

Cultural Pragmatics: A New Model of Social Performance

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The question of theory and practice permeates not only politics but culture, where the analogue for theory is the social-symbolic text, the bundle of everyday codes, narratives, and rhetorical configurations that are the objects of hermeneutic reconstruction. Emphasizing action over theory, praxis theorists, from Bourdieu to Swidler, underplay the deeply imbedded textuality of social action (e.g., Turner 1994). A no less distorting myopia affects the vision from the other side. Hermeneuts such as Dilthey and Ricoeur sharply underestimate the material problem of instantiating ideals in the real world. Marx was right when, in his "Theses on Feuerbach," he insisted on the necessity for an alternative, synthetic position: Theory and practice are certainly different, and often in tension one with another, but they are always necessarily intertwined.

How the theory and practice of social action become intertwined is the topic of this essay in sociological theory. I will suggest that such an intertwining can be understood, and unraveled, only by appropriating elements of the new, interdisciplinary field of performance theory. My ambition, in fact, is to develop a complex, systematic, macro-sociological model of cultural performance, one that applies not only to individual but also to collective social action. In the process of elaborating this new model, I will enter not only into the historical origins of theatrical performance and dramaturgical theory, but into the history and theories of social performance as well. This means looking at how, and why, symbolic action moved from ritual to theatre (Turner 1982), and why it has so often been urged to move back to ritual again (Schechner 1976). To put the argument that follows in brief and schematic terms, I will suggest that, in simpler societies, there was a "fusion" of the elements that compose social performance, and that in the process of social development these elements became increasingly "defused." In the face of such complexity, I will suggest, the challenge for contemporary social action can be seen as a project of "refusion." It is here, in the project of refusion, that the challenges both of social effectiveness and existential authenticity lie.

Towards a Cultural Pragmatics

Kenneth Burke (1957 [1941]) introduced the notion of symbolic action. Clifford Geertz (1973a [1964]) made it famous. These thinkers wanted to draw attention to the specifically cultural character of activities, the manner in which they are expressive rather than instrumental, irrational rather than rational, more like theatrical performance than economic exchange. Drawing also from Burke, and writing at about the same time, Erving Goffman (1956) introduced his own version of dramaturgical theory. Perhaps because of the more pragmatic than symbolic emphasis of mid-century symbolic interactionism, the specifically cultural dimension of this Goffmanian approach to drama made hardly any dent upon the sociological discipline as it has developed since, though it has entered forcefully into the emerging discipline of performance studies.[1]

In the decades that have ensued since the enunciation of these seminal ideas, those sociologists who have taken "the cultural turn" have followed a different path. It has been meaning, not action, that has occupied central attention, and in many ways deservedly so. To show the importance of meaning, as compared to such traditional sociological ciphers as power, money, and status, it has seemed necessary to demonstrate that meaning is itself a structure (e.g., Rambo and Chan 1990, Somers 1994), just as powerful as the others to which it has so often been reduced. To take meaning seriously, and not to dismiss it as an epiphenomenon, has been a formidable challenge. Thus, the "stronger," more controversial programs in contemporary cultural sociology (e.g., Eyerman 2001, Alexander and Smith 2001, Emirbayer and Misch 1998, Edles 1998, Seidman 1997, Mukerji 1997, Ringmar 1996, Somers 1995, Sewell 1992) have followed Ricoeur's philosophical demonstration that meaningful actions can be considered as texts, exploring codes and narratives, metaphors, metathemes, values, and rituals in such diverse institutional domains as religion, nation, class, race, family, gender, and sexuality. The ambition of these efforts has been to establish what makes meaning important, to understand what makes some social facts meaningful at all.

In terms of Charles Morris' (1938) classic distinction, such so-called strong programs have focused on the syntactics and semantics of meaning, on the relations of signs to one another and to their referents. Ideas about symbolic action and dramaturgy, by contrast, gesture to the pragmatics of the cultural process, to the relations between cultural texts and actors in everyday life. While such considerations have by no means been entirely ignored by those who have sought to develop a meaning-centered program in cultural sociology, they have been addressed largely in terms of the metatheoretical debate over structure and agency (E.g., Sewell 1992, Somers 1994, Kane 1991, Hayes 1994, Giddens 1984, Alexander 1988, Sahlins 1976, 1981). Metatheory is indispensable as an orienting device. It thinks out problems in a general manner and, by doing so, provides more specific, explanatory thinking with a direction to go. The challenge at this point, however, is to move downward on the scientific continuum, from the presuppositions of metatheory to the models and empirical generalizations upon which explanation depends. Metatheoretical thinking about structure and agency provides hunches about how this should be done, yet there remain gaping holes between general concepts and empirical facts. Without providing systematic mediating concepts, even the most fruitful theoretical-cum-empirical efforts to bridge semantics and pragmatics have an ad hoc character.

It is time, then, for sociological theorists who remain deeply concerned with meaning to develop a theoretical model of cultural pragmatics. Cultural practice must be theorized independently of cultural symbolics, while, at the same time, remaining fundamentally interrelated with it. Social action puts cultural texts into practice, but it cannot not do so directly, without passing goal. One way to say this is that theories of practice must respect the relative autonomy of structures of meaning. Another way to say this is that pragmatics and semantics are analytical, not concrete distinctions.

To insist on the analytical nature of the relation between pragmatics and semantics is to suggest that cultural practices are not simply speech acts, in the Austinian sense. Half a century ago, John Austin (1957) introduced into ordinary language philosophy, which had been initiated by Wittgenstein, the idea that language could, in fact, have a performative function, not only a constative one. Speaking aims to get things done, not merely to make assertions and provide descriptions. In regard to this performative dimension of speech, Austin keenly observed, the appropriate evaluative standard is not truth and accuracy, but "felicitous" and "unfelicitous." This philosophical innovation could have marked a turn to the aesthetic dimensions of individual and collective speech acts. Such a move can, indeed, be traced in the fleeting reflections about "exemplary" action by Hannah Arendt (1958) and, in her wake, such contemporary social thinkers as Eyerman (e.g., Eyerman and Jameson 1998), Lara (1998), and Ferrara (1998). The central thrust of speech act theory, however, has led in precisely the opposite direction, that is, to an increasing focus on the interactional, the situational, and the practical elements in symbolic action (e.g., Habermas 1984; Sachs, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974). Austin's innovation had the paradoxical effect of cutting off the practice of language from the significance of language as a text. Could Wittgenstein (1953) himself possibly have accepted the notion that the act of speaking could be understood without reference to the relevant language game? [2]

Could Saussure? Certainly, the creator of the structural-semiotic approach to linguistics would have agreed with Austin that parole (speech) must be studied independently of langue (language), yet he would have insisted that, in order to consider its effectiveness, spoken language must be considered in its totality as both langue and parole. In this respect, Saussure's sometimes errant discipline, Jacques Derrida, has been a faithful son. For Derrida (1988: 18) sharply criticized Austin for ignoring the "citational" quality of even the most pragmatic writing and speech. Because there can be no determinate, trans-contextual relation of signifier and signified, or referent, Derrida insisted that difference always involves difference. Interpreting symbolic practice – culture in its "presence" – always entails a reference to culture in its "absence," that is, to an implied semiotic text. In other words, to be practical and effective in action – to engage in what I will later call a successful performance – actors must be able to make the meanings of culture-structures stick.

The Real and the Artificial

Such philosophical considerations actually bear on some very practical and contemporary issues. These concern the manner in which contemporary cultural practice seems so uneasily to slide between artifice and authenticity. There is the deep pathos of Princess Diana's death and funeral, mediated by highly constructed, commercially-targeted televised productions, yet so genuine and compelling that the business of a great national collectivity came almost fully to rest. There are the Pentagon's faked anti-ballistic missile tests and its doctored action photographs of smart missiles during the Iraq war, both of which were passed off and accepted as genuine in their respective times. There is the continuous and often nauseating flow of the staged-for-camera pseudo-events, which Daniel Boorstin (1961) already began to conceptual four decades ago. Yet, right beside them, there is the undeniable moral power generated by the equally "artificial" media events explored by Daniel Dayan

and Elihu Katz (1992) -- Sadat's arrival in Jerusalem, John-Paul's first Papal visit to Poland, and John F. Kennedy's funeral.

Plays, movies, and television shows are staged as if they occur in real life, and in real time. To seem as if they are "live" (cf., Auslander 1999), to seem real, they are increasingly shot on location. National armies intimidate one another by staging war games, artificial events whose intention not to produce a "real" effect is announced well before they occur but which often have altered real balances of power nonetheless. Guerilla movements, like the Zapatista rebels from Chiapas, Mexico, represent powerful grass roots movements that aim to displace vast material interests and had the effect of getting real people killed. Yet, the masses in such movements present their collective force via highly staged photo-marches, and their leaders, such as Subcommander Marcos, present themselves in explicitly iconic and figurative ways.

Such postmodern commentators as Baudrillard (1983) denounce such interplay of reality with fiction as demarcating a new age, one in which, in the terms I suggested above, pragmatics has displaced semantics, social referents have disappeared, and only signifiers powered by the interests and powers of the day remain. In the course of this essay, I hope to show why such a vision of simulated hyper-textuality is false in some significant way. Signifieds, no matter what their position in the manipulated field of cultural production, can never be separated from some set of apriori, structured, and meaningfully understood signifiers. At this point in my argument, I confine myself to noting that the effort at artificially creating the impression of liveness is nothing new. The highly imagistic Impressionist painters wanted to trump the artificiality of the French Academy by moving outside, to be closer to the nature they were representing, to paint "en plein air." The mid-nineteenth Lincoln-Douglas debates were anything but "natural." They were actually highly staged, and their real social influence would have been greatly reduced had it not been for the hyperbolic expansiveness of the print media of that earlier, supposedly more innocent day (Schudson 1998). The aristocracies and emerging middle classes of the Renaissance, the period marking the very birth of modernity, were highly style conscious, employing facial make-up, hair shaping, and clothing on both sides of the gender divide, and engaging, more generally, in strenuous efforts at "self-fashioning" (Greenblatt 1980). Was it not Shakespeare, the greatest writer of the Renaissance, who introduced into Western literature the very notion of the whole world as a stage, suggesting that human beings are merely actors upon it?

If we are condemned to live our lives in an age of artifice -- a world of mirrored, manipulated, and mediated representation -- the constructed character of symbols does not make them less real. In a recent empirical study, Marvin and Ingle (1999) have described the American flag, the "stars and stripes," as a totem for the American nation, a tribe whose members periodically engage in blood sacrifice so that this totem may continue to thrive. Such a direct equation of contemporary sacrality with pre-literate tribal life has its dangers, and I will discuss these at great length below. Nonetheless, there is much in this account of contemporary life that rings powerfully true.

Nostalgia and Counter-Nostalgia: Sacrality Then and Now

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

Culture still remains powerful as an apriori input into social action, even in the most contemporary societies. Powers are still infused with sacralizing discourses, and modern and postmodern actors can strategize only by typifying in terms of institutionally segmented narratives and binary codes. Secularization does not mean the loss of cultural meaning, the emergence of completely free-floating institutions, or the creation of purely self-referential individual actors, a point that Emirbayer and Misch (1998) have made very well. There still remains the "dialectic between sacralization and secularization" (Thompson 1990). But action does not relate to culture in an unfolding sort of way. Secularization means differentiation rather than fusion, not only between culture, self, and social structure, but within culture itself.

Mannheim (1986 [1927]) pointed out that it has been the unwillingness to accept the implications of such differentiation that has always characterized conservative political theory, which from Burke to Oakshott to

contemporary communitarians has given short shrift to cultural pluralism and individual autonomy. What is perhaps less well understood is that such an unwillingness has also undermined some of the most important insights of interpretively oriented cultural social science.

For many of our modernist predecessors who maintained that, despite modernization, meaning still matters, the conceptual tools employed for meaning-analysis in traditional and simple societies often seemed good to be enough. According to such sociologists as Edward Shils (with Young 1956), and such anthropologists as F. Lloyd Warner (1951), modern societies still had ceremonies and rituals, and they still had sacred centers. According to Talcott Parsons, modern societies so institutionalized value patterns that self, culture, and social role were empirically, if not analytically, isomorphic, and fused. These thinkers jumped, each in his own creative way, directly from the late Durkheim to late modernity, without making the necessary conceptual adjustments along the way. The effect was to relegate to an "etc. clause" the overwhelmingly obvious fact that in modern society certain fundamental things about action and its relation to meaning have changed. It was, of course, in reaction to such insistence on social-cum-cultural integration that conflict theory made claims, long before postmodern constructivism, that public cultural performances were merely cognitive, not affective (1977), that they sprang not from cultural texts but from artificial scripts, that they were less rituals in which audiences voluntarily if vicariously participated than symbolic effects controlled and manipulated by elites (Birnbaum 1955).

The old fashioned Durkheimians, like the political conservatives from whom they differed in ideology, were motivated in some similar part by nostalgia for an earlier, more simple, and more cohesive age. Yet their critics often have been moved by feelings of a not altogether different kind, by an anti-nostalgia that barely conceals their own deep yearning for the sacred life. In confronting the fragmentations of modern and postmodern life, political radicals have often been motivated by cultural conservatism. From Marx via Nietzsche and Weber to the Frankfurt school, and later from Arendt to Jameson and Baudrillard, left cultural critics have lodged the nostalgic claim that capitalism or industrial society or mass society or postmodernity has destroyed the very possibility for meaning. As Clifford (1986) has suggested in another context, however, such criticism makes an allegory out of cultural history. Narrated as disenchantment, history becomes moralized as the fall from Eden, as declension from a once golden age of wholeness and holiness. Once representation is encased inside of such a framework, it must inevitably come to be seen as artificial. Whether modernity is viewed as substantively or only formally rational, it becomes mechanical and un-meaningful.

The classical theoretical statement of this allegory remains the Frankfurt School essay by Walter Benjamin's (1986 [1936]), "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," veneration for which has only grown among postmodern critics of the artificiality of the present age. Benjamin held that that the auratic quality of art, the aura that surrounded it and gave it a sacred and holy social status, was inherently diminished by art's reproducibility. If sacred aura is a function of distance, Benjamin maintained, then it can hardly be sustained once mechanical reproduction allows contact with the aesthetic object to become intimate, frequent, and mundane. Baudrillard's simulacrum (1983) marks merely another installment in this theoretical allegory of disenchantment. Following his lead, a more recent postmodern theorist, Peggy Phelan (1993), has suggested that, because the "only life" of performance is "in the present," it "cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations." Once performance is mechanically mediated, its meaningfulness is depleted. Such historical allegory becomes ontologically pessimistic, and in this way Heideggerian. If ontology is defined in terms of Dasein, as "being there," then any artificial mediation will wipe it away. "To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction," Phelan predicts, "it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology."

We can escape from such ontological fundamentalism only by developing a more complex sociology of performance theory. It was Burke (1957 [1941], 1959, 1965) who first proposed to transform the straightforward action theory of Weber and Parsons, the schema of means-ends-norms-conditions which simultaneously mimicked and critiqued economic man. He did so by considering "act" in a theatrical and expressive rather than in a nominalist, traditionally sociological manner, and he transformed "conditions" into the idea of a "scene" upon which an act could be displayed. With analytical transformations such as these, cultural traditions could be viewed not merely as regulating actions, in the traditional sociological sense, but as informing dramas, the performance of which could display exemplary motives, inspire catharsis, and allow working through.

The implications of such an extraordinary conceptual innovation, however, were limited by Burke's purely literary ambitions, as well as by the fact that he, too, betrayed nostalgia for a simpler society. On the one hand, he suggested, on the one hand, that "a drama is a mode of symbolic action so designed that an audience might be induced to 'act symbolically' in sympathy with it" (1965: 449, italics added). On the other hand, he insisted that, "insofar as the drama serves this function it may be studied as a 'perfect mechanism' composed of parts

moving in mutual adjustment to one another like clockwork" (ibid.). The idea is that, if audience sympathy is gained, then society really does function like a dramatic text, with true synchrony among its various parts. In other words, Burke's theory of dramaturgy functioned, not only as an analytical device, but also as an allegory for re-enchantment. The implication is that, if the theory is properly deployed, it will demonstrate for contemporaries how sacrality can be recaptured, indeed that it has perhaps never disappeared, and that the center will hold.

Such nostalgia for re-enchantment affected the most significant line of dramaturgical thinking that followed out from Burke. More than any other thinker, it was Victor Turner who demonstrated the most profound interest in modernizing ritual theory, with notions of ritual process, liminality and liminoid being the most famous result (Turner 1969; cf., Edles 1998). When he turned from ritual to dramaturgy, Turner (1974, 1982) was able to carry this interest forward in a profoundly innovative manner, creating a theory of "social drama" that deeply marked the social science of his day (Abrahms 1995, Wagner-Pacifici 1986). At the same time, however, Turner's intellectual evolution revealed a deep existential yearning for the more sacred life. He presented his social drama theory as a way to understand the ritualized nature of contemporary life. The social dramas he chose to interpret might involve tragedy, but their meanings typically unfolded in coherent and largely believable ways.

If Turner moved from ritual to theatre, his colleague, the drama theorist Richard Schechner, moved from theatre to ritual and back again. The founding father of contemporary performance studies, Schechner actually provided the first systematic analysis of the structural similarities between ritual and theatrical performance. Yet, once again, Schechner was animated as much by existential as analytical ambition. While his theorizing pointed to a clear path for understanding failed cultural productions, he himself hankered after a way to recreate the wholeness of what Peter Brook called "Holy Theatre" (1969), and what the Living Theatre presented as the theatre of life (cf. Carlson 1996: 100-120). Clifford Geertz made a similar move from anthropology to theatricality, employing notions of staging and dramatic representation to situate and contextualize symbolic action. It is striking, however, that Geertz confined himself to studying performances that unfolded inside firmly established and highly crystallized ritual containers, from the Balinese cockfight (1973), where "nothing happens" other than the aesthetic affirmation of status structures, to the "theatre state" of nineteenth century Bali (1980), where highly rigid authority structures were continuously reaffirmed in ritualistic, highly choreographed ways.

What characterizes this entire line of thinking -- a process of conceptual development that has been central to the development of contemporary cultural-sociological thought -- is the failure to explore the wide-ranging theoretical possibilities that can be gained by understanding symbolic action as a kind of social performance. Their shared nostalgia for simpler and more coherent societies prevented them from truly intertwining of semantics and pragmatics.[3] In an influential volume that capped the "Turner era," and segued to performance theory, John MacAloon offered a description of cultural performance that exemplified both the achievements and the limitations to which I am pointing here. MacAloon (1984) defined performance as an "occasion in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others." The communitarian emphasis on holism, on cultural, social, and psychological integration is palpable. MacAloon pushed dramaturgy toward performance theory, but he did so in a nostalgic and thus limiting way.

Taking off from Burke in a different direction, Goffman initiated a second, decidedly less nostalgic line dramaturgical theory. Half persuaded by game theory and rational choice, Goffman (1956) adopted a more detached, purely analytical approach to the actor's theatrical preoccupations. He insisted on a radical separation of cultural performance from cultural text, of actor from script. Rejecting out of hand the possibility that any genuine sympathy was on offer, from either actor or audience, Goffman described performance as a "front" behind which actors gathered their egotistical resources and through which they displayed the "standardized expressive equipment" necessary to gain results. Idealization was a performative, but not a motivational fact. In modern societies, according to Goffman, the aim was to convincingly portray one's own ideal values as isomorphic with those of another, despite the fact that such complementarity was rarely if ever the actual case.

This cool conceptual creativity contributed signally to understanding social performance, but the instrumental tone of Goffman's thinking severed, not only analytically but in principle, that is ontologically, the possibility of strong ties between psychological motivation, social performance, and cultural text. In linguistics, this opening toward a pure pragmatics of performance was taken up by Del Hymes. Following Austin's emphasis on the performative, Hymes (1964) stressed the need for "highlighting the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content." In anthropology, this line was elaborated in Milton Singer's (1959)

explorations of the “cultural performances” in South Asian societies, which he described as the “most concrete observable units of the cultural structure,” and which he broke down into such standard features as performers, audience, time span, beginnings, endings, place, and occasion. This Goffmanian combination of analytical deconstruction and nostalgia fed naturally and forcefully into the postmodern strand of contemporary performance theory, which, as I have already indicated, highlights the artificial and focuses in an exaggerated and exclusive manner on questions of commodification, power, and the politics of representation (e.g.: Diamond 1996, Carlson 1996, Auslander 1997, 1999).

Whether it is Marxist or Heideggerian, conservative or postmodern, Turnerian or Goffmanian, these lines of dramaturgical thinking, while enormously instructive, are blindered in ways that have had the effect of leading cultural sociology astray. We will be able to develop a satisfying theory of cultural practice only if we can separate ourselves both from nostalgia and anti-nostalgia. Not only disenchantment but re-enchantment (Bauman 1993) characterizes post-traditional societies. If social action can continue to be understood by social actors and social interpreters as a meaningful text – and empirical evidence suggests overwhelmingly that this continues to be the case -- then cultural practice must continue to be capable of capturing sacrality and of displaying it in successful symbolic performance. Disenchantment must not be understood as proof of Habermas’ assertion that, for there to be a democratic, modern, and postmetaphysical world, social actors must learn to live in a thoroughly de-ontological way. What disenchantment indicates, rather, is unconvincing cultural practice, failed symbolic performance.

Certainly it is true that, in a postmetaphysical world, social and cultural differentiation make successful symbolic performance much more difficult, and thus much less frequently achieved. It was for this reason that Nietzsche (1950 [1872]: 50), in his immensely nationalist and reactionary early work, paid such homage to the pre-Socratic phase of Greek dramatic life: “The metaphysical solace [which] is at bottom indestructibly joyful and powerful, was expressed most concretely in the chorus of satyrs” that characterized the Dionysian cult. One would not wish to agree with Nietzsche that, after this Dionysian phase, holistic and dramaturgical meaning disappears into Apollonian asceticism and individuality, any theory of cultural practice must take these historical variations seriously. Cultural life has radically shifted, both internally and in its relation to action and social structure. Nonetheless, culture can still be powerfully meaningful; it can possess and display coherence, and it can exert enormous social effect. To understand how culture can be meaningful, but may not be, we must accept history but reject radical historicism. Life is different, but not completely so. Rather than sweeping allegorical theory, we need allegorical deconstruction and analytic precision. We need to break the “whole” of symbolic action down into its component parts. Once we do so, we will see that cultural performance covers the same ground that it always has, but in a radically different way.

The Elements of Cultural Performance

Cultural performance is the social process by which actors, individually or in concert, display for others the meaning of their social situation. This meaning may or may not be one to which they themselves subjectively adhere; it is the meaning which they, as social actors, consciously or unconsciously wish to have others believe. In order to do have this effect, actors must offer a plausible performance, one that provides for their actions and gestures a believable account (Garfinkel 1967). As Gerth and Mills (1964: 55) once put it, “our gestures do not necessarily ‘express’ our prior feelings,” but, rather, “they make available to others a sign.” Successful performance depends on the ability to convince others that one’s performance is true, with all the ambiguities that the notion of aesthetic truth implies. If we understand cultural performance in this way, we can easily make out the basic elements that compose it.

(1) *A system of collective representations.* Performers present themselves as being motivated by and toward existential, emotional, and moral concerns, the meanings of which are defined by patterns of signifiers whose referents are the social, physical, natural, and cosmological worlds within which actors and audiences live. These worlds provide the background symbols for social performances, and some subsets of them become the scripted referents of performance texts. Propelled by the performative imagination, these inflected symbols are drawn together in chronological narratives and strings of analogical and antipathetic binary codes. In symbolizing actors’ and audiences’ worlds, these narratives and codes simultaneously condense and elaborate, and they employ a wide range of rhetorical devices, from metaphor to synecdoche, to configure social and emotional life in compelling and coherent ways. Systems of collective representations range from “time immemorial” myths to ideas created right on the spot, from traditional narratives carried by oral traditions to the scripts prepared by professional associations, bureaucratic organizations, playwrights, journalists, and speech writers.

Collective representations provide the background for performances. They do not speak themselves. Marjorie

Boulton (1960: 3) once described theatre as "literature that walks and talks before our eyes." It is this need for walking and talking – and seeing and listening to the walking and talking -- that makes the pragmatics of performance different from the hermeneutics of cultural texts, defining the specificity not only of the "script" but the other components of cultural practice as well. [4]

(2) *Actors*. These patterned representations are put into practice, or encoded, by flesh and blood people. As Reiss (1971) once suggested in *Toward Dramatic Illusion*, his study of the relation between theatrical technique and meaning in seventeenth century French theatre.

The theater has two attributes found in no other art simultaneously: it is both 'presence et present.' It has the effect of a reality in action, because the actor is as real as the spectators; he is in fact present in their midst, and participates in an action which occurs before their eyes. Hence illusion is built into the theatre ... This desire to cause the spectator to confuse his emotions with those of the stage character is usually left implicit, but it can be seen at the base of the varied suggestions intended to produce greater verisimilitude in the theatre. (1971: 138, 142)

These "performers" have internal subjectivities that reflect their particularities, and social identities that reflect their socially-defined status. While performers must, by definition and by situation, be oriented to patterned representations, their motivation vis-à-vis these patterns is contingent. In psychological terms, the relation between actor and text depends on cathexis, on the projection of emotion that makes a script seem subjectively important to them. Performance requires not only cognitive but expressive skills, and also the ability to display moral evaluations. Those who perform cultural scripts may not possess such skills (Bauman 1986), and, as a result, they may fail miserably in the effort to display meaning.

(3) *Observers/audience*. Cultural texts are performed so that meanings can be displayed to others. These other constitute the audience of observers for cultural performance. They decode what actors have encoded (Hall 1980), but they do so in variable ways. If cultural texts are to be convincingly communicated, a process that might be called cultural extension, it is necessary for the psychological identification of audience with performer to occur. But audiences may be focused or distracted, attentive or uninterested. If actors cathect to cultural texts, and possess high levels of cultural proficiency, their projections still may not be introjected by the audience/observers. Observation can be merely cognitive, without emotional or moral signification. There are other sources of variability as well. Audiences may not represent social statuses that complement the performers'. Audience attendance may not be required or compelled. There might not be an audience in the contemporary sense at all, but only participants observing themselves and their fellow performers.

(4) *Means of Symbolic Production*. In order to perform a cultural text before an audience, actors need access to the mundane material things upon which projections can be made. They need objects to serve as iconic representations, to help them dramatize and make vivid the invisible symbols they are trying to represent: clothing or other sorts of expressive equipment, a physical place to perform, and the means to assure the transmission of their performance to an audience.

(5) *Mis-en-scene*. With texts and means in hand, and audience before them, social actors engage in dramatic social action, entering into and projecting the ensemble of physical and verbal gestures that constitute performance. This ensemble of gestures is structured by the same sorts of symboling devices that structure a non-performed text. For the walking and talking to assume a pattern that constitutes a text in its own right – a text separated from what I will later call background collective representations and from scripts -- they must be coded, narrative, and rhetorically configured. But more is involved as well. Performance is sequenced temporally and choreographed spatially, and it obeys artistic laws that reflect these exigencies.

(6) *Social power*. The distribution of power in society, the nature of its political, economic, and status hierarchies, and the relations among its elites, profoundly affects the performance process, though it constitutes more a context for cultural pragmatics than an element of performance itself. Not all texts are equally legitimate in the eyes of the powers that be, whether these be possessors of material or interpretive power. Not all performances, and not all parts of a particular performance, are allowed to proceed. Will social power seek to eliminate certain parts of a cultural text? Who will be allowed to act in a performance, and with what means? Who will be allowed to attend? What kinds of responses will be permitted from audience/observer? Are there powers that have the authority to interpret performances that are independent of those with the authority to produce them? Are these powers also independent of the actors and the audience itself?

Fusion, Defusion, and Refusion: Cultural Performance in Historical Context

These components of cultural practice determine the nature of performance, whether and how it occurs, and what are its ultimate effects. Contingently addressed and interrelated within every social situation, they can, nonetheless, be defined in ideal-typical ways that differ broadly over historical time.

Sacred Ritual: Symbolic Performance in Early Societies

The members of early human societies were organized by kinship, age, and gender in collectivities of no more than sixty to eighty persons; they engaged in hunting and gathering, participated in fused social roles with little institutional differentiation, and lived psychologically and culturally in lifeworlds, like the Aboriginal "dream time" (Stanner 1958), in which mundane and profane were intimately intertwined. It was in such simple and fused social structures and symbolic universes that cultural performances assumed the "ritual" form articulated in classical anthropology and most profoundly crystallized by Durkheim's *Elementary Forms*.

The collective representations to which such rituals refer are not texts composed by specialists in an obscure or privileged corner of some complex, contentious, and often inattentive society. Neither do these early representational sets constitute the kind of "metacommentaries" that Geertz (1973b) attributes to cultural systems tout court, which allows collective representations to assume an interpretive and critical form. Levi-Strauss (1963), whose structuralist position stressed more than any other approach the textual nature of ritual representations, was at pains, nevertheless, to demonstrate how the binary arrangements of ancient myths reflect, in fantastical form, the actual crossings, pilgrimages, kinship structures, and communal conflicts of so-called primitive social life (cf., Turner 1957). This tight fusion between cultural text and social structure is certainly one way of understanding what Durkheim meant when he wrote the elementary forms of religion were simply society writ large. In their paradigm-setting anthropology of the nineteenth century, Spencer and Gillian (1927) described how the Engwura ritual cycle of the Australian Arunta recapitulated the actual life style of the Arunta males. When, a century later, Schechner (1976: 197) observed the Tsembaga dance of the Kaiko, he confirmed that "all the basic moves and sounds – even the charge into the central space – are adaptations and direct lifts from battle."

It is no wonder that the kinds of ritual performances orienting themselves to such myths are personal, immediate, and iconographic. Through the painting, masking, and composition of the physical body, ritual participants seek, not metaphorically but literally to become the immaterial representational text, their goal being to suggest the fusion of human and totem, "man and God," sacred and mundane. The aim of the performance is to make the symbolic process isomorphic with the sacred and profane axes of symbolic representation, to replicate and enact them, and thereby to align society with them. The roles in ritual performances likewise emerge directly, and without mediation, from society itself. In the Engwura ritual, the Arunta males performed parts that they currently assumed, or had once played, in Arunta social life. When social actors perform such easily assumed roles, they have little self-consciousness about doing so. Rituals are not considered to be a "performance" in the contemporary sense, but rather a natural and necessary -- traditional -- practice in ongoing social life. Scheduled performances, they are cyclical and repetitive, occurring at regular intervals reflecting institutional, biological, and psychological change. They employ means of symbolic production which, while not always immediately available, are generally near at hand -- a ditch dug with the sharp bones of animals, a line drawn from the red coloring of wild flowers, a head-dress made from bird feathers, an amulet fashioned from a parrot's beaks (Turner 1969).

If the staging of rituals is not optional, neither is the performers' participation. Ritual performance is obligatory, a matter determined by the established and accepted hierarchies of gender and age, not by individual choice or by pressures emanating from, and depending upon, the resources and institutions of plural or elite social power. Every relevant party must attend to ritual performances, and many ceremonies involve the entire community. Nor are attendees only observers. At various points in the ritual, observers are called upon to participate, sometimes as principals, at other times as members of the attentive chorus providing remonstrations of approval through such demonstrative acts as shouting, crying, and applause. At key phases in male initiation ceremonies, for example, women closely attend, and at particular moments play significant ritual roles, expressing indifference and rejection early in the performance, displaying physical signs of welcome and admiration in order to mark its end. Even when they do not participate, ritual audiences are hardly strangers. They are linked to performers by direct or indirect family ties. Neither are the audiences fragmented. United by how and what they think of the world, they share similar orientations to the sacred, mundane, and profane. Rappaport (1968), for example, describes the Tsembaga as "composed of aggregates of individuals who regard their collective well-being to be dependent upon a common body of ritual performances" (Schechner 1976: 211).

With texts tied to society, ritual roles tied to social roles, performance process following and reflecting text and social life, obligatory participation, and homogeneous and attentive audiences, it is hardly surprising that the effects of ritual performances tend to be immediate and virtually assured (cf., Schechner 1981: 92-94, 1976: 205). Rites not only mark transitions but create them. The participants become something or somebody else as a result. Ritual performance not only symbolizes a social relationship or change, it actualizes it. There is direct effect, without mediation. Such fused participation prevents any possibility of critical evaluation. The tricks of ritual specialists are rarely scrutinized. Levi-Strauss (1963, italics added) remarked upon this in his study of how Quesalid, after persuading ritual specialists to teach him the tricks of their trade, went on to become a great shaman. "Quesalid did not become a great shaman because he cured his patients," Levi-Strauss wrote; rather, "he cured his patients because he had become a great shaman." Shamans effect cures, individual and social, because participants and observers of their performances believe they have the force and exert the powers to which they lay claim. Shamans, in other words, are masters of ritual performance. The success of this performance depends, in the first place, on their dramatic skills, but these skills are enmeshed in the fused and very facilitating conditions of cultural performance in early societies.

Social Complexity and Post-Ritual Cultural Performance

Social development after these early band societies involved de-fusion, or differentiation, both institutionally and culturally (e.g., Alexander and Colomy 1987, Luhmann 1982). In terms of symbolic performance, this allowed what Derrida (1978) has called *differance*: not only a growing separateness of symbol from referent, the distance between signifier and signified that is called *difference*, but also the deferral of interpretation itself. As social development grows more complex, the interpretation of meaning is deferred. The symbolization of a thing becomes separated more overtly distinct from its referent, whether the latter is an object in nature, an ordinary cultural text, or a social cleavage or institution. Because of the emergence of *differance*, cultural performance changes from being about, or at least seeming to be about, embodiment and literal representation to being a presence whose meaning depends on the observer's reference to an absent text, a reference that is necessarily socially contingent and variable. To separate presence and absence is to give even greater weight than in earlier societies to the performative process itself.

Social differentiation was stimulated by the Neolithic revolution in agriculture, which allowed a surplus and created the basis for class stratification. These economic hierarchies were intertwined with the creation of symbolic ceremonies to mystify and justify the extraordinary new privileges vis-à-vis the subordinated masses (Eisenstadt 1963). Institutional differentiation proceeded alongside class segmentation, for functional rather than simply economic reasons. States emerged and administrative organizations; so did ethnic, racial, regional, and military groupings and identities; so also did organizational managers, quasi-scholars, centers of learning, and institutions of legal adjudication. The elites that organized these emerging institutions developed specialized symbolic routines and performances so that they could communicate with, and also intimidate, other institutional elites and lower level functionaries within their own ranks.

Yet, even as these social elites began systematically to acquire cultural power through symbolic mystification, the sacred began to achieve transcendence, to gain more independence from the mundane. As Weber (e.g., 1963) demonstrated, this process proceeded for internal and not only for external reasons, propelled by processes of rationalization and universalization on the cultural level itself. Cultural specialists emerged and sacred texts were written down, argued about, abstracted, and generalized. Training centers developed for priests, and prophets emerged in crisis times. Tensions emerged between the sacred and mundane spheres that were in principle irresolvable (Bellah 1970): the contingency of salvation led to endemic conflicts between empirical life and the other world. Conflicts also developed within the cultural sphere itself. Cultural rationalization and social differentiation meant that agreement over sacred meaning was no longer possible, and such religious heterodoxy stimulated institutional heteronomy in turn.

As fused performance fragmented, ritual gave way to theatre. This transition that can be understood both figuratively and literally. With cultural differentiation and social complexity, there emerges a new emphasis upon, and awareness of, artifice and performance. Specialists in ideological performance, "mystagogues" in Weberian terms, enter the social stage, never to disappear. But the transition from ritual to theatre is also literal. The social complexity produced by surplus and hierarchy allows play to be separated from work, and mundane leisure and entertainment to emerge as independent performance genres vis-à-vis the sacred ritual. To describe the development of theatre in this manner, however, suggests a severing of theatre from ritual that is too abrupt and a division between them that is too hermetic. There is more to the emergence of dramatic entertainment, more to secular performance, than letting off steam. Sacred texts, whether religious or secular, remain a strong point of reference, even when they are not fused with performance; and sacred experience

remains possible, even when the elements of performance become separated and its artificial and constructed character obvious to the casual eye. To understand how this is so we must look more closely at the historical emergence of theatre itself.

The Emergence of Theatre from Ritual

In Western societies, theatre emerged from within the Greek religious rituals organized around Dionysus, the god of wine (Hartnoll 1968: 7-31). In the ritual's traditional form, a dithyramb, or unison hymn, was performed around the altar of Dionysus by a chorus of fifty men drawn from the entire ethnos. As Greek society entered its period of intense and unprecedented social and cultural differentiation, the content of the dithyramb gradually widened to include tales of the demi-gods and secular heroes whom contemporary Greeks considered their ancestors. The sacred representational system, in other words, began to symbolize, to code and narrate, human society as well. This interjection of the mundane into the sacred introduced symbolic dynamics directly into everyday life, and vice-versa. During communal festivals dedicated to performing these new cultural texts, the good and bad deeds of secular heroes were recounted along with their feuds, marriages and adulteries, the wars they started, the ethnic and religious ties they betrayed, and the sufferings they brought on their parents and successors. Such social conflicts now became sources of dramatic tension linked to sacred conflicts and performed on ritual occasions.

Is it surprising that during this same period, as everyday life became subject to such symbolic and reconstruction, that the social role of "actor" first emerged? Thespian, for whom the very art of theatrical performance came eventually to be named, stepped out of the dithyramb chorus to become its leader. During ritual performance, he assumed the role of protagonist, either god or hero, and carried on a dialogue with the chorus. Thespian formed a traveling troupe of professional actors. Collecting the means of symbolic production in a cart whose floor and tailboard could serve also as a stage, Thespian traveled from his birthplace, Icaria, to one communal festival after another, eventually landing in Athens where, in 492 B.C., he won the acting prize just then established by the City Dionysus festival.

During this same critical period of social development, systems of collective representations began for the first time not only to be written down, to become actual texts, but to assume a form of composition clearly separated from religious life. In fifth century Athens, theatre writing became a specialty, prestigious writing contests were held, and prizes awarded to such figures as Aeschylus and Sophocles. Such secular imagists soon became more renowned than temple priests. At first, playwrights chose and trained their own actors, but eventually – no doubt in order to emphasize and highlight the autonomy of the dramatic text -- officials of the Athenian festival assigned actors to playwrights by lot.

As such innovations demonstrate, the independent institution of performance criticism had by then also emerged. Rather than being absorbed by the performance, judges now confronted actors and writers as independent artistic representatives. They represented aesthetic criteria that had become separated from purely religious and even moral considerations. Such judges also represented the city which sponsored the performance. Having constituted themselves as citizens of the public, those who composed the Greek city states attended performances as a detached audience of potentially critical observers. They were not there simply to be entertained. Festival days were devoted separately to comedies and to tragedies. While the first clearly provided recreation in the mundane, post-ritual sense of "entertainment," the latter most certainly did not. The performances of the Greek tragedies, while secular, partook of *la vie serieuse* that, according to Durkheim, marks a phenomenon as religious in the small "r" sense of the term. Not only did the masked performers of the Greek tragedies remain larger than life, but the texts they evoked "talked and walked" with compelling emotional and aesthetic force to the most serious and morally weighted civic issues of the day. From Aeschylus to Sophocles to Euripedes, Greek tragic drama (Jeager 1945: 232-381, *passim*) addressed civic virtue and corruption, exploring whether there was a natural moral order separated from, and more powerful than, the fatally flawed order of human social life. These questions were critical for sustaining the rule of law and an independent and democratic civil life.[5]

Aristotle crystallized in intellectual terms the empirical differentiation among the elements of performance that brought ritual to theatre. What ritual performers had once known "instinctively," Aristotle now felt compelled to write down. His *Poetics* (1987) made the natural artificial. It provided a kind of philosophical cookbook, instructions for meaning-making and effective performance for a society that had moved from the fusion of ritual to the self-consciousness of more theatrical performance. Aristotle explained that performances consisted of "plots" and that effective plotting demanded "narratives" which possessed "a beginning, middle, and end." In his theory of catharsis, he explained, not teleologically but empirically, how dramas could affect an audience:

plays would have to evoke sensations of "terror and pity" if such an emotional effect were to be achieved.

Similar developments brought ritual to theatre throughout the world's civilizations, in response to the same structural processes of cultural and social differentiation. "There were religious and ritual origins of the Jewish drama, the Chinese drama, all European Christian drama and probably the Indian drama," Boulton (1960: 194) informs us, and "in South America the conquering Spaniards brought Miracle Plays to Indians who already had a dramatic tradition that had developed out of their primitive cults." In medieval Europe, secular drama developed from the Easter passion plays. In twelfth century Autun, a center of Burgundian religious activity, an astute observer named Honorius analogized from the effects of the Easter Mass to the ancient Greek tragedians (Hardison 1965: 40, Schechner 1976: 210). "It is known," Honorius wrote, "that those who recited tragedies in theatres presented the actions of opponents by gestures before the people." He went on to suggest that, "in the theatre of the Church before the Christian people," the struggle of Christ against his persecutors is presented by a similar set of "gestures" that "teaches to them the victory of his redemption." Honorius compared each movement of the Mass to an equivalent movement in tragic drama, and described what he believed were similar, tightly bound and fused, audience effects. "When the sacrifice has been completed, peace and communion are given by the celebrant to the people," he wrote, and "then, by the *Ite, missa est*, they are ordered to return to their homes [and] they shout *Deo gratias* and return home rejoicing." It is no wonder that Boulton (1960: 195) simply equates such early religious pageants with acting. Suggesting that "the earliest acting was done by priests and their assistants," she notes that "one of the causes of the increasing secularization of the drama was that laymen had soon to be called in to fill in parts in the expanding 'cast'."

What followed this dramatization within European sacred ritual recapitulated the differentiating and fragmenting processes that brought ritual to theatre in ancient Greece. By the early seventeenth century, for example, the institution of criticism was already fully formed: "Nearly every play had a prologue asking for the goodwill of the critics" (Boulton 1960: 195). Yet, despite their independence from sacrality in the more traditional, fused, and cosmological sense (religion with a big "R"), these secular symbolic performances often projected, nonetheless, the most serious of moral themes and exercised potentially significant ideological and political effects (religion with a small "r"). Long before the rise of the novel and the newspaper, theatrical performances became arenas for articulating powerful social criticisms. Playwrights wove texts from the fabric of contemporary social life, but they employed their imagination to do so in a sharply accented, highly stimulating and provocative manner. The performance of these representations were furnaces that forged metaphors which circulated back to society, marking a kind of figure eight movement (Schechner 1977, Turner 1981: 73-74) from society to theatre and back to society again. While providing sophisticated and highly amusing entertainment, Moliere pilloried not only the rising bourgeois but the Catholic church, both of which returned his vituperation in kind. Shakespeare wrote such amusing and popular plays that he was patronized as low brow by the more educated and "sophisticated" playwrights and critics of his day. At the same time, Shakespeare satirized every sort of conventional authority and dramatized the immorality of every sort of social power. Reviled by the Puritan divines, Elizabethan drama was subject to strenuous efforts at censorship. The Restoration comedies that followed were no less caustic in their social ambitions or stinging in their effects.[6]

The Emergence of Social Drama

Responding to the same historical changes that de-naturalized ritual performance, collective actions in the wider society came increasingly to take on a performative cast. In "earlier" and more rigid phase of social differentiation, new social hierarchies had simply issued commands that their performances be legitimated by symbolic mystification. As societies became more loosely knit, authority increasingly challenged, and the distribution of ideal and material resources more subject to contention and conflict, contests for social power became more open-ended and contingent. In the process, they became framed, by ambitious participants and the new democratic publics alike, as "social dramas" that unfolded, or were performed, without any set script or pre-planned result. The *mis-en-scene* itself produced the script, by a sort of progressive-regressive method that resembled that Sartre described philosophically in *Search for a Method* (1953) and applied historically in his account (1976: 351-361) how a "fused" as compared to a "serial" group emerged spontaneously in the storming of the Bastille. In their progressive moment, social dramas pointing forward as enactment, creating narrative and enacting binary code. In their regressive moment, social dramas gain authority for these plots by retroactively pointing to pre-existing cultural themes. Via the process of social drama, individual and collective actors can gain legitimacy as interpreters of sacred social texts.

As the masses of powerless persons gradually became transformed into citizens, they constituted interpreting audiences. With the constitution of such publics, even the most instrumentally motivated conflicts were compelled to engage in new forms expressive communication. In order to preserve their social power, and their

ability to exercise social control, elites had to transform their interest conflicts into widely available performances that would project persuasive symbolic forms. As peripheries gradually became incorporated into centers, pretenders to social power thus strived mightily to frame their conflicts as dramas. They portrayed themselves as protagonists in simplified narratives, projecting their positions, arguments, and actions as exemplifications of sacred religious and secular texts. They “cast” their opponents as narrative antagonists, as insincere and artificial actors who were only role playing to advance their interests.

When Thomas Becket opposed the effort of Henry the II to exercise political control over the English church, he created a grand social drama that employed the dramatic paradigm of Christ’s martyrdom to legitimate his antagonism and then to memorialize it. King Henry defeated Sir Thomas in instrumental political terms, but the drama Becket enacted captured the English imagination and shaped its moral strictures for centuries since.[7] In the Renaissance city states (e.g., Brucker 1969), conflicts between church and state were graphically played out in the great public squares, not only figuratively but often literally before the eyes of the increasingly enfranchised populo. Heteronomy was neither mere doctrine nor a matter simply of institutional structure. It was also public performance. Savonarola began his mass popular movement to cleanse the Florentine Republic with a dramatic announcement in the Piazza della Signoria, the city’s public square. His public hanging, and the burning of his corpse that followed, were staged in the same civil space. Observed by an overflowing audience of citizens and semi-citizens, some horrified, others grimly satisfied (Brucker 1969: 271), the performance, instigated by his Savonarola’s arrest and torture-produced confession, graphically drew the curtain on the reformer’s spiritual renewal campaign. Machiavelli’s advice to Italian princes concerned, not only the mustering of increasingly dispersed administrative power, but instructions about displaying symbolic power, about learning how to perform like a prince who would appear, no matter what the actual circumstances, to exercise power in a supremely confident way.

In 1776, a small band of anti-British American colonialists boarded a merchant ship in the Boston harbor and threw tons of Indian tea into the sea. The instrumental effects of what immediately became represented in the popular imagination as “the Boston tea party” were negligible, but its expressive power was great. The collective performance dramatized the colonialists’ opposition to the British crown, clarified a key issue in the antagonism., and mobilized fervent public support. The inaugural military battle of the American Revolution, at Lexington, was collectively represented in terms of theatrical metaphor, as “the shot heard round the world.” American and British soldiers wore the brightly colored uniforms of opposed performers – Paul Revere memorably shouted out “the Redcoats are coming, the Redcoats are coming” -- and the long marches of the brightly attired soldiers on both sides were often accompanied by corps of fifes and drums. Bloody battles of the War for Independence were retrospectively narrated as fateful and dramatic contests, their victors transformed into icons by stamps and etchings.

The staging of collective action as social drama was intrinsic also to the revolution in France. During its early days, the radical sans coulottes displayed their opposition by staging an extraordinarily theatrical “women’s march” to Vincennes, in order to question the King about his loyalties and eventually to return with him in their symbolic command (Landes 1988). In the years that followed, heroes and villains switched places according to the logic of discourse and theatrical configuring, not political calculation, and no matter how violent or bloodthirsty, the victors and martyrs were painted, retrospectively, in classical Republican poses and togas, as in David’s celebrated portrait of Marat Sade.

Refusion and Authenticity: The Challenge of Successful Performance In Complex Societies

The goal of secular performance, whether on stage or in society, remains the same as the ambition of sacred ritual: psychological identification and cultural extension. The aim is to create, via skilled and affecting performance, the psychological identification of audience with actor and text, and thereby to achieve the projection of cultural meaning from performance to audience. With increasing social and cultural complexity, what Nietzsche (1956 [1872]: 126, 125) elegized as this “bringing to life [of] the plastic world of myth” and as those “moments of paroxysm that lift man beyond the confines of space, time, and individuation” become much more difficult to achieve, for the elements of performance become separated and independently variable, one from the other.

The challenge confronting individual and collective symbolic action in contemporary societies, whether on stage or in society at large, is to infuse meaning by re-fusing performance. Since Romanticism, this challenge has been related to the problem of authenticity (Taylor 1989). On the level of everyday life, authenticity is thematized by such questions as whether a person is “real,” whether he or she is straightforward, truthful, and sincere. Action will be viewed as real if it appears sui generis, the product of a self-generating actor who is not

pulled like a puppet by the strings of society. An authentic person acts without artifice, without self-consciousness, without reference to some laboriously thought out plan or text, without concern for manipulating the context of her actions, and without worries about that action's effects. The perception of authenticity, in other words, depends upon refusion.

Secular Ritual and Flow

Such an understanding allows us to move beyond the endless debate about whether ritual is possible or desirable in modern societies, a debate suffused and confused by nostalgia and counter-nostalgia on both sides. Refusion allows the temporary recovery of the ritual process. It allows contemporaries to experience ritual because it stitches seamlessly together the disconnected elements of cultural performance. In psychological terms, it is this seamless refusion that Csikszentmihaly (1975) described as "flow" (cf., Schechner 1976) in the innovative work on play and virtuoso performance in art, games, and sport that attracted broad attention three decades ago. In the terms I am developing here, what Csikszentmihaly discovered in these widely varying activities was the merging of text, context, and actor, a loss of self-consciousness about the results of action, whether success and failure, and a lack of concern for, even awareness of, the scrutiny of observers outside the action itself. Because of "the merging of action and awareness," he (1975: 38) wrote, "a person in flow has no dualistic perspective." The fusion of the elements of performance allows actors, and audiences, to focus their attention on the intended text to the exclusion of the many other texts, meanings, and alternative interpretations that are empirically available: "The steps for experiencing flow ... involve the ... process of delimiting reality, controlling some aspect of it, and responding to the feedback with a concentration that excludes anything else as irrelevant" (1975: 53-54).

Secular performances in complex societies seek to overcome fragmentation by creating flow and achieving authenticity. They try to recover ritual, to eliminate or negate the effects of social and cultural de-fusion. Successful performances re-fuse history. They recombine the elements that once were fused in a naturalistic way. They break down the barriers that history has erected – the divisions between background culture and performative text, between scripted text and actors, between mis-en-scene and audience. Successful performances overcome the deferral of meaning that marks difference: The signifier seems to become the signified, the mere action of performing seeming to determine the performance's effect. Refusion is made possible only by the deposition of social powers, but the very success of performance makes the effect, and even the existence, of such powers invisible. Social powers manifest themselves, not as external or controlling forces opposed to the unfolding performance, but as vehicles of representation, as conveyors of the intended meaning. In refusing all of these separated elements, successful performance temporarily closes the gap between sacred transcendence and the mundane, uninflected arenas social life. When post-ritual drama emerged in ancient Greece, Aristotle (1987) explained that a play is "an imitation of action, not the action itself." When refusion occurs, this cautionary note goes unheeded. The performance achieves verisimilitude. It seems to be action, not its imitation.

Scripts: The Refusion of Cultural and Performative Texts

Behind every social and theatrical performance there lies the established skein of collective representations that compose culture, the universe of basic narratives and codes and the cookbook of rhetorical configurations from which every performance draws. From within this broader universe of meanings, performers make choices about the paths they wish to take, the specific set of meanings they wish to project. These choices are the scripts, which either pre-exist performance and are (more or less) enacted by them or take form prospectively and are textually reconstructed post-hoc. Scripts crystallize the culture that backgrounds action, and they form a new background to interpretation in turn. This is literally true for a theatrical performance and figuratively for a social dramatic one. [8] Script is meaning primed to performance. In theatrical drama, this priming is usually, though not always, sketched out beforehand. In social drama, by contrast, scripts much more often are inferred by actors. In a meaning-searching process that stretches from the more intuitive to the more witting, actors and audiences reflect on the performance in the process of its unfolding, gleaning a script upon which the performance "must have" been based. In such social-dramatic scripting, actors and audiences draw the hermeneutical circle (Dilthey 1976). Performances become the foregrounded "parts" upon which "wholes" are constructed, the latter being understood as the scripts that allow the sense of an action to be ascertained.

Whether scripts are written out beforehand or gleaned in situ, the rules that submit scripts to the exigencies of theatricality everywhere apply. What distinguishes a script from background culture is, not its symbolic status, but its orientation to dramatic technique. Let us return to Boulton's classic description of theatre as literature that walks and talks. Scripts make walking and talking possible, though they do not guarantee it. Scripts provide

blue prints for how, within the physical confines of the performative process, actors can sustain the most basic rule of every sort of drama, what Boulton described as the fundamental need to “to hold audience attention.” In order to sustain attention, scripts must “achieve concentration” of cultural meaning; they must compress the background meanings of culture by changing proportion and by increasing intensity. Simplification and repetition are essential. “In a play,” Boulton (1960: 12-13) writes, “there are often repetitions even of quite simple facts, [overly] careful explanations, addressing of people by their names more frequently than in real conversation and various over-simplifications which to the reader of a play in a study may seem almost infantile.” The same sort of simplification and condensation affects the less consciously formed scripts of successful social dramas. As they strive to become protagonists in their chosen narrative, such social performers as politicians, activists, teachers, therapists, or ministers go over time and time again the basic story line they wish to project. They provide stereotyped accounts of their positive qualities as heroes or victims, and they exaggerate the malevolence of the motives of the actors they wish to identify as their antagonists, showing them to evildoers or fools. Whether inscribed apriori in theatrical scripts or subjunctively in social dramas, these simplifying techniques are “devices for ensuring that the audience grasps whatever it is necessary for it to know” (Boulton 1960: 12-13).

Employing naturalistic dialogue is another technique for scripting convincing dramatic action. “One of the chief differences between a play and a novel,” Boulton (1960: 101, original italics) suggests, “is that every single fact or idea in a play has to be conveyed to the audience by someone saying it.” If “dialogue is over-formal,” for example, even the most elegantly written script may be “dead theatrically” (98). Yet, while it is not necessary, and may even be counter-productive, to speak the King’s English, neither can ordinary speaking be mangled. In mangled speech, the meaning of the script, whether written or attributed, become unclear. During his early presidential performances, George W. Bush learned this to his great regret, as his famously ungrammatical and inarticulate mispeakings, or “Bushisms,” so frequently failed to get the point across. Such confusions must be interpreted dramatically. As a result of his speaking mistakes, President Bush’s early performances were often derailed from the serious to the comedic. Mr. Bush and his handlers lost control over the post hoc interpretation of the Presidential performance script.

To be effective, scripts must reflect the rules of performative coherence. Responding to the emergence of theatre from ritual, Aristotle (1987) theorized that every successful drama had to reflect the temporal sequence of beginning, middle, and end. Broadened in early modern Europe, when ritual was secularized and de-fused once again, this coherence rule became known as the “three unities” -- of action, place, and time (Boulton 1960: 13ff). Given the material and behavioral constraints of performances, classicists argued, theatrical action must be clearly of one piece: it must take place in the confines of one scene and one place and it must unfold in continuous time. In much the same manner do social dramas, whether congressional hearings and televised investigations, strive strenuously to sustain their own dramatic economy. With large visual charts, lead investigators display “time lines” for critical events, retrospective plottings whose aim is to suggest continuous actions punctuated by clearly interlinked causes and effects. Daytime television is interrupted so that the representations of these investigations can themselves unfold in continuous and real, and thus forcefully dramatic time. Ordinary parliamentary business is suspended so that such political-cultural performances, whether grandiose or grandiloquent, can achieve the unity of action, place, and time.

The unity achieved by successful scripting does not suggest that it plots harmonious action. Explicating what she calls “the general artistic laws of plot development,” Bolton (1960: 41ff) observes that “a play must have twists and turns to keep interest until the end.” Her argument that staged dramas “must develop from one crisis to another” is true, as well, for scripts that are unwritten and contemporaneously attributed. This becomes even more evident when Bolton explains that she employs crisis “as a literary term” that “does not necessarily mean something alarming or distressing, but merely a crisis of interest, an important event – in the sense that a proposal of marriage may be just as much a crisis as an avalanche.” In fact, according to Boulton, successful dramatic scripts follow a universal formula. After an initial clarification or introduction, in which “we learn who the chief characters are, what they are there for and what are the problems with which they start,” there is “some startling development giving rise to new problems.” This first crisis will be followed by others, which “succeed one another as causes and effects” according to the nature of the genre. Eventually, “the whole action is brought to a close by some final discovery,” an action or decision that is the denouement, the “untying of the knot.”

It is striking how similar crisis-staggered plotting is scripted by social performances. In Turner’s (1974) path-breaking studies, for example, he found almost exactly the same plot structure at work – breach, crisis, redress, and re-integration or schism.[9] The difference is that, in social dramas, performance itself initiates these divisions, as compared to their being inscribed apriori. In order to create performances that hold audience attention, indeed in order to establish the existence of a performance at all, social actors intentionally create twists and turns, claiming ordinary events as “crises” in order to dramatize a particular plot. The breach

initiating a drama, Turner observed, "may be deliberately, even calculatedly, contrived by a person or party disposed to demonstrate or challenge entrenched authority." But a breach also "may emerge [simply] from a scene of heated feelings" (Turner 1983: 70), in which case the initiation of a social drama is imputed, or scripted, by the audience, even when it is not intended by the actors themselves.

The naturalism underlying Turner's dramaturgical theory prevented him from seeing such sequential plotting as an artificial condensation that seeks, but often fails, to re-fuse background culture and performative text, much less as only one among the several elements that successful performances must re-fuse. What Wagner-Pacifici's (1986, 1994, 2000) growing body of work has demonstrated is just how difficult it is for even the most powerful social actors to ensure the kind of effective dramatic sequencing that Turner describes. For example, Wagner-Pacifici's detailed examination of the 1978 kidnapping and assassination of the Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro can be read as a case study of failed performance. Despite Moro's status as the most popular and influential Italian political figure of his time, he could not convince other influential collective actors to read from the script he himself constructed for the performance he was being compelled by his kidnappers to play. Moro wished to portray himself as still a hero, as the risk-taking and powerful protagonist in a performance that continued to demonstrate the need for an "opening to the Left" and, thus, the necessity to negotiate with his terrorist kidnappers to save his life. Against this projected script, other social interpreters, who turned out to be more influential, insisted that Moro's kidnapping illuminated the script of Moro's martyrdom and pointed to a narrative of revenge against the terrorist Left. While Wagner-Pacifici herself attributes the failure of Moro's performance primarily to unequal social power and the control that anti-Moro forces exercised over the means of symbolic production, the dramatic model I am developing here would reveal other dimensions of the failed performance to have been critically important as well.

Performance Process as Mis-en-Scene

Even after a script has been constructed that allows background culture to walk and talk, the "action" of the performance must begin, in an actual time, at a particular place, with particular actors before an actual audience, and subject to the limitations imposed by the available means of symbolic production and the influences of social power. This can be conceptualized as the challenge of instantiating a scripted text. [10] Drawing up French theorists, drama theorists have spoken about this process as the mis-en-scene, which translates literally as "putting into the scene." Offering a description that points implicitly to our notion of refusal, Pavis (1988: 87) defines mis-en-scene as the "confrontation of text and performance," the "bringing together or confrontation, in a given space and time, of different signifying systems, for an audience." For theatrical performance that takes off from written scripts, the process of mis-en-scene is organized by a specialized dramatic role, namely the director. For social dramas, in which scripts are attributed in a contemporaneous and often retroactive way, mis-en-scene is initiated by the act of performance itself: by the witting or unwitting intentions and sensitivities of collective actors, by the observing ego of the individual (her "I" as compared with her "me"), and by suggestions from an actor's agents or advisors, in response to pleas from a potential audience.

This emphasis on the details of actualizing representational sets inside the performative scenes has clear implications for social drama. It reminds us that underlying social strains do not, in and of themselves, instantiate social plots. It is the dramatic performance that creates the awareness and the configuration of social problems. Social dramas, in other words, seek simultaneously to create social problems and to resolve them. It is because contemporary social settings are broader and more flexible than in earlier societies that open ended dramas can, and in some sense must, emerge. Social dramas slice through the structure of contemporary ambiguity; they allow audiences and actors a chance to recapitulate and readjust their basic cultural resources, and they gesture toward meaningful actions that can resolve them.

When Bolton (1960: 182-3) warns that "over-directed scripts leave the producer no discretion," she is suggesting that scripts must leave directors "plenty of scope for inventions," that those who stage the actual performance of a script, who initiate the mis-en-scene, need a large space within which to exercise their theatrical imagination. Mis-en-scene is different from constructing an effective script. It involves such tasks as choreography, production facilities, acting, and public relations. It involves communication with an actual audience. We turn to a discussion of these varied elements after we consider the social powers and symbolic means upon which every instantiation process also rests.

Social Power and the Means of Symbolic Production

In the fused performances of early societies, neither social power nor the means of symbolic production is

problematic. Power is not split off as a separate thing, but mixed into meanings in a relatively invisible way. Age and sex provide bases for leadership by consensus, becoming folded into performance as expressive symbols. Likewise, the material means upon which such fused performances rely are widely accessible, even if not immediately available. In his study of the Tsembaga, Schechner (1976: 198) tells us that the konj kaiko ritual establishing peace between warring tribes never occurs more frequently every dozen years. The ritual centers on the mass slaughter of pigs and the subsequent feasting on their meat. Because it takes "years to allow the raising of sufficient pigs to stage a konj kaiko," the ritual cycle of war and peace "is tied to the fortunes of the pig population."

If even in such naturalistic and fused performances the varied elements of symbolic production retain some empirical autonomy, it is many times more so in contemporary societies. Dramatic defusion means everything is up for grabs. With script available and competent director in place, the means of symbolic production still might not be found. Even the most purely semiotic interpretations of performance are forced to acknowledge this possibility. While "the director nowadays has control over the theatrical," Aston and Savona (1991: 100) acknowledge in, *Theatre and Sign-System*, there remains "the task of organizing the signifying systems of theatre at her/his disposal."

What exactly the director has at her disposal is the question here. Most important of all is acquisition of a venue. Without a theatre or some makeshift stage, there can be no a performance, much less an audience, as Thespian himself discovered long ago. Likewise, without a secular equivalent of the stage, the venerable soapbox, there can be no social drama. Once space is attained, moreover, it must be shaped. If "the shape of a playing space can be altered by means of set construction " (ibid., 114), then we are back to the material base upon which symbolic productions can be mounted. They may not be superstructures in the Marxist sense, but neither can performances stand up all by themselves. The performative base, however, itself has a symbolic shape. Space becomes place (Enrikin 1991) by virtue of its architecture: "The style in which it is designed and built is in itself a cultural sign both of theatre and the society which creates it" (Aston and Savona 1991: 112). During the Clinton impeachment, it was widely noted that the hearings were being held in the Old Senate Office building, an ornate setting for the Watergate civil theatrics of yore.

This theatrical space will be further refined depending on the technical means available. In the daylight only, open-air theatres of the pre-industrial age, the "confines" of the "large and inflexible venue" (ibid., 114) placed limits on the intimacy that performers could communicate, whatever their theatrical powers or the artistry of the script. The introduction of lighting, however, "established the convention of the darkened auditorium" and "limited the spectator's spatial awareness to the stage area." Once attention is focused in this manner, a "space can be created within a space," and greater communicative intimacy is possible. Equally significant dramatic effects followed other technical innovations. The small size of the television as compared with the movie screen, for example, limited the use of long distance and ensemble shots and demanded much greater employment of close-up camera work, which in turn required more editing cuts to create a scene. Greater dramatic intimacy and dialogue followed. The availability of amplification pushed content in the opposite way. At first, only large-scale commercial musicals were miked, but soon operas and even most nonmusical plays were amplified "because the results sound more 'natural' to an audience whose ears have been conditioned by stereo television , high fidelity LP's, and compact disks" (Copeland 1990, in Auslander 34).

Whatever the dramatic effects of such innovations in the means of symbolic production, they reveal a continuous intermixing of the natural and artificial that belies the "culture industry" claims of critical theory. Only a perspective steeped in nostalgia would proclaim that the emergence of the television age or the movie industry had the effect of suddenly "mediatizing" performance. Images are not denuded of their authenticity by virtue of their mechanical reproduction. Not only are the means of symbolic reproduction only one of several performance dimensions, but they cannot be historicized in such an overly broad way. Performances have always been affected by the technical means at their disposal.

It is in terms of control over the means of symbolic production that social power enters directly into performance. The use of powerful arc lights was essential to Leni Riefenstahl's infamous filmed reconstruction of Hitler's triumphant evening arrival at the Nazis' Nuremberg rally in 1933, but it was political and economic power in a much broader sense that determined whether or not this highly influential political documentary could ever be made. Because Hitler's party had triumphed at the level of the state, Nazis who controlled the means of symbolic production. As an artist, Reifenstahl was herself infatuated by the Nazi cause, and she wrote a script that cast Hitler in a heroic light. But the tools for making her drama come to light in a literal sense were controlled by others. It was Goebbels who could hire the brilliant young film-maker and provide her with the stage and the megaphone for her work.

In most social dramatic performances, however, the effect of social power is less obvious and direct, though it is critical still. When the concentration camps remained under control of the German Reich, the "true story" of its anti-Jewish genocide could scarcely be told. Dramatic access to the actual camps was denied to all but the most sympathetic, pro-Nazi producers of newsreels and films. Independent, potentially critical observers were brought to camps that had been created to perform entirely dissembling political and cultural displays. Control over the means of symbolic production shifted only by virtue of force of arms (Alexander 2002). Only after Allied troops liberated the Western camps were the now famous newsreels of dead and emaciated Jewish prisoners produced and distributed to the rest of the world.

As this latter example suggests, social power not only provides the means of symbolic production but of symbolic distribution. How does one hear the sound of a tree falling in the forest? It is one thing to perform a drama, and even to film it. It is quite another to ensure its distribution. In the movie industry, distribution deals develop only after films are made, for those who represent theatre syndicates first need to examine the performances to which they are tying their bottom line. For social dramas, such sequencing is impossible; access to mass media is often simultaneous with access to the performance itself. Press releases are created, media events are staged, and press conferences are called so that social actors can create performances before "reporters," writers and photographers employed by institutions whose interests are separated from, and possibly opposed to, the performers' own. Because control over media is vital for connecting performances with publics and audiences, it is hardly surprising that newspapers for so long remained fused with – controlled by – particular ideological, economic, and political powers (Schudson 1998). This fusion allowed the partisans of different social positions to ensure the distribution only of the performances they themselves wished to be staged. Nonetheless, the processes of social and cultural differentiation gradually shifted media control. The more plural the social powers, the more independent the means of recording and distributing social dramas. An economic elite might continue to control its own media, but it would be much less likely to control the media of anti-business political parties or social movements.

In this regard, the analysis of modern hierarchies offered by Raymond Aron (1969) is more apropos than Marx's. While every specific performance faces the challenge of finding and controlling the means of symbolic production, the challenge for social performance in general, at least in democratic societies, is to overcome fragmentation and polarization, the competition and babel of different voices rather than monopoly and unilateral control. Even in Marx's ideal-type capitalism of nineteenth century England, parliamentary investigations into factory conditions were able to project highly critical performances: such hearings were widely reported in the press and their findings were distributed in highly influential "white papers" throughout the class system. Even in the authoritarian Germany of Count Bismark, which had outlawed the socialist party, the powerful performances of militant labor leaders and mass movements played for the entire nation, recorded and distributed by radical and conservative newspapers alike. In mid-twentieth century America, the civil rights movement would never have begun if Southern newspapers had been the only media to cover the protest activities of Black Americans. In fact, it was reporters from independent Northern-owned newspapers who recorded and distributed sympathetic interpretations of the compelling social dramas generated by the black-led movement, and these performances allowed psychological identification and cultural extension with the movement's cause. What James Scott (1990) has called the powers of the weak depend, in complex societies, on access to, if not control over, the means of symbolic production and distribution, for only in this way can critical social performances be interpreted sympathetically and distributed in an effective, mass way.

The Refusion of Actor and Role

Even if the technical means of symbolic production are sufficient, and if power over them is concentrated in sympathetic hands, there is no guarantee that the performance will succeed. Not only is there the matter of the script, but there is the extraordinary challenge of acting it out.[11] Actors might be hired or coerced to perform, and in this sense they represent merely one more productive means. But bringing a horse to water does not ensure that he will drink. Actors must perform their roles effectively, and they often are not able to do so even when they truly wish to proceed. If Barthes called theatre "a kind of cybernetic machine" that revealed an extraordinary "density of signs" (1972: 261), this signifying power is even more concentrated in the person/role of the actor herself. Veltrusky (1964:84) describes the actor as "the dynamic unity of an entire set of signs." While he acknowledges that signifying power also resides in "various objects, from parts of the costume to the set," he (ibid.) insists that "the important thing is ... that the actor centers their meanings upon himself" and that the actor "may do so to such an extent that by his actions he may replace all the [other] sign carriers."

In fused societies, ritual performers perform roles they have played or will play in actual social life. In post-ritual societies, the situation of performers is much more complex. In theatrical performances, actors are professionals

who have no off-screen relation to their scripted role. In social dramas, actors often do, in fact, occupy the social role they are performing, but their ability to continue to occupy this role is always in doubt, their legitimacy subject to critical observation. In both cases, then, the challenge for effective performance is to re-fuse actor and role, to make the person who is acting seem to be the role in a natural and authentic way. Schechner (1981b) called acting "restored behavior" or "twice-behaved behavior." In theatrical acting, behavior is a put on, but this faked behavior must seem unfaked. Schechner (1981a: 86-7) recounted the wisdom of the apocryphal master teacher: "Truth is what acting is all about," he is said to have intoned, and "once you fake the truth you've got it made." Schechner (ibid., 88) himself insists upon the "not-not not" quality of acting: "Olivier is not Hamlet, but also he is not not Hamlet; his performance is between a denial of being another (= I am me) and a denial of not being another (= I am Hamlet)."

Just as with the other efforts to re-fuse the disparate dimensions of performance process, refusing actor with text demands imagination and creativity. Vis-à-vis the structure of cultural texts, whether written or unwritten, the actor is like Levi-Strauss's down to earth, practical minded bricoleur. Explaining why "the text of play will tell you so little about how a production might look," Schechner (ibid., p. 86) writes that "the production doesn't 'come out' of the text, but is generated in rehearsal in an effort to 'meet' the text." During rehearsals, actors try out various "actions, gestures, fantasies, [and] words." It is a "process of collecting and discarding, of selecting, organizing, and showing." During the rehearsal experiments, "some things are done again and again [and] they are perceived ... as 'working' and they are 'kept'." Rather than existing all at once, the post-traditional performance "takes shape" little bit by little bit, building from the fragments of 'kept business'."

When social texts were more authoritative, less contested, and less de-fused from persons' everyday and accepted social roles, professional actors could achieve refusion in a more indexical than iconographic way. In what later came to be seen as histrionic, "picture acting," performers would point to a text rather than seeking actually to embody it. This approach exhibited the duality of actor and role rather than trying to make it seamless (Aston and Savona 1991: 118). In the late eighteenth century, when sacred and traditional social structures were being reconstructed by secular revolutions, this "anti-emotionalist" method came under criticism. In *The Paradox of Acting*, Diderot (1957 [1830]) attacked acting that communicated feelings by gesture rather than embodiment. It was not until the "new drama" of the late nineteenth century, however, by which time social and culture defusion were considerably more elaborate, that the intensely psychological and introspective theatre initiated by Strindberg and Ibsen fully legitimated acting methods that placed a premium on facsimile.

Only during this contemporary period of empirical defusion did the techniques of "method acting" for refusing actor and role emerge. In *The Actor Prepares*, the Russian father of method acting, Constantin Stanislavski (1936: 13) described his ambition in terms of the kind of flow associated with recovery of the ritual form. "The very best that can happen," he wrote, "is to have the actor completely carried away by the play." When this occurs, then "regardless of his own will he lives the part ... subconsciously and intuitively."

Before Stanislavski and his American students establish the "method" as the defining criterion of theatrical skill, celebrity acting (Quinn 1990) was the rule. Whether stage actresses like Sarah Bernhardt in the nineteenth century or Hollywood performers like Clark Gable in the twentieth, celebrity stardom can be understood as the condition in which the influence of the actor's person exceeds the impact of his theatrical role. Because stars communicate with audiences directly, communicating the culture content of an already established celebrity, refusion is much less likely. In the postmodern age of defusion and the hyper-awareness of artificiality, critics praise acting only when it is "transparent" and "honest" (Auslander 1997: 29), which means that it is viewed as faithful to the role, not to the actor's person itself. This is not to suggest that celebrity has disappeared. It is still box office, even it impedes the fused communication of the dramatic script.

If social and cultural defusion has shifted the focus of theatrical acting, we should not be surprised that the acting requirements for effective social drama have changed in a parallel way. When social and political roles were ascribed, whether through inheritance or through strict social sponsorship, individuals could be clumsy in their portrayal of their public roles. With increasing social differentiation, even inherited roles, if they are to sustain legitimacy, must be enacted in an apparently natural manner. This is all the more true in social dramas that instantiate meanings without the benefit of script, and sometimes without any prior clarification of actors' roles. It is not at all uncommon, for example, for the "designated actors" in an emergent political drama to refuse to play their parts. During the televised Watergate hearings in the summer of 1973, even Republican Senators who privately supported President Nixon felt compelled to join their fellow Democrats by expressing outrage and indignation at the Republican President's behavior. By contrast, during the televised Clinton impeachment hearings in 1998, most of the Democrats on the House panel publicly derided their Republican

colleagues. They kept their distance from the proceedings, which the Republicans leaders were trying to script as a serious, even tragic public event. The result was the destruction of verisimilitude. The proceedings created an almost carnival-like atmosphere in which comedy, not tragedy, was the order of the day. Actors on both sides of the aisle seemed "political," offering what appeared to be contrived and artificial performances. The political drama failed, in part, because the actors who composed it could not, or would not, fuse with their parts.

Even when actors in social dramas wish to play the parts that cultural texts assign them, however, they might not have the skill for refusion. Social dramas can succeed only when behavior seems unscripted and natural. To suggest that somebody is "just acting the part" is to attribute an insincerity to the role occupant that reflects failed performance. Citizens and social commentators take the measure of new officer holders and sometimes conclude they are not "up to the role," a failure that suggests not only lack of political talent but, quite possibly, an arrogance vis-à-vis the voters who gave the office-holder this social role. Six months into the presidency of George W. Bush, a New York Times columnist declared that, while the President "used to be casual in scripted settings[,] now he's scripted in casual settings" (Dowd 2001). She justified this observation by citing the President's lack of ease and grace, quoting a Republican party leader to the effect that Bush looked "nervous and uptight in the pictures of his meetings with European leaders." Insofar as the President's actions appeared scripted, he lost his authenticity, for he seemed not be his own man. Following up on her deflating observations, the Times columnist claimed that the President's "imagists" had now taken to setting up pseudo-natural events so that he could "show his effervescence." But she claimed this effort at performative success was to no avail: When "the president took his script to another casual setting" – a local hospital where a member of the first lady's staff had just had a baby -- "the friendly baby visit ... morphed into what it truly was: a stiff news conference."

Distributed in the nation's most influential newspaper, the implications of this satirical column were clearly dramaturgical. President Bush was being convicted of an incapacity for refusion, a performative failure that, if not corrected, could translate directly into a political one. The first President Bush, George H.W., had gained great authority during the early years of his administration by performing effectively as a war leader, convincing Americans that the war against Iraq was a holy quest against a dark and dangerous enemy of civil good. Facing the economic stagnation that marked the second part of his term, however, he had become increasingly awkward in performing his office. Projecting the appearance of being ineffectual and weak, he eventually failed to gain re-election. On the basis of the performative failures she has documented in the office behavior of his son, the Times columnist predicted a similar fate. She concluded her column by noting that recent polls about the performance of the second Bush "alarmingly echo the fall from favor of his father when he was deemed detached from the electorate." What she could not predict, of course, was the emergence of a new war scenario would allow the son to perform as effectively as his father. When this opportunity presented itself, George W. Bush refused and recouped, and he seemed like a "real President" for the first time.

The Refusion of Performance and Audience

Viewing performance purely in textual terms, semioticians tend to link the very existence of performance to its interpretation by an audience. Pavis (1988: 87) writes, for example, that the process of *mis-en-scene* unfolds "only when received and reconstructed by a spectator from the production." According to this reasoning, audience interpretation is tied directly to the dramatic intentions of the actors and the culture structure created by performance: "To decipher the *mis-en-scene* is to receive and interpret ... as a spectator the system elaborated by those responsible for the production" (*ibid.*). Such a theoretical position makes the psychological identification and cultural extension that are the dual ambitions of performance seem easy to achieve. It fails to appreciate just how radically defusion marks performance in post-traditional life.

Those actually involved in contemporary theatre have a more chastened and thus more accurate perception. No doubt this derives from their practical experience of the fundamental autonomy of the audience's world from the performers', the separation that makes performance into a pragmatics and not only a text. In the defused world of post-traditional performance, every dramatic effort faces an uncertain reception, for it is played before an audience whose reaction cannot be known. This contingency exists no matter what the performance's quality, no matter what the track record of the writer's, actor's, or producer's previous success. In an interview before the release of his movie *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*, Steven Spielberg (2001) confessed to being "the `fraidy-cat who makes a picture and immediately assumes that nobody is going to show up the first day and it will be reviled around the world." The world's most popular and influential creator of popular culture movies described his trepidation about audience reaction as a basic and inevitable feature of his film-making career.

That's the way I've been on every single project. Every one. When it doesn't turn out that way, I'm relieved.

Relief is the largest reaction I have to a film that's well received and opens well. I don't celebrate. I don't have victory parties. I simply feel relief.

Even when Spielberg's movies are well received, however, he professes a revealing uncertainty about whether the meaning he intended to create is the same meaning that his audiences understand. What "bothers me ... even more than people not going," he remarked, "is not communicating the ideas." What "I'm afraid of," he insisted, is "when people don't get it." Perhaps because she herself is the author of a classic text for theatre practitioners, Boulton (1960: 1996-7) provides a more clear-headed approach to audience than some theoreticians. Alongside writers and actors, she writes, the audience forms the third side of "the great triangle of responses which is drama," and it, too, involves an "exercise in imagination." Boulton speaks of audience receptiveness as contingency, speculating about whether or not an audience will be "cooperative," meaning capable of "submitting itself to a new experience." Describing such submission, she employs the language of incorporation, internalization, and identification. By "accepting a sample of life and tasting it," she writes, an audience is "sharing in the lives of imaginary people not altogether unlike known live persons." In his practical writings on the staging and success of psychodrama, the psychoanalyst J.L. Moreno reflected on the same kind of difficulties.

The more the spectator is able to accept the emotions, the role, and the developments on the stage as corresponding to his own private feelings, private roles, and private developments, the more thoroughly will his attentions and his fantasy be carried away by the performance. The paradox is, however, that he is identifying himself with something with which he is not identical ... The degree to which the spectator can enter into the life upon the stage, adjusting his own feelings to what is portrayed there, is the measure of the catharsis he is able to obtain on this occasion. (Moreno 1975: 48).

Not surprisingly, the practitioners who have written most convincingly about the gap between performance and audience, and the possibility of overcoming it, are those who have advocated most strongly the idea that secular theatre should recover its roots in religious ritual. Rejecting the defusion that makes theatrical performance artificial and makes audience participation vicarious and attenuated, dramatists in the modernist avant-garde have often tried to create theatrical flow experiences, where script, actors, and audience are one. In his Geneva address in 1923, Jacques Copeau, the visionary creator of communal theatre, readily acknowledged that "there are nights when the house is full, yet there is no audience before us" (Copeau 1955: 38-39). An audience truly exists only with fusion and internalization, if its members "gather [and] wait together in a common urgency, and their tears or laughter incorporate them almost physically into the drama or comedy that we perform." Copeau linked such fusion of audience and performance to the internal unity of the audience itself.

What I describe as an audience is a gathering in the same place of those brought together by the same need, the same desire, the same aspirations ... for experiencing together human emotions – the ravishment of laughter and that of poetry – by means of a spectacle more fully realized than that of life itself. (ibid.)

Peter Brook (1969: 127) explained his vision of the "Holy theatre" by describing refusion in a similar way. Only when the process of "representation", he writes, "no longer separates actor and audience, show and public" can it "envelop them" them in such a manner that "what is present for one is present for the other." In such situations, audiences give up their distanced observer role and become part of the performance itself: "Occasionally, on what he calls a 'good night,' [the actor] encounters an audience that by chance brings an active interest and life to its watching role." Rather than undermining dramatic communication, this kind of audience actually "assists" in the performance.

These discussions by theatre professionals point to the specifically sociological problems that social dramas encounter, for it is precisely in the dissociation between performance and audience that "society" enters in. What is the nature of this gap? How large is it? What explains it? What kinds of identification-generating processes would allow it to be overcome? Two different kinds of explanations are involved.

One sort of explanation points to the dimension that might broadly be described as social-structural. Theatrical analysts themselves are acutely aware of the fact "theatre is attended by the 'non-innocent' spectator whose world view, cultural understanding or placement, class and gender condition and shape her/his response" (Aston and Savona 1991: 120). It is because they are so sensitive to the defusion of performance and audience that film and television producers and distributors try to protect their investments by targeting specific "audience demographics" and by staging test-runs that can trigger textual readjustments in response. For much the same reason, politicians have always tried to "keep their ear to the ground" to gain "feedback" from the "grassroots" in front of whom their social performances are staged. That this testing of the demographics and responses of

potential audiences is now conducted by scientific polling does not change the performative principle involved. The goal remains one of overcoming social-dramatic defusion.

In complex societies, the structural barrier to re-fusing social drama with audience is the underlying fragmentation of the citizen-public. Social segmentation creates not only different interests but orthogonal subcultures, which in turn produce patterns and objects of identification. Endemically divided by left and right, white and black, north and south, male and female, and rich and poor, citizen-audiences often respond to social performances in diametrically opposed ways. For this reason, particularistic, group affirming social dramas are much easier to carry off than universalizing ones. This is even more the case when such ongoing and routine divisions are exacerbated by the polarizations generated by intensive social conflict and change. If secular ritual depends on the seamless refusion of audience and performance, it becomes that much more difficult when the elements of shared culture become refracted through the prism of polarizing change. Successful social drama depends on the audience having some perspectives commonly shared, as Copeau so clearly understood.

Whether or not some such shared element "really exists" is not simply a reflection of social structure and demographics. It is also a matter of interpretation. This points to the second sort of explanation with which any social approach to the defusion of audience and performance must be concerned. The interpretive dimension is creating by the autonomy of the performative process itself. It is up to audiences to interpret whether or not a social drama hooks into a society's background culture in a compelling way. Bauman (1989) has suggested that a consciousness of doubleness is inherent in performance, that every performance is compared to an idealized or "remembered" model available in the wider culture. In other words, audience interpretation does not respond to the quality of the performative elements per se, to whether the script, direction, acting, and means of symbolic production are of high quality in and of themselves. Audiences of social (and theatrical) dramas judge quality comparatively. Scripts, whether written or attributed, are compared to the great and convincing plots of earlier times. Did the fervor over President Reagan's trading of arms for hostages constitute another Watergate, or did it pale by comparison? Social acting is evaluated in a similar way. In his role as chairman of the House Impeachment Committee, how did Representative Henry Hyde's efforts stack up against Sam Ervin's bravura performance as chairman of the Senate Select Committee during the Watergate hearings? How do the participants in today's Presidential debates compare to the towering model of the Lincoln-Douglas debates that, according to American mythology (Schudson 1992), made civil-dramatic history more than a century ago? When audiences interpret the meaning and importance of social dramas, it is such comparative questions as these that they keep in mind. If their answers are negative, those who are beyond easy demographic reach will be much less likely to invest their affect in the performance. If the fragmentation of an audience will not be overcome, then, for large segments of the citizenry, neither psychological identification nor cultural extension will occur. When the answers are positive, audiences experience the social drama in a heightened and broadened way. As they become more deeply involved, performance has the chance to draw them out of their demographic and subcultural niches, to bring fragmented publics into a more widely shared, and possibly more universalistic, liminal space.

The Circle of Criticism and Self-Evaluation

In the sorts of differentiated societies that generate post-ritual performance, interpretation has come to assume an independent position, both institutionally and in terms of cultural authority. Every defused element of performance is subject to independent criticism, judged in relation to reflexive criteria that demarcate aesthetic power and genre-authenticity. Such judgments issue from "critics," whether they are specialized journalists employed by popular media or intellectuals who work in academic milieu. But critical judgments do not enter performance only from the outside. They are also generated from within.

Around each of the defused elements of drama there have developed specialized performative communities which maintain and deploy their own critical and often quite ruthless standards of judgment. The distance from the first drama prizes awarded by the City Dionysius festival in ancient Greece to the Academy Awards distributed by Hollywood in postmodern Los Angeles may be great in geographic, historical, and aesthetic terms, but the socio-logic remains the same: recognition of the differentiated criteria for evaluating secular performance. Continuous evaluations are generated within every performative medium and emergent genre -- from theatre to feature film, from documentary to independent film, from country and western singing to rap, from evening television to soap operas, from science fiction to the animated cartoon. Such self-policing devices aim to "improve" the possibilities for projecting performance in effective ways. Judgments and awards are distributed according to peer evaluations. Despite the power of the studios, it is the actors, cinematographers, editors, directors, writers, and costume designers themselves who create the hierarchies of aesthetic ability in each of their performative communities, not the powers outside the academy itself.

In less formal ways, critical interpretive judgments circulate freely and endlessly throughout dramatic life, in both its theatrical and social forms. Public relations, an extraordinarily large industry, concerns itself with conditioning and structuring the interpretations that audiences apply to performance. This is also the concern of agents and handlers, of experts in focus groups, of privately hired pollsters. It is the ambition, as well, of every "nasty" piece of gossip and flashy fad and fashion that circulates through segmented social groups, and sometimes through whole societies, by word of mouth.

The Agonistic Engagement with Meaning

In complex societies, structures of power and culture provide the background to cultural performance, but authenticity is achieved, not ascribed. It is the performance itself that determines legitimacy. Good wars may be viewed as illegitimate, and bad wars can be viewed as good. Authentic heroes can be undone. Scheming, malevolent, and dangerous men can be genuinely loved and revered. It is the successful performance of a symbolic text that creates authenticity, not the actual nature or quality of its signifieds. This is what the pragmatics of cultural performance is all about. Each of the defused elements of drama can be presented in a more and less effective way. If there is a theoretical danger of so concentrating on pragmatics, it is that the symbolics of culture are temporarily put aside. But it is with the pragmatics of symbolic action that we are always concerned. We must never forget that the success of effective performance is measured by the extent to which it engages meaning.

Meaning is constructed in an agonistic way (Arendt 1958, Benhabib 1996). Agonism suggests the dynamic movement from which meaning flows, a conflictual and wave-like dialectic that pits good against evil, that highlights the existential and metaphysical contrast between sacred and profane. These binaries define the fundamentals of the cultural language that backgrounds performance. They create the basic codes, and they propel the fundamental social narratives upon which every successful performance must seek to draw. "Performing the binaries" implants drama in the basic language of background culture. It legitimates script and setting, acting and directing, power and symbolic means, and both critical praise and condemnation. If performance is implanted in these binaries, psychological identification can be achieved, and elements of the background culture can be extended to the particular interests that are being performed. In the process of dramatic refusion, every element of performance tries to draw the same line in the sand. The authenticity that marks effective performance is an agonistic achievement. The drama's protagonists forcefully align themselves with the sacred themes and figures of cultural myth, and through such an embodiment become new icons, and create new texts, themselves. They cannot do so, however, without at the same time constructing and highlighting the in-authentic. Signaling their antipathy to the profane, to the evil themes and figures that threaten to pollute and overwhelm the good, they cast doubt on the sincerity and verisimilitude of other performers. If a protagonist successfully performs the binaries, audiences will pronounce the performer to be an "honest man," the movement to be "truly democratic," an action to be the "very epitome of the Christian spirit."

This social relativity affects every social performance and every kind of dramatic genre, from entertainment to political confrontations large and small.

Grossberg (1992: 206) has described how rock music "must constantly change to survive," and how it does so by seeking "to reproduce its authenticity in new forms, in new places, in new alliances." Rock does this in an agonistic way. On the one hand, "it must constantly move from one center to another," aligning itself with sacred themes and places. On the other hand, "in order to constantly project its claim to authenticity," rock is always "transforming what had been authentic into the inauthentic." When Auslander (71) writes that, whatever its radical claims, "rock ideology is conservative," he is pointing to the same necessity for cultural performance to align itself with the binaries of background culture: "Authenticity is often located in current music's relationship to an earlier, 'purer' moment in a mythic history of the music."

Applying the same theoretical logic to a very different sort of radical claim, Chan (1998) has proposed that political revolutions should be seen not as creations of a completely new ideology but as exercises in "center displacement." In her study of the confrontation in Tiananmen Square in June, 1989, Chan demonstrates how the activities of the radical students and the Communists who held power can be viewed as competing performative efforts to engage and rearticulate the same background script. Protestors and reactionaries each sought to demonstrate that it was their own movement and ideas that more truly expressed the sacred ideas of the Chinese Revolution. As they sought performatively to legitimate themselves, they sought also to brand their opponents as inauthentic, polluting, and dangerous counter-revolutionaries.

Performing the binaries is a routine part of everyday political life. In 1980, in the debate among Republican and

Democratic candidates for Vice-President of the United States, the Republican contender from Indiana, Senator Dan Quayle, sought to gain credibility by citing the martyred former President, John F. Kennedy. Quayle's opponent, Texas Senator Lloyd Benton, responded with a remark that not merely scored major debating points but achieved folkloric status in the following years: "Senator, I had the honor of knowing Jack Kennedy, and you're no Jack Kennedy." Speaking directly to his political opponent, but implicitly to the television adjudicating the authenticity of the candidates, Benton sought to prevent Quayle from performing an iconic role. He succeeded.

Performative Effects

People want to accomplish things through their actions. Sometimes these aims are purely cultural: they want to assert the validity of a value or belief. Sometimes these things are practical: they want to gain something material, to manipulate a situation or person, to realize an interest. No matter what kind of aim they pursue, actors need to engage in symbolic action. Unless they wish to rely only on brute force, they must convince others to act in a certain way. This means that they must try to convince others to believe what they say: that they are who they say they are; that they will do what they state, warn, or promise that they will do; that the results of their actions will be as predicted; that the situation is, in fact, the way they have described it to be.

In a complex world in which the elements of performance have become defused, all this is more difficult than it might seem at first to be. To get these results is to have engaged in successful performance. Only when the elements of performance are re-fused does the performance ring true. This is more than mere belief. When there is refusion, the performance is deeply felt to be true. Persons are really accepted as being motivated by the values they evoke. The reasons people offer are taken as indeed compelling. The accusations persons make seem thoroughly justified. The persons they condemn are taken to be guilty as charged.

In theatrical drama, such effectivity is illocutionary. The staged drama is successful, not because it produces social results in the "real world," but because the audience is brought to catharsis in the theatrical one. The drama has allowed and compelled a working through of motives and relationships. It has deepened understanding, sometimes in a profound, sometimes in a comedic way. In the end, however, the theatrical audience can always walk away.

In social drama, the effects of successful performance are perlocutionary. In addition to catharsis and deepened feeling and thought, social dramas also create practical effects. For it is through staging compelling performances that social actors, whether individual or collective, achieve their ambitions in the "real world." Business deals are clinched, enterprises are initiated, employees are motivated. Wars are launched and morale is sustained. Revolutions are made. Careers are made and lost. Heroes are created and powerful leaders are brought to their knees. Collective identities are shattered and remade.

These illocutionary and perlocutionary effects have implications for the metatheoretical about structure and agency. When drama is successful, it transforms performance into text. What I mean to suggest here is that that, insofar as elements of performance are fused, pragmatics become symbolics. To illuminate the pragmatics of successful performance, I have held background culture constant, treating it as a reservoir of established codes, narratives, and rhetorical configurations. The model of cultural pragmatics I have developed here helps us to understand how and why the background meanings of such culture structures change.

Performances became authentic by seeming to embody and perform established, apriori scripts, even if they ostensibly are engaged in efforts to alter to them. Yet, the extraordinary creativity and imagination that the varied and complex efforts at refusion entail suggest that performing culture always already involves significant change. For example, as script writers make efforts to simplify and reduce background themes, and to create surprising shifts and turns, they introduce not only new harmonic shifts on cultural chords but sometimes unharmonic ones, and sometimes they even go beyond chords themselves. This is even more true for social-dramatic scripting, which must make sense of highly contingent situations, is rarely written before hand, and is often attributed in a post-hoc way.

Similarly, in the effort to re-fuse script with time, place, and act, mis-en-scene initiates innovations that, while initially minor, can often become often far-reaching. We have earlier explored the extraordinary leeway that directors have instantiating their scripts. We have also seen how changes in the means of symbolic production lead to reconstructions of performance. To recount the great actors in theatrical history is to trace the serial and radical reconfiguring of scripted roles, so much so that it has often been argued that the meaning of the roles themselves has drastically changed.

When performance produces flow, these sometimes radical cultural changes will be incorporated by the audience as such. When this last element of performance comes into play, the demand to exercise imagination produces further possibilities for cultural change. As citizen-publics, audiences reflect and express underlying social transformations. In political terms, publics can present expectations for more inclusion and more responsiveness to difference; they might be stimulated by backlash and be inclined to select and interpret in less exclusive, more particularistic ways; or, after a period of intense public involvement, they might be motivated by hopes for privatization and withdrawal. For better and for worse, as audiences change, so do the meanings they attribute to performance. We have seen that the publics for social dramas rarely respond to a performance with one mind. Ethnic, racial, class, and gender groupings produce sometimes subtle, sometimes dramatically different readings of the same performance, whether these are traditional and theatrical (Liebes and Katz 1990) or social (Hunt 1997). Such fragmented interpretations of the same performance enter into the construction of subcultures in turn, differentiating them further, relating them to one another in new ways, introducing hybrid and alternative themes (Jacobs 2000).

Would the great cultural innovations of world history have come about in such a different way? Drawing agonistically upon the background culture, successful performance has itself become a radical new text. Buddha was a fervent and loyal Hindu who ostensibly wished merely to purify the established tradition. In the process of performing this purification, he polluted existing interpretations to such an extent that a new religious text, and new audiences, were created. Jesus was a devout Jew who created a powerful performance of purification by attacking the authenticity of Temple Jews; he embodied godliness by acting vividly in devout and expressive ways. But without his having intended it, Jesus' audience took his performance, not as a purification of the ancient text, but as itself a text that marked the beginning of a new cultural script. The democratic radicals who made the English and American revolutions also felt that they were purifying their political traditions (Bailyn 1963), restoring the ancient Republicanism of their forefathers that had become polluted and corrupted by kingship and aristocracy. The revolutions they performed, however, were taken not as faithful performative iterations but as new texts in themselves; they became founding fathers of a new political culture.

Whatever kinds of change performances introduce, what is vital to understand is that, when they are successful, to that degree they are retrospectively taken as texts in themselves. The records these actions leave become imprints upon the collective conscience. These imprints are a collectivity's memories, the performative deposits that become the culture(s) of record and are continuously worked, reworked, and re-imagined in post-performative space. Collective memories are rememberings of cultural performances, dramas whose success leaves indelible marks (e.g., Eyerman 2002).

Some Philosophical and Aesthetic Considerations: Confronting the Performative Status of Authenticity

It is scarcely an exaggeration to suggest that an implicit awareness of the idea animating this essay -- that refusal is an artificial and constructed process -- has haunted the consciousness of modern society. From the esoteric worlds of philosophy and art to the grittiest domains of everyday life, there has been the unnerving recognition that performance is less the emanation of a fixed self than the contingent coordination and display of various dramatic parts.

In esoteric thought, the danger that actors can seem real without actually being so was crystallized more than a century ago by a series of philosophical warnings (cf., Carlson 40ff). In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche (1984 [1878]: 51) observed that "the profession of almost every man, even the artist, begins with hypocrisy, as he imitates from the outside, copies what is effective." Such modern artificiality threatened to kill "free spirit" that Nietzsche aphorized throughout his melancholy later work. Because Santayana (1922: 133-4) was equally haunted by modern fragmentation, he was equally critical of the supposed artificiality of modern performance: "Every one who is sure of his mind, or proud of his office, or anxious about his duty assumes a tragic mask."

Sartre brought this philosophical exploration to its highest level, defining it as the existential dilemma posed by the need to re-fuse performance in order to make it authentic. Only by facing the inherent nothingness of the human condition, Sartre believed, would humans recognize their creativity, the starting-from-scratch-nature of every action, and only via such recognition would they accept the fact of their own moral responsibility. This ontological conviction allowed Sartre to be keenly sensitive to the performative. In a famous digression in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre (1956 [1943]: 101-102) insists that the waiter is only "playing at being a waiter in a café." In describing "the dance of the grocer, of the tailor, of the auctioneer," Sartre suggests they are performers on a stage, and simultaneously exposes the artificiality of such a suggestion: "They endeavor to persuade their clientele that they are nothing but a grocer, an auctioneer, a tailor." In contrast with Nietzsche

and Heidegger, however, and with the late Foucault's call for the cultivation of the self, in this early work at least Sartre rejects the romantic illusion that actors can disengage from performance and embrace a fused authenticity. His insistence, rather, is that actors must recognize that, indeed, they are performing. For to perform without knowing it produces bad faith. Only if one knows that one assumes and projects a mask does one act in good faith, achieve existential authenticity, and accept moral and political responsibility.

Art theorists, critics, and playwrights have confronted and exposed the same kind of dilemma. Each of the principal media of modern performance has been championed, one after the other, for what is mistakenly taken to be its ontology of realism -- the life-like qualities that purportedly allow the medium to achieve verisimilitude in contrast with merely written texts. Earlier I quoted Boulton's remark that theatre as "literature that walks and talks before our very eyes." This is a prelude to her paean to theatricality.

There is an enormous difference between a play and any other form of literature. A true play is three-dimensional ... It is not intended that the eye shall perceive marks on paper and the imagination turn them into sights, sounds and actions; the text of the play is meant to be translated into sights, sounds and additions which occur literally and physically on a stage. Though in fact plays are often read in silence, if we are to study drama at all we must always keep this in mind. (Boulton 1960: 3)

Paradoxically, the ingenuity of Boulton's book springs from her detailed exploration of how every dimension of this lifelike physicality can and must be convincingly contrived. In *What Is Cinema?*, the French film philosopher Andre Bazin (1968: 9-16, 76-124) insisted on the same contrast, but he believed that his own medium's capacity for realism trumped any other's. "Can the photographic image, especially the cinematographic image," Bazin (*ibid.*, 96) asked, "be likened to other images and in common with them be regarded as having an existence distinct from the object?" His answer was no. In contrast to novel, newspaper, or theatre, he argued, only film based itself on a realist ontology. Continuous photographer apparently moving fluidly through time and space provided a *prima facie* guarantee of verisimilitude.

Presence, naturally, is defined in terms of time and space ... Before the arrival of photography and later of cinema, the plastic arts (especially portraiture) were the only intermediaries between actual physical presence and absence. Their justification was their resemblance ... But photography is something else again. In no way is it the image of an object or person, more correctly it is its tracing It carries with it more than mere resemblance, namely a kind of identity ... But photography is a feeble technique in the sense that its instantaneity compels it to capture time only piecemeal. The cinema does something strangely paradoxical. It makes a molding of the object as it exists in time and, furthermore, makes an imprint of the duration of the object. (*ibid.*: 96-97)

Yet, once again, this very insight allowed Bazin to appreciate and explain the dissimulating artfulness of film. In controlling the *mis-en-scene*, Bazin famously suggested, the director, not the actor or script writer, was as the true auteur of filmic art. Thirty years later, Philip Auslander, the postmodern performance theorist, would make precisely the same claim for television as against film. Pointing to "an ontology of liveness," Auslander (1999: 12-13) talks about how even prerecorded television manifests an ability to "colonize liveness." That television can "remediate theatre at the ontological level through its claim to immediacy," Auslander warns, creates grave problems of manipulation and artificiality.

It is hardly surprising that this dilemma of artificiality/authenticity has invaded theatrical practice itself. Thus, the relatively new genre of "performance art" exposes artifice by creating defusion. In Auslander's (1997: 41) discussion of the experimental Wooster Group, whose actors maintain their actual personal identities throughout their entire repertoire of their different plays, he writes that the actors' "style of performing," which "at once evokes and critiques conventional acting," can be described as a "performance 'about' acting." As compared to the "holy theatre" of the modernist avant-garde director Peter Brook, which strove to create a fused, ritual effect, such postmodern theatricality exposes the artificiality of refusion, highlighting the separateness of actor, performance, and text. The performances are "less representations of an exterior reality than of the relationship of the performers to the circumstances of performance" (*ibid.*).

It was, of course, Bertold Brecht who first made de-fusion an intended theatrical effect. Brecht had been an assistant to Max Reinhardt, the early 20th century German theatre director whose extraordinary staging led, for the first time, to the practice of attributing performances the director rather than to actor or playwright (Hartnoll 1966: 244). If Reinhardt's aesthetic manipulation of performative elements remained tied to the effort at refusing audience and text, exactly the opposite was true for Brecht. He employed sophisticated staging methods to destroy what he came to see as the dangerous illusions of theatricality. He ordered his actors not to

"become" the actor they were portraying, and he strove to prevent the audience from becoming emotionally involved in his plays. As a political radical, Brecht (e.g., 1964) wanted his plays to provide training for seeing through the false consciousness of capitalist society. If theatrical performances were exposed as highly artificial, he hoped, perhaps the social texts that informed and deformed everyday life could also be stripped of their performative power.

This aim of exposing dominant ideology by de-fusing dramatic performance overlaps with the "rituals of resistance" approach of neo-Marxism (Hall and Jefferson 1976). Members of the Birmingham school of cultural studies claimed that the symbolic actions of lower class persons only superficially engage the hegemonic texts of capitalist society. Inverting traditional ritual theory, they suggested that symbolic action by dominated economic group defiantly performed subcultural scripts. The idea that de-fusion can expose conservative ideology continues to motivate what Carlson (1996: 165-186) has called "resistant performance" in contemporary theatre, which today is more often directed against hierarchies of sex, gender, race, and ethnicity than class. The feminist film-maker Thi Minh-Ha Trinh (1991: 1993-94; cf., Carlson 1996: 181-82), for example, describes herself as confronting "a blind denial of the mediating subjectivity of the spectator as a reading subject and meaning maker-contributor." She criticizes artists who "consider their works to be transparent descriptions or immediate experiences of Reality 'as it is'," and she suggests, describing her own project as engaging in an effort to "break off the habit of the spectacle" by employing such techniques as "asking questions aloud." Only by so explicitly "addressing the reality of representations," Trinh insists, can an artist succeed in "entering explicitly into dialogue with the viewer/reader." Such radical performance theorists aim, in other words, at defusing the traditional elements of cultural practice.

Conclusion: The Moral Task of the Sociologist In the Face of Cultural Pragmatics

In their concern with the normative implications of refusion, critical philosophers, drama theorists, and artists have sought to expose the artificiality of cultural performance, whether on stage or in real life. Alarmed by its political and moral consequences, they have called for defusion, and they themselves have typically sought to further the process. The task of the sociologist is a different one. The practice of sociology is imbued with moral concern, but its aim is exposition and interpretation, not evaluation per se. In thinking about cultural pragmatics, the critical contribution of sociology comes, not from denouncing re-fusion, but from naming and illuminating it. More controversially, perhaps, I would suggest that sociologists should not follow the avant-garde even by advocating defusion. Without refusion, social life would not be possible. Indeed, not only repressive but also liberating social values are communicated through cultural performances that are successfully fused. Democratic and emancipatory ideologies have often been vitiated by their performative failures. Politically emancipatory theory must be supported by aesthetically compelling practice.

The sociological approach to performance, then, remains agnostic vis-a-vis the moral qualities of symbolic action. From the perspective of the sociologist, every performance is equally constructed, and authenticity is viewed as product, not condition, of successful performance. It is a matter of actors displaying and embodying appropriate affect, symbols, and demeanor according to the genre at hand, and of audiences being selectively inattentive to stimuli that point outside this frame. "The creation of the effect of authenticity in rock [music]," Auslander (1999: 70) writes, "is a matter of culturally determined convention." What is true of rock music is true of every other genre of cultural performance, from auratic sacred performances in church to the great civil performances of democratic social life.

It is not an accident that such intellectual pioneers as Turner (1983: 55-57) and Schechner (1981a89ff) cited Csikszentmihaly's ideas. Flow provided a psychology of the sort of ritualized secular performances they wanted to see. In his appropriation of Csikszentmihaly, Schechner (84) observed, quite rightly, that flow "is the opposite of reflexivity." To think that contemporary society is purely reflexive is to accept modernization theory in its most dichotomous and historicist terms (e.g., Beck et al. 1994). Symbolic action evokes meaning, and meaning opens up symbolic participation in fantasy, narrative, and code.

But to recognize the continuing possibility of flow does not mean that the specificity of post-traditional societies can be ignored. Reflexivity pervades contemporary life. Cultural performers might aim at flow, but they rarely achieve it. To understand why, we must move beyond the nostalgic reconstruction of situations in which performative success is easily facilitated, and beyond the counter-nostalgic hypotheticals according to which such performance is permanently blocked. Only by analyzing the everyday reality of defusion will we ever be able to theorize the possibility for its alternative -- the refusion that can sustain myth.

Refusion is critically important to the life of societies. For even if we maintain realism and moral responsibility,

we must still acknowledge, with the early Nietzsche (1956 [1872]: 136), that “every culture that has lost myth has lost, by the same token, its natural and healthy creativity.” If “the forces of imagination ... are saved only by myth,” then even the most democratic and individuated societies must still be sustained in this way. Myths are generated by successful cultural performances. Insofar as they are successful, they reinvigorate collective codes, allowing them, in Nietzsche’s words, to be “ubiquitous and unnoticed, presiding over the growth of the child’s mind and interpreting to the mature man his life and struggles.”

Notes

[1] For the very idea that social theory should be related to this relatively new field of performance studies, I am indebted to a discussion with Richard Pels. For introductions to the field as it now stands, see Auslander (1997, 1999) and Carlson (1996). Both of these authors have influenced my own understanding, and I will make specific reference to their work below.

[2] This question is underscored in the influential commentary on Wittgenstein’s notion by Baker and Hacker (1980: 51, italics altered): “For the notion of a game carries with it a wide range of desiderated associations that may fruitfully illuminate the concept of language. Games are free creations of the human mind, autonomous and rule-governed. The rules of a game do not budge for every conceivable circumstance, but are not therefore deemed incomplete. The foundation of the ability to play a game lies in training; the ability to play it is mastery of a technique. Playing games is a human activity, and its existence presupposes common reactions, propensities, and abilities. The goal of a game, to the extent that it is a winning or losing game, is determined by the game (by what counts as winning or losing) and is not extraneous to it, even though one may play for pleasure, fame, or money.”

[3] Robert Bellah’s later work, which did so much, alongside Geertz’s, to create contemporary cultural sociology, can be understood as hobbled by Republican nostalgia in much the same way.

[4] Later in this essay, in my discussion of social differentiation, I will break this category of collective representations down into the two categories of background culture and scripts.

[5] It was exactly this process of differentiating theatrical drama from Dionysian ritual that Nietzsche traced, and pilloried, in his provocative and extraordinarily nostalgic early work, *The Birth of Tragedy*. In contrast to the Apollonian chorus of later Greek drama, Nietzsche (1950 [1872: 56] argues, “the dithyramic chorus ... is a chorus of the transformed, who have forgotten their civic past and social rank, who have become timeless servants of their god and live outside all social spheres.” No artificial separation between actor, audience, and script yet existed: “In the dithyramb we see a community of unconscious actors all of whom see one another as enchanted.”

This chasm of oblivion separates the quotidian reality from the Dionysiac. But as soon as that quotidian reality enters consciousness ... it is viewed with loathing, and the consequence is an ascetic, abulic [sic] state of mind ... The truth once seen, man is aware everywhere of the ghastly absurdity of existence ... of the trumpery garments worn by the supposed reality of civilized man ... The symbolism of the satyr chorus express[es] analogically the primordial relation between the thing in itself and appearance .. Audience and chorus were never fundamentally set over against each other An audience of spectators, such as we know it, was unknown ... Each spectator could quite literally ... imagine himself, in the fullness of seeing, as a chorist [sic] ... The world of the stage is a vision of that satyr chorus – a vision so powerful that it blurs the actors’ sense of the ‘reality’ of cultured spectators ranged row on row about him ... [Here] the poet ... sees himself surrounded by living, acting shapes into whose innermost being he penetrates Metaphor, for the authentic poet, is not a figure of rhetoric but a representative image standing concretely before him in lieu of a concept ... The primary dramatic phenomenon [is] projecting oneself outside oneself and then acting as though one had really entered another body, another character ... [But] the power of the epic Apollonian spirit is such that it transfigures the most horrible deeds before our eyes by the charm of illusion The poet who writes dramatized narrative can no more become one with his images ... [He creates] splendidly realistic counterfeits, but neither ideas nor affects are infused with the spirit of true art ... The Euripidean prologue may serve to illustrate [this] rationalistic method [when] a character appear[s] at the beginning of the play [and] tell[s] who he is, what preceded the action, what has happened so far, even what is about to happen.” (1950 [1872]: 51-55, 78-79).

[6] In his provocative interpretation of the distinctiveness of seventeenth-century French drama, Reiss (1971) emphasizes the importance of differentiating among performative elements: “It seems to me that, as far as possible, all theatrical elements – mise en scene, acting, the spoken language in conjunction with visual effect, the spectator – should be considered ... as it is apparent that the ostensible themes of the theater often become

just one more of these elements" (1971: 1). In the course of his monograph, in fact, the emergence of each of these elements is given an all-powerful effect in turn. Earlier I quoted from Riess's emphasis on the significance of the liveness of the actor-performers; he also details the independent weight of the spectator, the script, and staging.

Of all these elements the most important is the spectator, and it is precisely he who is never taken into account in current explanations of the 'sudden' change in the direction of the French theatre around 1640 (1971: 1)... The very fact that language can, and does, destroy not only its own credibility but also that of the characters and situations visible through it, implies – even depends upon – its prior ability to create these things [and] the play's very existence during this period depends in the main on the creative power of language (1971: 109) ... The same loss of illusion follows when the *mis-en-scène* is designed with no attempt at *vraisemblance*. In Corneille's *Galerie du Palais*, a curtain is drawn aside and the audience sees "le libraire, la lingere, et le mercier chacun dans sa boutique" ... The set, in fact, often seems to take over from the text (1971: 122-23) ... The theater relied perhaps on the *de facto* unreality of the theatrical situation itself (its being in a theater, on a stage) to maintain a distance (144).

[7]Turner's (1975) pioneering work on the drama generated by the conflict between Thomas Becket and Henry II was the first to notice and conceptualize such social dramas. Theoretically, however, Turner's concept of an unfolding sequence extending from breach to crisis to redress and then to reintegration or schism amounted to little more than a set of quasi-functionalist metaphors for the experiences of actors themselves. Turner failed to tie the emergence of social dramas to the historical incorporation of peripheries into centers (Eisenstadt 1985) and, despite, his own clear awareness of the problematics created by modernization (e.g., Turner 1982: 70, and Wagner-Pacifiçi 1986), he was unable to problematize the fragmentation and de-fusion of the various social and cultural elements of which performances are composed. I will speak more about Turner's dramaturgical approach below.

[8]In his reconstruction of how Abel Meeropole's song, "Strange Fruit," became Billy Holiday's signature performance, the journalist David Margolick (2000: 56) emphasizes the specificity of its lyrical emphasis on lynching as the factor that made it stand out *vis-à-vis* the more general background themes of Black protest songs and artistic texts.

To some, Andy Razaf's "Black and Blue," written in 1929 and immortalized by Louis Armstrong, was arguably the first black protest song aimed at a largely white audience. But while lynching was a conspicuous theme in black fiction, theater, and art, it did not feature prominently in black music. Irving Berlin referred to lynching in "Supper Time" ... but before Meeropol and Holiday came along, no one had ever confronted the topic so directly. "It was really the first time that anyone had so explicitly and poetically transmitted the message of black people," said the note record producer Ahmet Ertegun. "It was always guarded in the blues: hidden language. But this was quite open."

[9]"The fact that a social drama, as I have analyzed its form, closely corresponds to Aristotle's description of tragedy in the *Poetics* ... is not ... because I have tried inappropriately to impose an 'etic' Western model of stage action upon the conduct of an African village society, but because there is an interdependent, perhaps dialectic, relationship between social dramas and genres of cultural performance in perhaps all societies. Life, after all, is as much an imitation of art as the reverse." (Turner 1983: 72)

[10] Margolick (2000: 49-50) testifies to the significance of such staging in his reconstruction of how Billy Holiday's rendition of "Strange Fruit" became a runaway hit at the New York night club, Café Society.

Witnessing "Strange Fruit" at Café Society was a visual, as well as an auditory, experience. Josephson, who called the song "agitprop" ... decreed elaborate stage directions for each of the three nightly performances. Holiday was to close each set with it. Before she began, all service stopped. Waiters, cashiers, busboys were all immobilized. The room went completely dark, save for a pin spot on Holiday's face. When she was finished and the lights went out, she was to talk off the stage, and no matter how thunderous the ovation, she was never to return for a bow.

[11]To cite Margolick's account once more: Neither the script (lyrics), the *mis-en-scène*, nor the already primed white and black audiences were enough to ensure the success of "Strange Fruit." There was also the indistinguishable factor of Billy Holiday herself.

To the hip young liberals who came to hear Holiday amid what the columnist Ralph de Toledana later called "the

eddy cigarette smoke" of Café Society, or to the college kids who paid seventy-five cents to stand and listen at the bar, "Strange Fruit" left an indelible impression. "It has its power and validity in the exquisite torture of her voice ...," Toledana late wrote. It was "a beautifully rendered thing, like a great, dramatic moment in the theatre," the artists and cartoonist Al Hirschfeld said ... "It was thrilling," [Betty] Comden recalled. "That song was bloodcurdling and wonderful and she did it so beautifully." "She was shocking in her personal magnetism," Ralph Gleason, the jazz writer, later recalled.

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