. In anthropological fieldwork, participant observation is a way of learning about cultures other than that of the fieldworker. In anthropology, for the most part, the “home culture” is Western, the “other” non-Western. But in performance studies, the “other” may be a part of one’s own culture (non-Western or Western), or even an aspect of one’s own behavior. That positions the performance studies fieldworker at a Brechtian distance, allowing for criticism, irony, and personal commentary as well as sympathetic participation. In this active way, one performs fieldwork. Taking a critical distance from the objects of study and self invites revision, the recognition that social circumstances – including knowledge itself – are not fixed, but subject to the “rehearsal process” of testing and revising. Fourth, it follows that performance studies is actively involved in social practices and advocacies. Many who practice performance studies do not aspire to ideological neutrality. In fact, a basic theoretical claim is that no approach or position is “neutral.” There is no such thing as unbiased. The challenge is to become as aware as possible of one’s own stances in relation to the positions of others – and then take steps to maintain or change positions.



Performances occur in many different instances and kinds. Performance must be construed as a “broad spectrum” or “continuum” of human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainments, the performing arts (theatre, dance, music), and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race, and class roles, and on to healing (from shamanism to surgery), the media, and the internet. Before performance studies, Western thinkers believed they knew exactly what was and what was not “performance.” But in fact, there is no historically or culturally fixable limit to what is or is not “performance.” Along the continuum new genres are added, others are dropped. The underlying notion is that any action that is framed, enacted, presented, highlighted, or displayed is a performance. Many performances belong to more than one category along the continuum. For example, an American football player spiking the ball and pointing a finger in the air after scoring a touchdown is performing a dance and enacting a ritual as part of his professional role as athlete and popular entertainer.

As a method of studying performances, the relatively new discipline of performance studies is still in its formative stage.

Performance studies draws on and synthesizes approaches from a wide variety of disciplines including performing arts, social sciences, feminist studies, gender studies, history, psychoanalysis, queer theory, semiotics, ethology, cybernetics, area studies, media and popular culture theory, and cultural studies. But “performance studies is more than the sum of its inclusions” (see **Kirshenblatt-Gimblett box 1**). Performance studies starts where most limited-domain disciplines end. A performance studies scholar examines texts, architecture, visual arts, or any other item or artifact of art or culture not in themselves, but as players in ongoing relationships, that is, “as” performances. I will develop this notion of “as” performance in [Chapter 2](#). Briefly put, whatever is being studied is regarded as practices, events, and behaviors, not as “objects” or “things.” This quality of “liveness” – even when dealing with media or archival materials – is at the heart of performance studies. Thus, performance studies does not “read” an action or ask what “text” is being enacted. Rather, one inquires about the “behavior” of, for example, a painting: how, when, and by whom was it made, how it interacts with those who view it, and how the painting changes over time. The artifact may be relatively stable, but the performances it creates or takes part in can change radically. The performance studies scholar examines the circumstances in which the painting was created and exhibited; she looks at how the gallery or building displaying the painting shapes its reception. These and similar kinds of performance studies questions can be asked of any behavior, event, or material object. Of course, when performance studies deals with behavior – artistic, everyday, ritual, playful, and so on – the questions asked are closer to how performance theorists have traditionally approached theatre and the other performing arts. I discuss and apply this kind of analysis more fully in every chapter of this book.



**Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (birthdate not disclosed):**

American performance theorist specializing in the aesthetics of everyday life, Jewish performance, and folklore. She was the founding chair of NYU’s Department of Performance Studies from 1981 to 1993. Author of *Destination Culture* (1998).

In performance studies, questions of embodiment, action, behavior, and agency are dealt with interculturality. This approach recognizes two things. First, in today’s world, cultures are always interacting – there are no totally isolated groups. Second, the differences among cultures are so profound that no theory of performance is universal: one size cannot fit all. Nor are the playing fields where cultures

## Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

### *Performance studies is more than a sum of its inclusions*

Performance studies starts from the premise that its objects of study are not to be divided up and parceled out, medium by medium, to various other disciplines – music, dance, dramatic literature, art history. The prevailing division of the arts by medium is arbitrary, as is the creation of fields and departments devoted to each.

To study performance, as an artform that lacks a distinctive medium (and hence uses any and all media), requires attending to all the modalities in play. This distinguishes performance studies from those that focus on a single modality – dance, music, art, theatre, literature, and cinema. For this and other reasons, performance studies is better equipped to deal with most of the world’s artistic expression, which has always synthesized or otherwise integrated movement, sound, speech, narrative, and objects.

A provisional coalescence on the move, performance studies is more than the sum of its inclusions. While it might be argued that “as an artform, performance lacks a distinctive medium” (Carroll 1986: 78), embodied practice and event is a recurring point of reference within performance studies. What this means, among other things, is that presence, liveness, agency, embodiment, and event are not so much the defining features of our objects of study as issues at the heart of our disciplinary subject. While some may address these issues in relation to plays performed on a stage, others may address them in relation to artifacts in a museum vitrine.

We take our lead from the historical avant-garde and contemporary art, which have long questioned the boundaries between modalities and gone about blurring them, whether those boundaries mark off media, genres, or cultural traditions. What they found interesting – Chinese opera, Balinese barong, circus – we find interesting.

Such confounding of categories has not only widened the range of what can count as an artmaking practice, but also gives rise to performance art that is expressly not theatre; and art performance that dematerializes the art object and approaches the condition of performance.

1999, adapted by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett from “Performance Studies,”  
a report written for the Rockefeller Foundation

interact level. The current means of cultural interaction – globalization – enacts extreme imbalances of power, money, access to media, and control over resources. Although this is reminiscent of colonialism, globalization is also different from colonialism in key ways. Proponents of globalization promise that “free trade,” the internet, and advances in science and technology are leading to a better life for the world’s peoples. Globalization also induces sameness at the level of popular culture – “world beat” and the proliferation of American-style fast foods and films are examples. The two ideas are related. Cultural sameness and seamless communications make it easier for transnational entities to get their messages across. This is crucial because governments and businesses alike increasingly find it more efficient to rule and manage with the collaboration rather than the opposition of workers. In order to gain their collaboration, information must not only move with ease globally but also be skillfully managed. The apparent victory of “democracy” and capitalism

goes hand in hand with the flow of controlled media. Whether or not the internet will be, finally, an arena of resistance or compliance remains an open question. Those resisting the “new world order” are stigmatized as “terrorists,” “rogue states,” and/or “fundamentalists.” I further discuss these rhetorical and performative strategies in [Chapter 8](#).

Performance studies adherents explore a wide array of subjects and use many methodologies to deal with this contradictory and turbulent world. But unlike more traditional academic disciplines, performance studies is not organized into a unitary system. These days, many artists and intellectuals know that knowledge cannot be easily, if at all, reduced to a singular coherence. In fact, a hallmark of performance studies is the exposition of the tensions and contradictions driving today’s world. No one in performance studies is able to profess the whole field. This is because performance studies has a huge appetite for encountering, even inventing, new kinds of performing and

ways of analyzing performances while insisting that cultural knowledge can never be complete (see **Geertz box**). If performance studies were an art, it would be avant-garde.

As a field, performance studies is sympathetic to the avant-garde, the marginal, the offbeat, the minoritarian, the subversive, the twisted, the queer, people of color, and the formerly colonized. Projects within performance studies often act on or act against settled hierarchies of ideas, organizations, and people. Therefore, it is hard to imagine performance studies getting its act together or settling down, or even wanting to.

world-famous for fifteen minutes.” The fleeting archive of our epoch is inscribed more in the mp3 or DVD, music video, or hyperlinked email than it is in a considered piece of literature.

**Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910):** Russian author, social thinker, and mystic. Novels include *War and Peace* (1863–69) and *Anna Karenina* (1875–77).

**James Joyce (1882–1941):** Irish author of *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939), novels that experiment with language while celebrating the imaginations and peregrinations of Dubliners. Joyce was a big influence on his one-time assistant, Samuel Beckett.

**Andy Warhol (1928?–87):** American artist and filmmaker. Leader of the Pop Art movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Warhol appropriated images from American popular culture – Campbell’s soup cans, Marilyn Monroe – and repositioned them as high art.

Another way of understanding what’s happening is to regard our time as witnessing an explosion of multiple literacies. People are increasingly “body literate,” “aurally literate,” “visually literate,” and so on. Films come at all levels of sophistication, as do recorded musics. Email is a burgeoning of letter-writing. Not the elegant handwritten correspondence of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe and Europeanized America, but a rapid part-words-part-pictures hypertextual communication. People not only gab on their cell phones, they converse via instant messaging, and learn to read each other’s body languages and moods across cultures. Sometimes playful, sometimes dangerous, people travel actually or virtually to faraway places – communicating and hooking up across ethnic, national, linguistic, religious, and gender boundaries. Webcams and chatrooms flourish. Operating at many levels and directions simultaneously demands multiple literacies. These multiple literacies are “performatives” – encounters in the realm of doing, of pursuing a throughline of action. A shift is occurring, transforming writing, speaking, and even ordinary living into performance. Exactly how this transformation is being accomplished and what it might mean is a principal concern of this book. A world of multiple performatives is the turf of performance studies. Or to put it another way, the academic discipline of performance studies has emerged as a response to an increasingly performative world.



## Clifford Geertz

### *The pitfalls of cultural analysis*

Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is. It is a strange science whose most telling assertions are its most tremulously based, in which to get somewhere with the matter at hand is to intensify the suspicion, both your own and that of others, that you are not quite getting it right. But that, along with plaguing subtle people with obtuse questions, is what being an ethnographer is like.

1973, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 29

## Multiple literacies and hypertexts

Some people complain that literacy is declining not only in terms of basic reading skills, but also in what people read and how they write. The universality of television plus the growing global availability of the internet gives speech and visual communication a strong lift over conventional literacy. This affects all strata of culture from the ways ordinary people communicate to the art of writing. Few novelists in the early twenty-first century write epic “big” novels such as **Leo Tolstoy’s** *War and Peace* or even hyper-literate works such as **James Joyce’s** (*Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake*). Life is lived very fast, with lots of fast-forward and stop-action. Events and “stars” come and go before we can really take them in. A sensational act is almost immediately displayed on the world media stage. **Andy Warhol** was on the right track when he predicted that “in the future everyone will be

Traditional literacy is being forced to the extremes – a low-level pulp-and-picture-only literacy and a high-level literacy. What is being squeezed is mid-level, or ordinary, literacy. The ability to read, write, and calculate above a basic standard is probably declining in so-called “advanced” societies. Whether literacy will ever be achieved globally is open to question. Computers are taking over basic tasks. For example, a clerk in a store simply swipes a bar-coded item past the scanner, enters the amount of money proffered, and waits for the computerized cash register to read out how much to give in change. Efficient voice-recognition programs transcribe speaking into writing. Already the software exists so that a person speaks in one language and her words are spoken or typed in another. Many web pages offer to translate the content into several languages. At least at the level of basic comprehensible communication, the curse of the Tower of Babel is history.

What is gaining in importance is hypertext, in the broadest meaning of that word. Hypertext combines words, images, sounds, and various shorthands. People with cell phones talk, of course. But they also send photos and use the keypads to punch out messages that combine letters, punctuation marks, emoticons and other graphics. A different kind of freedom of speech is evolving, even more rapidly in the so-called “developing world” than in Europe or North America. As of 2012, more than 950 million people in China out of a population of 1.34 billion own cell phones and 485 million use the internet. India, with a population of 1.21 billion, has 884 million cell-phone owners and 120 million internet users. The Chinese government wants to control what’s being disseminated, but can’t effectively do so because the origination points of messages cannot be monitored. The number of people using social media – such as Facebook and Twitter – is growing exponentially. As of 2012, Facebook had 845 million active users. Email, blogs, instant messaging, mobile internet, and wi-fi are transforming what it means to be literate. Books as print are being replaced by interactive e-forms that can be played with on tablet devices. And reading itself is increasingly supplanted by a range of ideas, feelings, requests, and desires that are communicated in many different ways. People are both readers and authors. Identities are revealed, masked, fabricated, and stolen. This kind of communicating is highly performative. It encourages senders and receivers to use their imaginations, navigating and interpreting the dynamic cloud of possibilities surrounding each message.

High-level literacy is fast becoming the specialty of academics who master one or more specialized knowledges. Some of these knowledges – in cybernetics, biotechnology, medicine, weapons research, and economics – are having a huge impact on the world. Whole industries are devoted

to “translating” high-level research into marketable applications. At the same time, many academics do not feel the need to address a broad public or to explain exactly what the bases for the new knowledges are. Unfortunately, this is true of performance studies too. For example, performance studies scholars who “read” pop culture may not write in ways that ordinary people – those who practice pop culture – find accessible. A chasm has opened separating the scholars from those they write about.

## Performance studies here, there, and everywhere

Performance studies (PS) has become an established academic field. The discipline is conceived, taught, and institutionalized in a number of different ways. There are stand-alone PS departments – NYU, Northwestern, Texas A&M, and the University of Sydney – and departments that include performance studies in their names – such as Brown University’s Theatre Arts and Performance Studies, UC Berkeley’s Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies, and Liverpool Hope University’s Drama, Dance, and Performance Studies. A steadily increasing number of schools offer performance studies courses (**see Performance studies in the USA, the UK, and beyond box**). Broadly speaking, there are two main brands, NYU’s and Northwestern University’s. NYU’s performance studies developed from the intersection of theatre, dance, performance art and the social sciences and broadened to encompass gender and queer studies, poststructuralism, postcolonial studies, and critical race theory. NU’s is rooted in oral interpretation, communication, speech-act theory, and ethnography and today includes personal narrative, literature, culture, technology, and performance theory (**see Jackson box**). These two approaches share a common commitment to an expanded vision of “performance” and “performativity” – two terms that I will unpack in this book.

Sometimes performance studies is practiced under a different name, as in the Department of World Arts and Cultures of the University of California Los Angeles. Or even as a reimagining of the field, as in China’s “Social Performance Studies” (**see Sun and Fei box**). There are many schools where performance studies is a thin wedge – a single course or two being “tried out.” But the trend is clear. More performance studies departments, programs, and courses are on the way. Even if many professing performance studies work in non-performance studies environments, they form a strong and increasingly influential cohort reshaping a broad range of fields and disciplines.



## Shannon Jackson

### *The genealogy of performance studies at Northwestern*

The development of Northwestern's Department of Performance Studies proceeds from a different direction [than NYU's]. To some, its narrative is less often recounted. To others, of course, it is the only one that matters. [. . .] The Department of (Oral) Interpretation had a decades' long existence in a very different institutional milieu – that is, inside a School of Speech, one that also housed distinct departments of Communication Studies, Radio/TV/Film, and Theatre. Thus, unlike the progenitors at NYU who broke from a prior institutional identity as Theatre, Northwestern's department had considered itself something other than Theatre for its entire institutional existence. Oral Interpretation was most often positioned as an aesthetic subfield within Speech, Communication, and/or Rhetoric. Its proponents drew from a classical tradition in oral poetry to argue for the role of performance in the analysis and dissemination of cultural texts, specializing in the adaptation of print media into an oral and embodied environment. Northwestern was unusual for devoting an entire department to this area. Most of that faculty's colleagues and former graduate students would find themselves in the oral interpretation slot of a larger Communication department – in the Midwest, the South, the Southwest, the West, and on the East Coast. This made for a dispersed kind of institutional network. It also meant that the decision to shift nomination and orientation to Performance Studies occurred within that network rather than exclusively within a department. The division within the National Communication Association was renamed Performance Studies [in 1985], and field practitioners around the country followed suit. [. . .] If these two stories [NYU's, Northwestern's] show that institutional contexts differently constitute disciplinary identity, they also imply that the history of a discipline changes depending upon where one decides to begin. One way to resituate this two-pronged story of a late twentieth-century formation is to cast Performance Studies as the integration of theatrical and oral/rhetorical traditions.

2004, "Professing Performance," 9–10

## Performance studies in the USA, the UK, and beyond

### *A panoply of places, programs, and possibilities*

**Aberystwyth University, Aberystwyth, Wales, UK** In the Aberystwyth joint honours Performance Studies degrees:

**We make:** physical theatre; group work; devised performance; site-specific work; time-based art . . .

**We study:** live art; protest action; cutting edge performance; ritual; dance; popular entertainment; public ceremony . . .

**We work:** in a studio; on the beach; in a chapel; at the railway station; in a car . . .

**We use:** bodies; voices; objects; architectures; audiences . . .

**We examine:** video; sound recording; light effects; mobile phones . . .

**We deploy:** space; time; dramaturgy; choreography . . .

[aber.ac.uk/en/undergrad/courses/tfts/performance](http://aber.ac.uk/en/undergrad/courses/tfts/performance)

**Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, USA** Performance studies is concerned with communication embedded in aesthetic texts and contexts. [. . .] The graduate program in performance studies emphasizes creative and embodied

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scholarship geared toward enacting social change. The interdisciplinary nature of the program allows students to complement course work with other communication areas as well as courses in theatre, dance, justice and social inquiry, American Indian studies, African American studies, Chicana/o Latina studies, Asian Pacific American studies, literary studies, and studies related to women and gender.

[humancommunication.clas.asu.edu/about/performance\\_studies](http://humancommunication.clas.asu.edu/about/performance_studies)

**Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, USA** How is performance an active ingredient in the maintenance, negotiation, or possible change of social and cultural norms? How do multiple modes of performance and representation travel across borders to be “read” or “experienced” or “felt” in times or places far distant from their initial articulation? Is crossing borders a “given” for performance? How? Why? These, and so many other questions, are basic to Performance Studies. [. . .] The central focus in Performance Studies can be contrasted to the central focus in Theatre Arts. The central emphases in Theatre Arts are the history, theory, and practical skill-sets required for a well-rounded student of global theatre practices. Performance Studies, in contrast, focuses on the multiple modes in which live performance articulates culture, negotiates difference, constructs identity, and transmits collective historical traditions and memories.

[brown.edu/Departments/Theatre\\_Speech\\_Dance/about/performancestudies.html](http://brown.edu/Departments/Theatre_Speech_Dance/about/performancestudies.html)

**Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada** Performance Studies has emerged as a cross-sector “research current” at Concordia in the past several years. Founded at the crossroads of 20th Century interdisciplinary and intercultural creation in the performing arts, and the “performative turn” in cultural, aesthetic, and political theory, Performance Studies draws on theories of embodiment, event, and agency much the way Cultural Studies emphasizes literature, media, and the concept of “text” in its analysis of a broad range of phenomena. [. . .] In more recent performance scholarship, the line between human and non-human performer has been decisively blurred, and Performance Studies has investigated the performing object, installation arts, immersive entertainments, and techniques of museum and exhibition display.

Adapted from an email from Mark Sussman and  
[graduatestudies.concordia.ca/SIP/researchcurrents/currents/performancestudies](http://graduatestudies.concordia.ca/SIP/researchcurrents/currents/performancestudies)

**Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA** The Theater & Performance Studies Program at Georgetown [. . .] encourages interdisciplinary learning about culture, politics and identity through the lens of performance research, community-based performance, play analysis and playwriting, stage direction, cross-cultural ensemble, solo performance, dramaturgy, design and multimedia production, and world theater history.

[performingarts.georgetown.edu/about/](http://performingarts.georgetown.edu/about/)

**Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, New York University, New York, USA** The Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics is a collaborative, multilingual and interdisciplinary network of institutions, artists, scholars, and activists throughout the Americas. Working at the intersection of scholarship, artistic expression and politics, the organization explores embodied practice – performance – as a vehicle for the creation of new meaning and the transmission of cultural values, memory and identity. Anchored in its geographical focus on the Americas (thus “hemispheric”) and in three working languages (English, Spanish and Portuguese), the Institute’s goal is to promote vibrant interactions and collaborations at the level of scholarship, art practice and pedagogy among practitioners interested in the relationship between performance and politics in the hemisphere.

[hemi.nyu.edu](http://hemi.nyu.edu)

**Johannes Gutenberg-Universität, Mainz, Germany** The IPP “Performance and Media Studies” is an international PhD Program consisting in a three-year study program during which doctoral students attend seminars, practical workshops,

discuss their respective research projects, and write the doctoral thesis. At the core of the program lie questions concerning the concept of "culture" itself. Doctoral seminars are given on subjects like "Performance and Performativity," "Cultural Studies" and "Media Studies" and ask for the structure of the various cultural processes of change as they are effective in performative and mediated cultures. As innovative solutions to these questions can only be found in an interdisciplinary and international exchange, the IPP thus supports international and interdisciplinary research as the methodological condition for the future cultural analysts.

[performedia.uni-mainz.de/index\\_ENG.php](http://performedia.uni-mainz.de/index_ENG.php)

**Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, Georgia, USA** The Program in Theatre and Performance Studies [. . .] at KSU features performance as an art form, as a field of study, and as a method of inquiry (or a way of knowing) in classes throughout the major. The entire program embraces the idea of embodied learning. [. . .] The degree program features several required courses in Performance Studies as well as courses that integrate the scholarship of Theatre Studies and Performance Studies.

[kennesaw.edu/theatre/what\\_is\\_performance\\_studies.shtml](http://kennesaw.edu/theatre/what_is_performance_studies.shtml)

**Monash University, Melbourne, Australia** Performance promotes advanced research in theatre and performance around three key strands – cultures, philosophies and practices. We deal with the intangibles of our cultural heritage, with how the performing arts are read and received and absorbed into our collective social memory. We're about how creativity builds community, and defines identity.

[arts.monash.edu.au/performance/](http://arts.monash.edu.au/performance/)

**National University of Singapore, Singapore** Our "Introduction to Performance Studies" module provides an overview of the key concepts behind a fast-developing discipline, and uses them to interpret a range of social practices and performance events that can be found in Singapore and other highly globalized societies. The module combines fieldwork, critical thinking, and performance analysis. [. . .] The methodological perspectives of Performance Studies – anthropology, ethnography, critical theory, aesthetics – are deployed to contextualize ritual and theatricality as integral to the practices of spectacle and display that contribute so arrestingly to social reality in urban Asia.

Email from Paul Rae

**Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, USA** The Department of Performance Studies lives at the sprawling intersection of personal narrative, literature, culture, technology, and performance theory. By thinking critically about cultural performance, students and faculty in the department bend – and sometimes break – long-standing concepts of what performance really is. We value the study of performance, documenting, analyzing and theorizing on cultural rituals, public identities and political positions. And we value the practice of performance, examining and enacting literary texts to create live interpretations of novels, poetry, and other written sources. Our students and faculty are vibrant scholars who question cultural assumptions and influence national performance scholarship and production. This fertile environment, where faculty and students analyze texts and develop original thought, continually strengthens the individual, the department, and the school.

[communication.northwestern.edu/departments/performancestudies/about.php](http://communication.northwestern.edu/departments/performancestudies/about.php)

**Performance Studies in the UK and Ireland** Programs include: Birkbeck University of London (Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies); Brunel University (MPhil and PhD, Contemporary Drama and Performance Studies); King's College London (MA Theatre & Performance Studies); Liverpool Hope University (Department of Drama, Dance, and Performance Studies); Queen Mary, University of London (MA Theatre & Performance, PhD in Drama); Roehampton University (BA, MPhil, and PhD in Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies); University of Limerick (BA Voice & Dance and PhD Arts

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Practice); Trinity College Dublin (MPhil Theatre & Performance, PhD Drama Studies, PhD Digital Arts); University of Warwick (BA, MA, MPhil, PhD Theatre and Performance Studies); and others.

**PerformanceStudies.org** lists over 60 colleges and universities with performance studies programs. Most of these are in the UK or the USA, with several in Australia, Canada, Germany, and South Africa.

[performancestudies.org](http://performancestudies.org)

**Performance Studies International** lists members in the above countries plus Israel, Venezuela, Switzerland, Serbia, France, Italy, Finland, Slovenia, and Japan.

[psi-web.org](http://psi-web.org)

**Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA** Texas A&M's new M.A. program emphasizes the ethnographic study of vernacular culture. The department has strengths in Africana studies, dance and ritual studies, ethnomusicology, folklore, performance ethnography, popular music studies, religious studies, theatre and media studies, and women's studies.

[performancestudies.tamu.edu/performance-studies](http://performancestudies.tamu.edu/performance-studies)

**University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, California, USA** In the past decades, graduate study in the field of performance studies has undergone an energetic renovation, and "performance" itself has become critical to scholarship and research across the humanities. [...] The Graduate Group Ph.D. in Performance Studies at Berkeley is at the cutting edge of this epistemic shift.

[tdps.berkeley.edu/programs-courses/graduate-program](http://tdps.berkeley.edu/programs-courses/graduate-program)

**University of California at Davis, Davis, California, USA** *Vision for Performance Studies* We understand performance as both an object of inquiry and as a lens through which to view the world. We are committed to a notion of process, both in understanding performance activity, and identities, cultures, and representation. We understand practice not only as an important counterweight to theory, but as a mode of inquiry in its own right. [...] We understand that studying performance is studying a way of doing, and that bridging the theoretical and the practical within disciplinary and transdisciplinary formations is a powerful means of enhancing both theory and practice.

[performancestudies.ucdavis.edu/htmls/faculty/faculty.html](http://performancestudies.ucdavis.edu/htmls/faculty/faculty.html)

**University of California at Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California, USA** We use performance as an organizing concept for studying a wide range of behaviors and situations, from tourism to tango to the internet. [...] Our participating faculty and graduate students belong to the departments of Theater, Film, Anthropology, Design, Art History, Musicology, Ethnomusicology, Women's Studies, World Arts and Cultures, English, French, German, and Comparative Literature. The Center seeks to provide a resource through which students and faculty can come together to consider the study of performance across disciplines and schools.

[performancestudies.ucla.edu/about.html](http://performancestudies.ucla.edu/about.html)

**University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand** Te Puna Toi Performance Research Project NZ was established in 2001 by the Department of Theatre and Film Studies at the University of Canterbury in order to provide a New Zealand-centred platform for performance research. Te Puna Toi organises conferences, symposia, collaborations and events that encourage local and international artists to come together to explore, devise, produce, discuss, write about and create experiments in the production of avant-garde theatre, performance and film.

[tepunatoī.canterbury.ac.nz/about.shtml](http://tepunatoī.canterbury.ac.nz/about.shtml)

**University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, USA** Students in the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Chicago can take “Performance/Theory/East Asia,” a course that “introduces students to the field of performance studies through East Asian performance.” This course “consider[s] the disciplinary formations of Performance Studies and East Asian Studies in relation to one another [by exploring] theories of embodiment, performativity, and nationality.”

[taps.uchicago.edu/page/courses-2011-2012](http://taps.uchicago.edu/page/courses-2011-2012)

**University of Kwazulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa** The Department of Drama and Performance Studies offers modules in Applied Participatory Drama, Performance Studies, Contemporary Dance – History and Aesthetics, Education and Development, and other classes that combine theory and practice.

Adapted from [dramastudies.ukzn.ac.za](http://dramastudies.ukzn.ac.za)

**University of Maryland, USA** In essence, Performance Studies defines “performance” more broadly than traditional theatre studies and has, therefore, allowed scholars to use methodologies from fields such as anthropology, ethnomusicology, critical theory, sociology, cultural studies, American Studies, and critical studies race and gender. [. . .] The purpose of [UM’s] Ph.D. program is to educate scholars who can excel in the challenging and increasingly interdisciplinary academic world, bringing substantive research skills to bear on contemporary questions of theatre and performance.

[tdps.umd.edu/programs/PhD-TPS](http://tdps.umd.edu/programs/PhD-TPS)

**University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA** The Center for World Performance Studies (CWPS) seeks to unite artists, performers, scholars and the community through the international language of the arts. [. . .] Through its work, CWPS strives to bridge the gap between performance and scholarship; increase knowledge of performing arts around the globe; bring into intellectual focus the increasing globalization of the performing arts, and; take advantage of the interdisciplinary opportunities at the University of Michigan.

[ii.umich.edu/cwps](http://ii.umich.edu/cwps)

**University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA** Performance Studies focuses on performance as a method of textual study, as an aesthetic event, and as a social and rhetorical act. Drawing on and contributing to interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary research, performance studies courses [at UNC-Chapel Hill] engage the power and pleasure of performance to invite change, to enrich subjectivity, and to heighten awareness of the nature of complex political and cultural scripts and the possibilities for representation in action to intervene on constructed social realities.

[comm.unc.edu/areastudy/perf/index\\_html](http://comm.unc.edu/areastudy/perf/index_html) and [comm.unc.edu/graduate/phdareasstudy](http://comm.unc.edu/graduate/phdareasstudy)

**University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA** The Center for Performance Studies is an inter-disciplinary consortium of graduate programs at the University of Washington [. . .] comprised of a wide range of faculty and graduate students across the campus and across fields who have joined together to support the study of performance in a variety of forms and cultures.

[depts.washington.edu/uwcps/about/index.shtml](http://depts.washington.edu/uwcps/about/index.shtml)

**University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia** Theatre and Performance Studies at UNSW engages with both theory and practice, and subjects the entire spectrum of human performance to critical examination – from the most mundane daily rituals to the conventions of grand opera. The focus includes new, hybrid and technologically advanced modes of performance, combining practical experimentation with intellectual exploration.

[empa.arts.unsw.edu.au/areas-of-study/theatre-and-performance-studies-82.html](http://empa.arts.unsw.edu.au/areas-of-study/theatre-and-performance-studies-82.html)

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**University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia** The Department of Performance Studies at Sydney University was one of the first to be established in the world and regularly attracts visiting academics from the US, Europe and Asia who come to observe our unique program.

[sydney.edu.au/arts/performance/](http://sydney.edu.au/arts/performance/)

**Utrecht University, Utrecht, Netherlands** Research in the field of Media and Performance Studies at Utrecht University is specifically interested in emerging media, comparative media research, and the relationship among media, culture and society in a global context from both historical and theoretical perspectives. Students [. . .] receive a thorough grounding in the theoretical and historical approaches to media and performance and their impact on citizenship, cultural identity, new forms of (popular) representation, entertainment, and cultural participation.

[uu.nl/faculty/humanities/en/education/mastersprogrammes/mediaandperformancestudies/Pages/default.aspx](http://uu.nl/faculty/humanities/en/education/mastersprogrammes/mediaandperformancestudies/Pages/default.aspx)

## William Sun and Faye C. Fei

### *Social performance studies*

The need to introduce performance studies to Chinese schools and other institutions had a very different context from the one in the West. [. . .] Performance studies would need to be redefined to fit the reality of China. What we call “social performances” refers to actions performed outside of the theatre that have a definite impact on a particular audience. [. . .]

What was badly needed was social performance studies, a new research field focusing mainly on urban professional performances such as those of teachers, doctors, lawyers, salespeople, and government officials. The goal of social performance studies was, and is, to analyze various kinds of social performances – the performances in everyday life, to use Erving Goffman’s term – in order to improve the inadequate ones and to eliminate false ones. In a sense, one of the missions of social performance studies is to study and develop appropriate norm/standards of performance in and across all professions. [. . .] Chinese social performance studies [. . .] explores the right casting of related social roles, and to find ways to help people adjust themselves and perform these roles better. This is because, philosophically, we believe that human beings do not really have the freedom to choose their social roles in the first place – they are inevitably born within certain social structures that constrain and confine individual actions. [. . .] In China, after decades of repression and forced “correction” under an ideology ignoring individual freedom, the sudden adoption of the open door policy and then the market economy set loose many Chinese people’s urge to take free actions, often ignoring disciplines, or before proper disciplines were established when they rushed into new fields such as sales, advertising, law, public relations, and so on. Having seen too many free-wheeling improvisations, including many poor or fake performances, more and more Chinese administrators and managers groping in those new fields have realized their need to be more disciplined. Yet new disciplines often look like empty facades when people working in those fields have not been properly trained and remain far away from the ideal models. [. . .] Currently the Chinese SPS practitioners are focusing on two main areas of application – educational theatre and professional training. In each area, they start with some appropriate models for student/trainees to emulate.

2013, “Social Performance Studies: Discipline vs. Freedom,” 7, 9, 27–28, 34

## Is performance studies an independent field?

Even with the updated nomenclature, is performance studies truly an independent field? Can it be distinguished from theatre studies, cultural studies, and other closely allied fields? One can construct several intellectual histories explaining the various specific outlooks of performance studies as practiced by different schools of thought. In this book, I am developing my own version of the “NYU School of Performance Studies.” But even my present and former colleagues at NYU have different versions of this story (see **Kirshenblatt-Gimblett box 2, Taylor box, and Phelan box**). The narrative outlining how performance

studies developed at NYU concerns interactions among Western and Asian philosophies, anthropology, gender studies, feminism, the aesthetics of everyday life, race theory, area studies, popular entertainments, queer theory, and postcolonial studies. These interactions have been heavily inflected by an ongoing contact with the avant-garde – both the Euro-American “historical avant-garde” (from symbolism and surrealism through to Dada and Happenings) to the more current avant-gardes being practiced in many parts of the world. Many students, and some professors, of performance studies at NYU are also practicing artists – in performance art, dance, theatre, and music. Preponderantly, their approach has been experimental – to stretch the limits of their arts in ways analogous to how performance studies stretches the limits of academic discourse.

### Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

#### *NYU's Department of Performance Studies*

When I was recruited in 1980 the then Graduate Drama Department at NYU's School of the Arts was adrift. At first, I thought I was an unlikely candidate for chair. I had a PhD in folklore, not theatre. I studied performance in everyday life, not on the stage. Soon I realized there was no mistake. A mark of NYU's seriousness in making the transformation to performance studies was hiring a chair who did not come from drama or theatre. I brought a performance perspective to the study of culture that was remarkably aligned with what was emerging as performance theory and in a broad range of experimental and popular performance. By having someone who was not a theatre scholar chair, the faculty was ensuring a more radical break between the former Graduate Department of Drama and emerging Department of Performance Studies.

At the time that I was being recruited, the department consisted of four men – Richard Schechner, Brooks McNamara, Michael Kirby, and Theodore Hoffman. The department had never had a woman on the faculty. There were more than 400 MA and PhD students on the books, some of them deceased.

The idea for performance studies that I encountered had been developing in the context of contemporary experimental performance, with links to the historical avant-garde. Schechner, Kirby, and McNamara were themselves active in the off off Broadway movement. Performance studies would let them align their artistic practice with their pedagogy. This meant abandoning a traditional curriculum in European and American drama and theatre. EuroAmerican theatre would thenceforth find its place within an intercultural, intergeneric, and interdisciplinary intellectual project as one of many objects of study. Taking their lead from the historical avant-garde and contemporary experimental performance, they determined that Western theatre and the dramatic text would not be at the center of the new Performance Studies curriculum, though it continues to play an important role. [. . .]

Over the 12 years of my chairing (1980–92), we developed a rich Performance Studies curriculum that came to include dance research, thanks to Marcia Siegel, and feminist theory, thanks to Peggy Phelan. We placed greater emphasis on theory across the curriculum than had previously been the case. We raised academic and admission standards, reduced and transformed our student body so that everyone was full-time, increased financial aid, restructured requirements, and increased the pace and likelihood of completing the degree. We created a Performance Studies Archive. And, on our tenth anniversary, we organized the first Performance Studies international conference.

2001, personal communication

## Diana Taylor

### *Performance studies: a hemispheric focus*

My particular investment in performance studies derives less from what it is than what it allows us to do. What I want performance studies to do is provide a theoretical lens for the sustained historical analysis of performance practices – the Americas being my special area of interest. The many definitions of the word “performance,” as everyone has noted more or less generously, result in a complex, and at times contradictory, mix. For some it is a process, for others the “result” of a process. For some it is that which disappears, while others see it as that which remains as embodied memory. As the different uses of the term rarely engage each other, “performance” has a history of untranslatability. Ironically, the word is stuck in the disciplinary boxes it defies, denied the universality and transparency that some claim it promises its objects of analysis. These many points of “untranslatability,” of course, are what make the term and the practices so culturally revealing. While performances may not give us access and insight into another culture, they certainly tell us a great deal about our desire for access and the politics of our interpretations.

“Performance” has no equivalent in Latin America. Translated simply but nonetheless ambiguously as masculine (“el performance”) or feminine (“la performance”), it usually refers to performance art. Nonetheless, scholars and artists have started to use the term to refer more broadly to social dramas and embodied practices. What this “performance studies” approach allows us to do is crucial: rethink cultural production and expression from a place other than the written word which has dominated Latin American thought since the conquest. While writing was used before the conquest – either in pictogram form, hieroglyphs or knotting systems – it never replaced the performed utterance. Writing was a prompt to performance, a mnemonic aid, not a separate form of knowing. With the conquest, the legitimation of writing over other epistemic and mnemonic systems assured that colonial power could be developed and enforced without the input of the great majority of the population – the indigenous and marginal populations without access to systematic writing. While some scholars engage in “indigenismo” by focusing on oral traditions, the schism does not lie between the written and spoken word but rather between discursive and performative systems.

Western culture, wedded to the word, whether written or spoken, enables language to usurp epistemic and explanatory power. Performance studies allows us to take seriously other forms of cultural expression as both praxis and episteme. Performance traditions also serve to store and transmit knowledge. Performance studies, additionally, functions as a wedge in the institutional understanding and organization of knowledge. In the United States, departments of Spanish and Portuguese limit themselves to “language and literature” to the exclusion of much else. In Latin American institutions, “departamentos de letras” assure a similar schism between literary and embodied cultural practice. The resulting exclusions of many forms of embodied knowledge from analysis effect their own performance of erasure.

Performance is as much about forgetting as about remembering, about disappearing as about re-appearing. A “hemispheric” focus indicates just how much “America,” as the U.S. likes to think of itself, has forgotten about America, whose name, territory, and resources it has fought so hard to dominate. Domination by culture, by “definition,” by claims to “originality” and “authenticity,” functions in tandem with military and economic supremacy. Though a-historical in much of its practice, performance studies can allow us to engage in a sustained historical analysis of performance practices. That’s what I’m asking it to do.

2001, personal communication

**Diana Taylor (1950– ):** leading theorist of Latin American performance and founding director of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics. Taylor chaired NYU’s Performance Studies Department from 1996 to 2002. Her books include *Theatre of Crisis: Drama and Politics in Latin America* (1991), *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s ‘Dirty War’* (1997), and *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003).

## Peggy Phelan

### *Another history, another future of performance studies*

One potent version of the history of performance studies is that the field was born out of the fecund collaborations between Richard Schechner and Victor Turner. In bringing theatre and anthropology together, both men saw the extraordinarily deep questions these perspectives on cultural expression raised. If the diversity of human culture continually showed a persistent theatricality, could performance be a universal expression of human signification, akin to language? [. . .] Was "theatre" an adequate term for the wide range of "theatrical acts" that intercultural observation was everywhere revealing? Perhaps "performance" better captured and conveyed the activity that was provoking these questions. Since only a tiny portion of the world's cultures equated theatre with written scripts, performance studies would begin with an intercultural understanding of its fundamental term, rather than enlisting intercultural case studies as additives, rhetorically or ideologically based postures of inclusion and relevance.

This is the story that surrounded me when I first began teaching in the Department of Performance Studies [. . .] in 1985. I was immediately fascinated by the idea that two men gave birth. [. . .]

When I first began reading Turner's and Schechner's work I was struck by its generosity and porousness, its undisguised desire to be "taken up." [. . .] But I was also a little suspicious of their ease, their sense that all could be understood if we could only see widely and deeply enough. [. . .] As the institutionalization of performance studies spread throughout the eighties (sometimes under other names) in the United States and internationally, the openness of the central paradigm sometimes made it seem that performance studies was (endlessly?) capable of absorbing ideas and methods from a wide variety of disciplines. [. . .]

But institutionalization is hardly ever benign, and one could easily tell the story of the consolidation of the discipline of performance studies in a much less flattering manner. Many people (including some of my own inner voices), did tell me such stories, but I'll use the conditional here to muffle echoes and because I love the guilty. To wit: one could accuse the discipline of practicing some of the very colonialist and empire-extending arts it had critiqued so aggressively. One could argue that performance studies was a narrow, even small-minded, version of cultural studies. One could say that performance studies had so broad a focus precisely because it had nothing original to say. One could suggest that the famous "parasitism" of J. L. Austin's linguistic performative was actually a terrific description of performance studies itself. One could even argue that the whole discipline was created as a reactionary response to the simulations and virtualities of postmodernism; a discipline devoted to live artistic human exchange could easily be taken up by the universities in the eighties precisely because its power as a vital form of culture exchange had been dissipated. A new discipline just in time to commemorate a dead art would be in keeping with the necrophilia of much academic practice.

But each of these (conditional) claims misses what I believe are the most compelling possibilities realized by performance studies. While theatre and anthropology certainly played a central role in the generative disciplines of performance studies, other "points of contact" have also had exceptional force in the field. [. . .] We must begin to imagine a post-theatrical, post-anthropological age. [. . .]

Thinking of performance in the expanded field of the electronic paradigm requires that we reconsider the terms that have been at the contested center of performance studies for the past decade [since 1988]: simulation, representation, virtuality, presence, and above all, the slippery indicative "as if." The electronic paradigm places the "as if" at the foundation of a much-hyped "global communication," even while it asks us to act "as if" such a network would render phantasmatic race, class, gender, literacy, and other access differentials. [. . .]

The electronic paradigm as an epistemic event represents something more than a new way to transmit information; it redefines knowledge itself into that which can be sent and that which can be stored. Performance studies [. . .] is alert to the Net's potential to flatten and screen that which we might want most to remember, to love, to learn. We have created and studied a discipline based on that which disappears, art that cannot be preserved or posted. And we know performance knows things worth knowing. As the electronic paradigm moves into the center of universities, corporations, and other systems of power-knowledge, the "knowing" that cannot be preserved or posted may well generate a mourning that transcends the current lite Luddite resistance to technology.

1998, quoted in "Introduction," *The Ends of Performance*, 3–5, 8

**Peggy Phelan (birthdate not disclosed):** American feminist scholar, Ann O’Day Maples Professor in the Arts at Stanford University, and a founder of Performance Studies international. Author of *Unmarked* (1993), *Mourning Sex* (1997), and *Art and Feminism* (2001, with Helena Reckitt).

The philosophical antecedents to performance studies include questions addressed in ancient times, in the Renaissance, and in the 1950s to 1970s, the period immediately before performance studies came into its own. Early philosophers both in the West and in India pondered the relationship between daily life, theatre, and the “really real.” In the West, the relationship between the arts and philosophy has been marked, according to the Greek philosopher **Plato**, by “a long-standing quarrel between poetry and philosophy.” The ancient Greek felt that the really real, the ideal, existed only as pure forms. In his *Republic* (c. 370 BCE), Plato argued that ordinary realities are but shadows cast on the wall of the dark cave of ignorance. (One wonders if shadow puppetry, so popular in Asia from ancient times, was known to Plato.) The arts – including the performing arts – imitate these shadows and are therefore doubly removed from the really real. As if this weren’t enough, Plato distrusted theatre because it appealed to the emotions rather than to reason, “watering the growth of passions which should be allowed to wither away.” Plato banned poetry, including theatre, from his ideal republic. It was left to Plato’s student **Aristotle** to redeem the arts. Aristotle argued that the really real was “indwelling” as a plan or potential, somewhat like a genetic code. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle reasoned that by imitating actions, and by enacting the logical chain of consequences flowing from actions, one might learn about these indwelling forms. Far from wanting to avoid the emotions, Aristotle wanted to arouse, understand, and purge their deleterious effects.

**Plato (c. 427–c. 347 BCE):** Greek philosopher, the advocate of reason, restraint, and logic over excess and passion. Plato developed the dialogical or dialectical style of discourse – reasoning by means of dialogue and the confrontation of opposites. Ironically, Plato’s dialogues are extremely theatrical and he was very passionate about the life of the mind.

**Aristotle (384–322 BCE):** Greek philosopher, student of Plato. Aristotle published numerous philosophical treatises, including the *Poetics* (c. 335 BCE), where he outlines the principles of Greek tragic drama. Aristotle’s ideas have profoundly influenced European and European-derived performance theory.

Indian philosophers had a different idea altogether. Writing at roughly the same time as the Greeks, they felt that the whole universe, from ordinary reality to the realm of the gods, was *maya* and *lila* – illusion, play, and theatre on a grand scale. The theory of *maya-lila* asserts that the really real is playful, ever changing, and illusive. What is “behind” *maya-lila*? On this, Indian philosophers had several opinions. Some said that nothing was beyond *maya-lila*. Others proposed realities too awesome for humans to experience. When Arjuna, the hero-warrior of the *Mahabharata*, asks Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* section of the epic to show his true form, the experience is terrifying in the extreme. Still other philosophers proposed the existence of *brahman*, an absolute unity-of-all which a person can enter through meditation, yoga, or living a perfected life. At the achievement of *moksha*, or release from the cycle of birth–death–rebirth, a person’s individual *atman* (the absolute within) becomes one with *brahman* (the universal absolute). But for most people most of the time, reality is *maya-lila*. The gods also enter the world of *maya-lila*. The gods take human form, as Krishna does in the performance of Raslila (Krishna’s dance with adoring female cow-herders and with his favorite lover, Radha) or as Rama does in the performance of Ramlila (when Vishnu incarnates himself as Rama to rid the world of the demon Ravana). Raslila and Ramlila are performed today. Hundreds of millions of Indian Hindus believe in these enacted incarnations – where young boys temporarily become gods. Notions of *maya-lila* are discussed more fully in [Chapter 4](#).

In Renaissance Europe the widely accepted notion that the world was a great theatre called the *theatrum mundi* was well put in **William Shakespeare’s** *As You Like It* when Jaques says, “All the world’s a stage | And all the men and women merely players; | They have their exits and their entrances; | And one man in his time plays many parts” (2, 7: 139–42). Hamlet, in his instructions to the players, had a somewhat different opinion, more in keeping with Aristotle’s theory of mimesis: “[. . .] the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as ’t were, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure” (3, 2: 21–25). To people living in the *theatrum mundi* everyday life was theatrical and, conversely, theatre offered a working model of how life was lived.

The most recent variation on the *theatrum mundi* theme emerged shortly after World War II and continues to the present. In 1949, **Jacques Lacan** delivered his paper “The Mirror Stage,” an influential psychoanalytic study proposing that infants as young as six months recognize themselves in the

**William Shakespeare (1564–1616):** playwright, poet, and actor generally regarded as the greatest writer in the English language. Among his 38 plays are *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, *Measure for Measure*, *As You Like It*, *Henry V*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Tempest*.

mirror as “another” (see **Lacan box**). In 1955, **Gregory Bateson** wrote “A Theory of Play and Fantasy.” Bateson emphasized the importance of what he termed “metacommunication,” the message that tells the receiver that a message of a certain kind is being sent – social communications exist within a complex of frames. Bateson’s ideas were elaborated on by **Erving Goffman** in a series of works about performing in everyday life, the most influential of which is his 1959, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. At roughly the same time, philosopher **J. L. Austin** developed his notion of “performativity.” Austin’s lectures on the performative were published posthumously in 1962 as *How to Do Things with Words*. According to Austin, performatives are utterances such as bets, promises, namings, and so on that actually do something, that perform. A little later, in France, **Jean-François Lyotard**, **Gilles Deleuze**, **Michel Foucault**, **Jean Baudrillard**, **Pierre Bourdieu**, **Jacques Derrida**, **Guy Debord**, and **Félix Guattari** proposed what were then radical new ways to understand history, social life, and language. Many of these ideas retain their currency even today. I discuss performativity, postmodernism, simulations, and poststructuralism in [Chapter 5](#).

is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of fantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic – and, lastly, to the assumption of the armor of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development. [. . . Later in life while free associating in psychoanalysis] he ends up by recognizing that this being has never been anything more than his construct in the imaginary and that this construct disappoints all his certainties. For in this labor which he undertakes to reconstruct *for another*, he rediscovers the fundamental alienation that made him construct it *like another*, and which has always destined it to be taken from him *by another*.

1977, *Écrits*, 1, 4, 42

**Jacques Lacan (1901–81):** French structuralist psychoanalyst who theorized the development of an alienated self in terms of interactions among the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. His works include *Écrits* (1977) and *The Four Functions of Psychoanalysis* (1978).

**Gregory Bateson (1904–80):** British-born anthropologist, cyberneticist, and communications theorist. Major works include *Naven* (1936), *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972) and *Mind and Nature* (1979).

**Erving Goffman (1922–82):** Canadian-born anthropologist who studied the performances and rituals of everyday life. His books include *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), *Behavior in Public Places* (1963), *Interaction Ritual* (1967), and *Frame Analysis* (1974).

**J. L. Austin (1911–60):** English philosopher and linguist. His influential Harvard lectures on the concept of the “performative” were posthumously published as *How to Do Things with Words* (1962).

**Jean-François Lyotard (1924–98):** French philosopher. Major works include *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), *The Differend* (1988), and *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event* (1988).

## Jacques Lacan

### *The mirror stage*

The child [. . . from the age of six months can] already recognize as such his own image in a mirror. [. . .] This act [. . .] immediately rebounds [. . .] in a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates – the child’s own body, and the persons and things, around him. [. . .] We understand the mirror stage *as an identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to this term: the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image. [. . .] The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust

**Gilles Deleuze (1925–95):** French poststructuralist philosopher who collaborated with **Félix Guattari (1930–92)**. Together they wrote *Anti-Oedipus* (1977) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987).

**Michel Foucault (1926–84):** French philosopher-historian who analyzed and criticized prison systems, psychiatry, and medicine. Foucault explored the relationships connecting power and knowledge. Among his works are *Madness and Civilization* (1965), *The Order of Things* (1970), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), *Discipline and Punish* (1977), and *The History of Sexuality* (1978).

**Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007):** French cultural theorist known for his work on simulations. His books include *Simulations* (1983), *The Illusion of the End* (1994), and *Selected Writings* (2001).

**Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002):** French sociologist who worked extensively in Algeria before becoming a professor at the Collège de France in Paris. Among his many books are *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972, Eng. 1977), *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (1994, Eng. 1998), *Acts of Resistance* (1988), and *Masculine Domination* (2001).

**Jacques Derrida (1930–2004):** Algerian-born French philosopher who pioneered the literary and cultural theory of deconstruction. Among his many books: *Of Grammatology* (1976), *Writing and Difference* (1978), *Limited Inc* (1988), *Who's Afraid of Philosophy?* (2002), and *On Touching* (with Peter Dreyer, 2005).

**Guy Debord (1931–94):** French writer and filmmaker, founder of the Situationists (1957–72), a revolutionary group of artists and writers who came to prominence during the Paris riots of May 1968. Author of *The Society of the Spectacle* (1994).

My own role in the formation of performance studies goes back to the mid-1960s. My 1966 essay “Approaches to Theory/Criticism” was a formulation of an area of study I called “the performance activities of man” (*sic*): play, games, sports, theatre, and ritual. “Actuals,” published in 1970, related rituals in non-Western cultures to avant-garde performances. Both of these essays are in *Performance Theory* (2003). In 1973, as guest editor of a special *TDR* issue on

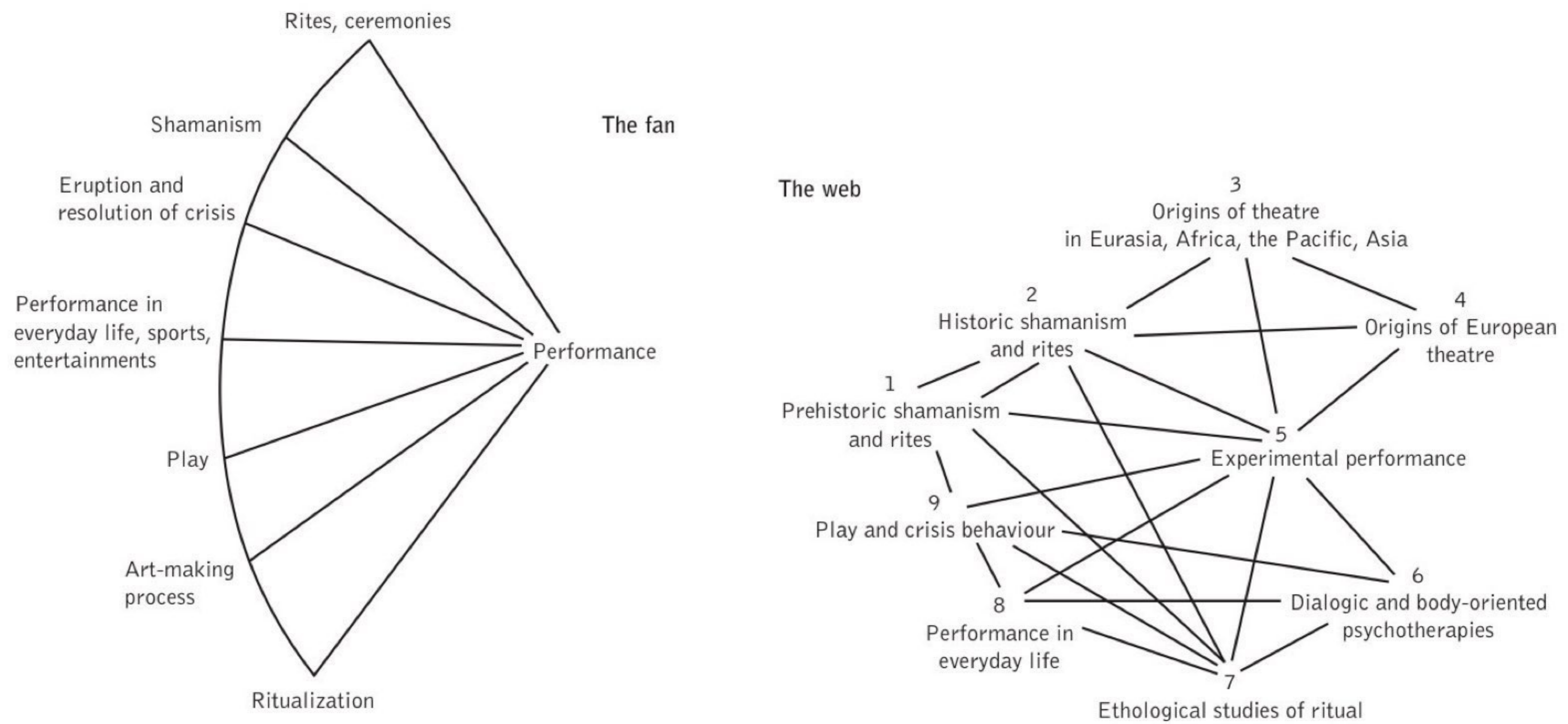
“Performance and the Social Sciences,” I outlined seven “areas where performance theory and the social sciences coincide”:

- 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 Connections between human and animal behavior patterns with an emphasis on play 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 familiar cultures (from the Western perspective).
- 7 Constitution of unified theories of performance, which are, in fact, theories of behavior.

I saw these nodes connected to each other either as a “fan” or a “web” (see [figure 1.1](#)). In 1977, the first edition of *Performance Theory* appeared, revised and expanded in 1988 and again in 2000. I published *Between Theater and Anthropology* in 1985 and *The Future of Ritual* in 1993. I also co-edited several books as well as serving twice as editor of *TDR* (1962–69, 1986–present). I related my theories to my artistic work and research activities in various parts of the world, and to my growing sense of the broad spectrum of performance (see [figures 1.2 and 1.3](#)).

## The Victor Turner connection

This network of ideas and practice was nourished by my relationship with anthropologist **Victor Turner**. Though we knew each other’s work earlier, Turner and I met in 1977 when he invited me to participate in a conference he was organizing on “Ritual, Drama, and Spectacle.” The conference was so successful, and the chemistry between Turner and me so positive, that we joined to plan a “World Conference on Ritual and Performance,” which developed into three related conferences held during 1981–82. The first focused on the performances of the Yaquis of northern Mexico and the US Southwest; the second on the work of **Suzuki Tadashi**. The culminating meeting took place in New York from 23 August to 1 September 1982. Attending were artists and scholars from the Americas, Asia, Europe, and Africa. All in all, 74 participated, 49 at the New York conference – only



**fig 1.1.** Performance can be graphically configured as either a fan or a web. This open fan depicts an orderly panorama ranging from “ritualization” on one end through the “performances of everyday life” in the center to “rites and ceremonies” at the other end. Ritualization is an ethological term; rites and ceremonies are uniquely human.



The web depicts the same system more dynamically – and therefore more experientially. Each node interacts with all the others. It’s no accident that I place “experimental performance” at the center. This arbitrary and subjective positioning expresses my life practice. Others might place something else at the center. In actual fact, there is no center – one ought to imagine the system as in continuous motion and realignment. Furthermore I place historical events alongside speculations and artistic performances. This method is similar to that of Indigenous Australians who credit dreams with a reality maybe even stronger than awake-time events. My method is also similar to the classic theatre exercise wherein “as if” = “is”.

Drawing: “Fan” and “Web” from p. ii of *Performance Theory*, 1977 and all subsequent editions.

**Victor and Edith Turner, Phillip Zarrilli**, and I were at all three meetings. Turner exulted in the meetings as utopian gatherings (see **Turner box**). *By Means of Performance* (1990) was edited from the proceedings of the three episodes of the World Conference.

**Victor Turner (1917–83):** Scottish-born anthropologist who theorized notions of liminality and social drama. Major works include *Forest of Symbols* (1967), *The Ritual Process* (1969), *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (1974), and *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982). Turner collaborated with his wife **Edith Turner (1921– )** on projects. Among Edith Turner’s writings are *Experiencing Ritual* (1992) and *The Hands Feel It* (1996).

**Suzuki Tadashi (1939– ):** Japanese founding artistic director of the Suzuki Company of Toga, with whom he has directed a number of influential works including *The Trojan Women* and *Dionysus*. He advocates an intensely physical approach to actor training which he outlines in *The Way of Acting* (1986).

**Phillip Zarrilli (1947– ):** American-born director, writer, and actor trainer. A Professor of Performance Practice at Exeter University, Zarrilli has developed a psychophysical acting process drawing on Asian martial, medical, and meditation practices. His books include *When the Body Becomes All Eyes* (1998), *Kathakali Dance Drama* (2000), and *Acting (Re) Considered* (editor, 2nd edition, 2002).

What made Turner’s conferences so special was that they were extended get-togethers of relatively few people, lasting from five days to two weeks. Participants had plenty of time to trade ideas, view performances, tell stories, and socialize. These conferences very much shaped my ideas about what performance studies could become. In my courses at NYU, I invited many of those who were at one or another of the conferences to lecture or guest teach. Friends reached out to friends. Tilting performance studies toward anthropology – which was particularly strong in the 1970s and 1980s – is linked to working with Turner and the people he introduced me to; other possibilities for performance studies have since come strongly into play.

fig 1.2. A selection of performances directed by Richard Schechner.



*Yokasta Redux*, Saviana Stanescu and Richard Schechner. The Yokastas strike a pose. From the left: Phyllis Johnson, Jennifer Lim, Daphne Gaines, Rachel Bowditch. East Coast Artists, New York, 2005. Photograph by Ryan Jensen.



*Cherry Ka Bagicha (The Cherry Orchard)*, Anton Chekhov. Act 2, Dunyasha flirting with Yepikhodov. With the Repertory Company of the National School of Drama, New Delhi, 1982. Photograph by Richard Schechner.



*Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, August Wilson. Act 2, Ma Rainey (seated, played by Sophie Mcina), her girl Dussie Mae, played by Baby Cele, and her nephew, Sylvester. Grahamstown Festival, Republic of South Africa, 1992. Photograph by Richard Schechner.



*The Oresteia*, Aeschylus (in Chinese). Agamemnon, played by Wu Hsing-kuo, steps on the purple carpet. With the Contemporary Legend Theatre, Taipei, 1995. Photograph by Richard Schechner.



*Three Sisters*, Anton Chekhov. Act 2, Vershinin, played by Frank Wood, orating about the future. With East Coast Artists, New York 1997. Photograph by Richard Schechner.

## Victor Turner

### *By their performances shall ye know them*

Cultures are most fully expressed in and made conscious of themselves in their ritual and theatrical performances. [. . .] A performance is a dialectic of “flow,” that is, spontaneous movement in which action and awareness are one, and “reflexivity,” in which the central meanings, values and goals of a culture are seen “in action,” as they shape and explain behavior. A performance is declarative of our shared humanity, yet it utters the uniqueness of particular cultures. We will know one another better by entering one another’s performances and learning their grammars and vocabularies.

1980, from a Planning Meeting for the World Conference on Ritual and Performance, quoted in “Introduction,”  
*By Means of Performance* (1990), Richard Schechner and Willa Appel (eds), 1

After Turner’s death in 1983, I convened another conference in his style – a 1990 meeting on “intercultural performance” attended by about 20 artists and scholars at the Rockefeller Foundation’s villa in Bellagio, Italy. Many of the participants were closely associated with what was by then being called the “emerging field of performance studies.” The three conferences – stretching over 15 years – were important as field-defining events, as means of dissemination, and as prototypes for the yet-to-be-convened “Points of Contact” conferences of the Centre for Performance Research in Wales and the annual conferences of Performance Studies international (PSi).

## The Centre for Performance Research and PSi

From 1980, when the NYU Graduate Drama Department morphed into the Department of Performance Studies, the first such in the world, performance studies developed rapidly. I resumed editorship of *TDR* in 1986, titling it “*The Journal of Performance Studies*.” In Wales in 1988, **Richard Gough** founded the Centre for Performance Research (CPR). The CPR convened a series of conferences entitled “Points of Contact” (named after the introduction to my *Between Theater and Anthropology*) and in 1996 launched its own journal, *Performance Research (PR)*. *PR* publishes a broad range of materials – for example, *On Cooking* (1999), *On Form* (2005), and *On Ecology* (2013). In 1990, what was planned as a modest, graduate-student-led conference celebrating the tenth anniversary of NYU’s performance studies department attracted 110 people, 43 from outside the USA. The conveners of the conference playfully dubbed it PSi, Performance

Studies international, and the name stuck. By 2012, PSi’s membership had grown to nearly 2,000 from 40 countries. In 1993, members of ATHE (American Theatre in Higher Education) formed a performance studies “focus group” sponsoring performance studies panels and a “pre-conference” immediately before ATHE’s annual meeting. In 1995, the first annual PSi conference – “The Future of the Field” – brought 550 people to NYU. *The Ends of Performance* (1998, Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane, editors) is based on this conference. In 1996, PSi met at NU. After that, and continuing in the twenty-first century, the movable feast of PSi’s annual meetings have been served up in the UK, Germany, New Zealand, Singapore, Canada, Croatia, the Netherlands, and the USA. PSi became an official organization in 1997 (see **PSi box**). Despite its success, and as is clear from where the organization convenes annually, PSi and PS are open to the charge of being “imperialistic” – that is, guided by Western ideas and, to a significant degree, Western leadership (see **McKenzie, Wee, and Roms box**).

**Richard Gough: (1956– ):** founder and director of the Centre for Performance Research (CPR) of Aberystwyth, Wales and first president of PSi. Gough organized a series of conferences, “Points of Contact,” in the 1990s which helped define performance studies. He is a founding editor of the journal *Performance Research*.

## Northwestern’s brand of performance studies

It was no accident that the second annual PSi conference took place in 1996 at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. NU’s brand of performance studies, which took its

## PSi (Performance Studies international)

### *Artists and scholars from throughout the world*

PSi is a professional association founded in 1997 to promote communication and exchange among scholars and practitioners working in the field of performance. We seek to create opportunities for dialogue among artists, thinkers, activists and academics.

PSi is actively committed to creating a membership base of artists and scholars from throughout the world. We recognize that while performance studies as a field encourages conversations across disciplinary boundaries, professionals in various parts of the world often need greater opportunities to exchange research and information about performance with others who share their interests and expertise.

PSi is a network of exchange for scholars and practitioners working in diverse locations, both disciplinary and geographic. We act as a crucible for new ideas and forms in performance discourse and practice, often testing the relation between the two. As a professional organization, PSi is committed to encouraging the development of both emerging and established artists and scholars.

[psi-web.org/about/mission](http://psi-web.org/about/mission)

present shape during the 1980s, emerged from speech communications, oral interpretation (the performance of literature other than dramas), rhetoric (debate and public speaking), and urban anthropology. Adherents of the NU approach take a very broad view of what constitutes “text” (see **Stern and Henderson box**). In the 1980s, two historians of performance studies felt it was “too early” to claim a paradigm shift from oral interpretation and theatre to performance studies (see **Pelias and VanOosting box**). But by the start of the new millennium the shift was well established.

Impetus for the shift came strongly from **Dwight Conquergood**, the chair of Performance Studies at NU from 1993–99 and a major theorist, ethnographer, and

filmmaker. Conquergood argued for combining text- and performance-based approaches with creative work (see **Conquergood box**). Conquergood’s ideas and practice remain at the core of NU’s program.

**Dwight Conquergood (1949–2004):** American ethnographer and performance theorist. Chair of Northwestern University’s Department of Performance Studies during a decisive, formative period, 1993–99. Through his teaching, ethnographic work, and lecturing, Conquergood was instrumental in shaping the NU brand of performance studies. Co-director (with Taggart Siegel) of the video documentary *The Heart Broken in Half* (1990).

## Jon McKenzie, C. J. W.-L. Wee, and Heike Roms

### *Away from imperialism?*

Performance research has gone global. By this we refer not so much to the cultural phenomena studied – which, it is clear, have long been located around the world – but to the *locations* of researchers themselves. These locations have steadily expanded over the past two decades, whether it be in terms of individual researchers working alone or in small groups on different continents. This expansion is mirrored by the emergence of performance research and study programs in different countries. [. . .] Important research projects and academic departments have emerged in locales as diverse as Australia, Brazil,

fig 1.3. A photographic array of some examples of the "broad spectrum of performance."



**Ritual:**  
Trinidad carnival. Stilt walkers, variants of the Moko Jumbie, from T&T Kaisokah Moko Jumbies from San Fernando, Queen's Park Savannah, Port of Spain. Photograph by Pablo Delano.



**Ritual:**  
Girl receiving Eucharist from a priest at Grand Bay, Mauritius, First Holy Communion. Photograph by Perry Joseph/ArkReligion.com. Reproduced with permission.



**Play:**  
Sam and Kate Taylor and their cousin Bridget Caird playing "dress up" in New Zealand, 1979. Photograph by Moira Taylor.



**Sports:**  
New Zealand Crusaders' Justin Marshall runs between South Africa Cats' Wikus van Heerden and Trevor Hall during his 100th Super 12 rugby match at Jade Stadium, Christchurch, New Zealand, April 2005. AP/Photopress, Ross Land. Copyright EMPICS. Reproduced with permission.



**Popular Entertainment:**  
Woodstock Festival of music, 1968. Elliott Landy/Magnum Photos.



**Performing Arts: Theatre**

Peter Brook's 1970 production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Royal Shakespeare Theatre. On the swings, Alan Howard as Oberon and John Kane as Puck. Below, Sara Kestelman as Titania and David Waller as Bottom. Copyright 1970 David Farrell. Courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.



**Performing Arts: Dance**

Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, *Story/Time* rehearsal, McGuire Theater, September 7, 2011. Gene Pittman for Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.



**Performance in Everyday Life:**

Dr. Basir Ahmad Jaghori talks to a patient at a mobile health clinic in the mountain village of Raquol, in Panjab district, Afghanistan, 9 June 2011. Photograph by Paula Bronstein; Getty Images News.



**Political Performance:**

Occupy Wall Street demonstrators stage a march past the New York Stock Exchange dressed as corporate zombies during a protest on Wall Street, 3 October 2011. Photograph by Emmanuel Dunand. Getty Images.



**Performance Art:**

Performance View Poetry Project at Saint Marks Church, 1985. Karen Finley performing *Don't Hang the Angel*. Photograph by Dona Ann McAdams.

Canada, China, Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Israel, Peru, Poland, Singapore, Slovenia, and South Africa. [. . .]

If performance research as a recognized area of study and its institutionalization as performance studies have been widely perceived as centered in the United States, there is, also, a growing sense that a profound decentering of the area is transpiring [. . .]. Performance studies is no longer about the West – specifically the United States – studying the “Rest.” While performance has for some time been recognized as both a contested concept and a practice of potential contestation, the sites and stakes of those contests have both multiplied and entered into new configurations.

2010, *Contesting Performance: Global Sites of Research*, 1–2

## Carol Simpson Stern and Bruce Henderson

### *A whole field of human activity*

The term performance incorporates a whole field of human activity. It embraces a verbal act in everyday life or a staged play, a rite of investive played in urban streets, a performance in the Western traditions of high art, or a work of performance art. It includes cultural performances, such as the personal narrative or folk and fairy tales, or more communal forms of ceremony – the National Democratic Convention, an evensong vigil march for people with AIDS, Mardi Gras, or a bullfight. It also includes literary performance, the celebration of individual genius, and conformity to Western definitions of art. In all cases a performance act, interactional in nature and involving symbolic forms and live bodies, provides a way to constitute meaning and to affirm individual and cultural values.

1993, *Performance*, 3

## The “inter” of performance studies

Performance studies resists fixed definition. Performance studies does not value “purity.” It is at its best when operating amidst a dense web of connections. Academic disciplines are most active at their ever-changing interfaces. In terms of performance studies, this means the interactions between theatre and anthropology, folklore and sociology, history and performance theory, gender studies and psychoanalysis, performativity and actual performance events – and more. New interfaces will appear as time goes on, and older ones will disappear. Accepting “inter” means opposing the establishment of any single system of knowledge, values, or subject matter. Performance studies is open, multivocal, and self-contradictory. Therefore, any call for a “unified field” is, in my view, a misunderstanding of the very fluidity and playfulness fundamental to performance studies.

At a more theoretical level, what is the relation of performance studies to performance proper? Are there any limits to performativity? Is there anything outside the purview of performance studies? I discuss these questions in [Chapters 2 and 5](#). For now, let me say that the performative occurs in places and situations not traditionally marked as “performing arts,” from dress-up and drag to certain kinds of writing and speaking. Accepting the performative as a category of theory makes it increasingly difficult to sustain a distinction between appearances and reality, facts and make-believe, surfaces and depths. Appearances are actualities – neither more nor less so than what lies behind or beneath appearances. Social reality is constructed through and through. In modernity, what was “deep” and “hidden” was thought to be “more real” than what was on the surface (Platonism dies hard). But in postmodernity, the relationship between depths and surfaces is fluid; the relationship is dynamically convective.

## Ronald J. Pelias and James VanOosting

### *A magical renaming that opens doors*

The term “performance studies” as a disciplinary title enjoys increasing currency, often used in place of the more familiar label, “oral interpretation.” [ . . . ]

Performance studies calls into question the privilege of academic authority by including all members of a speech community as potential artists, all utterances as potentially aesthetic, all events as potentially theatrical, and all audiences as potentially active participants who can authorize artistic experience. By rejecting canonical security and exclusionary conventions, performance studies practitioners eschew artistic imperialism in favor of aesthetic communalism. These claims, then, yield an ideology that is racially democratic and counterelitist. [ . . . ]

[T]he move to performance studies institutionalizes what oral interpretation sanctioned as experimentation. [ . . . ] While positioned squarely within the field of speech communication, [the name] “performance studies” suggests clear links to theatre, ethnography and folklore, popular culture, and contemporary literary criticism. However, the new nomenclature is hardly arbitrary or mercenary; it is justified by the long evolutionary development of oral interpretation. [ . . . ] Performance studies, thus, is an act of magical renaming, a stage of evolutionary development, and a revisionist reading. But does the name change point to a paradigm shift? It is too early to say.

1987, “A Paradigm for Performance Studies,” 219, 221, 228–29

## Ethical questions

Many who practice performance studies resist or oppose the global forces of capital. Fewer will concede that these forces know very well – perhaps even better than we do – how to perform, in all the meanings of that word. The interplay of efficiency, productivity, activity, and entertainment – in a word, performance – informs and drives countless operations. In many key areas of human activity “performance” is crucial to success. The word crops up in apparently very different circumstances. These divergent uses indicate a basic overall similarity at the theoretical level. Performance has become a major site of knowledge and power (see **McKenzie box**). In relation to this relatively new situation, many ethical questions remain nakedly open. The most important concern “intervention” – biologically, militarily, culturally. When, if ever, ought force be used to “save” or “protect” people – and why say yes to Libya and no to Syria? Who has the right and/or the responsibility to say yes or no? What about genetic intervention? Who can be against preventing or curing diseases and increasing crop yields? But what about cloning? Or modifying human traits? What constitutes a “disease” and what traits are “bad”? When does “life” begin and end? The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw some very nasty things done under the aegis of

a eugenic “improvement” of the human species. What about genetically engineering “super athletes” (see **Miah box**)? In terms of art and scholarship, what, if any, ought to be the limits to creativity and cultural borrowings? I take up some of these questions in [Chapter 8](#).

## Conclusions

Performance studies came into existence within, and as a response to, the radically changing intellectual and artistic circumstances of the last third of the twentieth century. As the twenty-first century unfolds, many people remain dissatisfied with the status quo. Equipped with ever more powerful means of finding and sharing information – the internet, cell phones, sophisticated computing – people are increasingly finding the world not a book to be read but a performance to participate in. Paradoxically, this textbook is a book about the world becoming less of a book. Performance studies is an academic discipline designed to answer the need to deal with the changing circumstances of the “glocal” – the powerful combination of the local and the global. Performance studies is more interactive, hyper-textual, virtual, and fluid than most scholarly disciplines. At the same time, adherents to performance studies face





## Dwight Conquergood

### *Performance studies at Northwestern*

What is really radical about theatre, performance, and media studies at NU is that we embrace both written scholarship and creative work, texts and performance. [. . .] Printed texts are too important and powerful for us to cede that form of scholarship. But it is not enough. We also engage in creative work that stands alongside and in metonymic tension with conventional scholarship. We think of performance and practical work as a supplement to – not substitute for – written scholarship. [. . .]

Speaking from my home department, we sometimes 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, and community. By community, I mean citizenship and civic struggles for social justice. Theatre, performance, and media studies at NU all struggle to forge a unique and unifying mission around the triangulation of these three perspectives on performance and creative work:

1. Accomplishment (the making of art and culture; creativity; embodiment; the work of imagination; 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; critique; thinking about and with performance; performance as an optic, a metaphor or theoretical model for understanding culture; knowledge that comes from contemplation and comparison – concentrated attention and contextualization as a way of knowing).
3. Application (activism, the connection to community; social contexts and articulations; action research; artistic and 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).

The ongoing challenge of our collaborative agenda is to refuse and supersede the deeply entrenched division of labor, apartheid of knowledges, that plays out inside the academy as the difference between thinking and doing, interpreting and making, conceptualization and creativity. 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.

1999, from a talk at the "Cultural Intersections" conference, Northwestern University

daunting ethical and political questions. What limits, if any, ought there to be to the ways information is gathered, processed, and distributed? Should those with the means intervene in the interest of "human rights" or must they respect local cultural autonomy at whatever cost? Artists and scholars are playing increasingly decisive roles in addressing these ethical and political questions. One goal of this textbook is to help you think about and act on these questions.

### TALK ABOUT



1. Clifford Geertz wrote, "Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is" (*Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 29). Is this true of your own department in relation to performance studies? What is the "place" of performance studies in your department?

## Jon McKenzie

### *Performance is a new subject of knowledge*

[. . . P]erformance will be to the 20th and 21st centuries what discipline was to the 18th and 19th, that is, an onto-historical formation of power and knowledge [italics in original]. [. . .] Like discipline, performance produces a new subject of knowledge, though one quite different from that produced under the regime of panoptic surveillance. Hyphenated identities, transgendered bodies, digital avatars, the Human Genome Project – these suggest that the performative subject is constructed as fragmented rather than unified, decentered rather than centered, virtual as well as actual. Similarly, performative objects are unstable rather than fixed, simulated rather than real. They do not occupy a single, “proper” place in knowledge; there is no such thing as the thing-in-itself. Instead, objects are produced and maintained through a variety of socio-technical systems, overcoded by many discourses, and situated in numerous sites of practice. While disciplinary institutions and mechanisms forged Western Europe’s industrial revolution and its system of colonial empires, those of performance are programming the circuits of our postindustrial, postcolonial world. More profoundly than the alphabet, printed book, and factory, such technologies as electronic media and the Internet allow discourses and practices from different geographical and historical situations to be networked and patched together, their traditions to be electronically archived and played back, their forms and processes to become raw materials for other productions. Similarly, research and teaching machines once ruled strictly and linearly by the book are being retooled by a multimedia, hypertextual metatechnology, that of the computer.

2001, *Perform Or Else*, 18

## Andy Miah

### *Genetically altered athletes?*

The prospect of creating a human who can sprint the one-hundred-metre race in five or six seconds is a ridiculous notion in our current (and near future) scientific climate. Equally, the possibility of creating an athlete who can have a non-depleting capacity for endurance is ludicrous. Yet the international sporting community has begun to take seriously the possibility that genetics may present ethical issues for elite sport and be used with some affect to performance. In addition, genetic research has already begun in areas tangential to sport training technology.

2004, *Genetically Modified Athletes: Biomedical Ethics, Gene Doping and Sport*, 6

2. How might performance studies help to deal with some of the problems facing the world, such as threats to the environment, the oppression and exploitation of people, overpopulation, and war?

## PERFORM

1. Form a circle. Each person speaks her/his name. Continue until everyone in the class knows everyone else’s name.
2. Someone walks across the room. Someone else describes that action. The person walks across the room again, “showing” what previously they were just “doing.” What were the differences between “walking” and “showing walking?”

