

compartmentalization as folklore has always been since the first emergence of the concept more than two centuries ago. While the forms of folk expression and the discipline devoted to their study are continuously transformed, the symbolic construction of folklore remains a significant social force, energized by the dynamic processes of traditionalization, ideology, social thought, and the artfulness of everyday life.

■ See also ETHNOMUSICOLOGY; MUSIC, FOLK AND TRADITIONAL.

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PERFORMANCE

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A mode of communicative behavior and a type of communicative event. While the term may be employed in an aesthetically neutral sense to designate the actual conduct of communication (as opposed to the potential for communicative action), performance usually suggests an aesthetically marked and heightened mode of communication, framed in a special way and put on display for an audience. The analysis of performance—indeed, the very conduct of performance—highlights the social, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions of the communicative process.

Conceptions of Performance

In one common usage performance is the actual execution of an action as opposed to capacities, models, or other factors that represent the potential for such action or an abstraction from it. In the performing arts this distinction can be seen in the contrast between composed guidelines or models for artistic presentations, such as playscripts or musical scores, and the presentational rendition of those works before an audience. A form of intersemiotic translation is involved here, a shift from

the encoding of a message in one sign system (code) to another. The transformation can go the other way as well, from performed action to transcribed text, as when a DANCE is transcribed into Labanotation or an orally performed FOLKTALE into written form. The approach to verbal art known as ETHNOPOETICS is centrally concerned with the problems of such transcription.

In this sector of performance studies, theater people, for example, have long been interested in the relationship between playscript and performance and the process of moving from the former to the latter. Folklorists, to take another example, contrast text-centered perspectives, which focus on disembodied, abstract FOLKLORE items, with performance-centered perspectives, which are concerned with the actual use of folklore forms.

The focus of debate on these issues centers upon how much and in what ways the script or score or folkloric tradition determines performance as against how much flexibility, interpretive choice, or creative opportunity rests with the performer. A corollary concern, in the fine arts especially, is how accurately a given version of a playscript or musical score represents the intentions of the playwright or composer. We do not, for example, have *Macbeth* written in Shakespeare's hand. Can we reconstruct what he intended, and, if so, how are we bound by that understanding in performance? As a general tendency, critics and scholars tend to vest authority in the musical or dramatic text and through it in the author of the artistic work, whereas performing artists tend to provide the strongest arguments for their own creative contribution to the artistic process. It is also clear that a neutral performance of a received and authoritative text is an idealist fiction; performance always manifests an emergent dimension, as no two performances are ever exactly the same. Beyond this, there is too much variation across the range of performing arts, cultures, and historical periods (and within each of these) to make a conclusive argument. Ultimately, the relative proportion and interplay of au-

thority and creativity, the ready-made and the emergent, must be determined empirically, in the close study of performance itself.

A similar contrast between the potential for communicative action and the actual conduct of communication is found in linguistic usage in the opposition between competence and performance. This contrast was proposed by U.S. linguist Noam Chomsky and is central to the theory of generative grammar. In generative grammar competence is tacit grammatical knowledge, the formal structure of language as an abstract, idealized, cognitive system of rules for the production and comprehension of grammatically appropriate sentences. Performance, by contrast, is "natural speech," what the speaker actually does in using language. For Chomsky and other generative grammarians, competence is the primary concern of linguistic theory; a grammar is no more or less than a theory of competence for a given language. Performance tends to be seen as deviant, imperfect, encumbered by such "grammatically irrelevant" factors as distractions, memory restrictions, errors, shifts of attention and interest, and the like.

Other students of language, however, especially psychologists, sociolinguists, and linguistic anthropologists, are centrally concerned with performance. For example, Dell Hymes, a U.S. anthropologist, argues that a socially constituted linguistics demands an alternative conception of competence and performance and their relative importance to linguistic theory. In this view, social function gives shape to linguistic form, language has social as well as referential meaning, and the communicative function of language in the constitution of social life is fundamental to its essence. Hymes emphasizes "communicative competence," encompassing the whole range of knowledge and abilities that enable one to speak in socially appropriate and interpretable ways. It involves not only grammatical knowledge but also the knowledge and ability to greet, tell a story, pray, or promise. In this view, what transformational grammar would relegate to performance and thus exclude from

the purview of linguistic theory assumes at least parity with grammar at the center of a theory of language. Performance here is an accomplishment.

* In contrast to notions of performance as any doing of an act of communication are conceptions of performance as a specially marked mode of action, one that sets up or represents a special interpretive frame within which the act of communication is to be understood. In this sense of performance, the act of communication is put on display, objectified, lifted out to a degree from its contextual surroundings, and opened up to scrutiny by an audience. Performance thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of the act of communication and gives license to the audience to regard it and the performer with special intensity. Performance makes one communicatively accountable; it assigns to an audience the responsibility of evaluating the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer's accomplishment.

late To the extent that the skill and effectiveness of expression may become the focus of attention in any act of communication (some would argue that to some extent it is always so), the potential for performance is always present. In these terms, then, performance is a variable quality, relatively more or less salient among the multiple functions served by a communicative act. Accordingly, performance may be dominant in the hierarchy of functions, or subordinate to other functions—informational, rhetorical, phatic, or any other. Thus, for example, a sea chantey sung on board ship primarily to coordinate a work task may be secondarily presented to and appreciated by the sailors for the skill of the chanteyman's performance; on the other hand, performance may become paramount if the same singer is featured onstage at a maritime folk FESTIVAL. The relative dominance of performance, then, will depend on the degree to which the performer assumes responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative skill and effectiveness as against other communicative functions. It may range along a continuum from sustained, full performance, as when an operatic diva sings at La Scala, to a fleeting breakthrough into performance, as when

a child employs a new and esoteric word in conversation with peers as a gesture of linguistic virtuosity. Situated somewhere between the two might be hedged performance, as when someone presents an off-color joke and claims it was picked up from someone else in case it is not well received by the audience, but tells it as well as possible in the hope that the skill and effectiveness of the presentation may be evaluated positively.

Integral to the conception of performance as a frame that puts on display the intrinsic qualities of the act of communication itself is the way in which this framing is accomplished, or in the Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman's term, how performance is keyed. Every act of communication includes a range of explicit or implicit framing messages that convey instructions on how to interpret the other messages being conveyed. This communication about communication was termed *metacommunication* by Gregory Bateson. In empirical terms this means that each community will make use of a structured set of distinctive communicative means to key the performance frame so that communication within that frame will be understood as performance within that community. These keys may include special formulas ("Once upon a time . . .," "Did you hear the one about . . .?"), stylizations of speech or movement (for example, rhyme, parallelism, figurative language), appeals to tradition as the standard of reference for the performer's accountability ("The old people say . . ."), even disclaimers of performance ("Unaccustomed as I am . . ."). The culture-specific constellations of communicative means that key performance may be expected to vary from one culture to another, although areal and typological patterns and universal tendencies may exist.

Characteristics of Performance

Prominent among the cues that signal performance may be situational markers: elements of setting, such as a raised stage, a

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proscenium arch, or an altar; special paraphernalia, such as costumes or masks (*see MASK*); occasioning principles, such as seasonal festivals or holy days. All performance, like all communication, is situated, enacted, and rendered meaningful within socially defined situational contexts. The comparative study of performance, however, has tended to emphasize those events for which performance is a criterial attribute, what the U.S. anthropologist Milton Singer has called "cultural performances." Cultural performances tend to be the most prominent performance contexts within a community and to share a set of characteristic features.

First of all, such events tend to be *scheduled*, set up and prepared for in advance. In addition, they are *temporally bounded*, with a defined beginning and end; they are also *spatially bounded*, that is, enacted in a space that is symbolically marked off, temporarily or permanently, such as a theater, a festival ground, or a sacred grove. Within these boundaries of time and space, cultural performances are *programmed*, with a structured scenario or program of activity, as in the five acts of an Elizabethan drama or the liturgical structure of an Iroquois condolence ceremony. These four features are in the service of an additional one, which is part of the essence of cultural performances, namely, that they are *coordinated public* occasions, open to view by an audience and to collective participation; they are occasions for people to come together. Moreover, involving as they do the most highly formalized and aesthetically elaborated performance forms and the most accomplished performers of the community, such performance events are *heightened* occasions, available for the enhancement of experience through the present enjoyment of the intrinsic qualities of the performative display.

Perhaps the principal attraction of cultural performances for the study of society lies in their nature as *reflexive* instruments of cultural expression. U.S. scholar Barbara Babcock has suggested that the term reflexive identifies two related capacities of performance, both rooted in the capacity of any system of

signification to become an object to itself and to refer to itself, thus opening up to view the organizing and patterning principles by which the system is constituted.

First of all, performance is formally reflexive—signification about signification—insofar as it calls attention to and involves self-conscious manipulation of the formal features of the communicative system (physical movement in dance, language and tone in song, and so on), making one at least conscious of its devices. At its most encompassing, performance may be seen as broadly metacultural, a cultural means of objectifying and laying open to scrutiny culture itself, for culture is a system of systems of signification. Thus, Singer, in his efforts to understand the complex culture of India, concentrated his attention on such cultural forms as plays, concerts, lectures, ritual readings and recitations, rites, ceremonies, and festivals, because his "Indian friends thought of their culture as encapsulated in these discrete performances, which they could exhibit to visitors and to themselves."

Reflexive is a more potent term here than the still widely current *reflective*, which treats performances and other artistic forms as reflections, mirror images (though perhaps distorted ones, as in a fun house) of some primary cultural realities such as values, patterns of action, structures of social relations, and the like—an "art follows life" perspective. Recent performance studies in anthropology, as in the work of Roger Abrahams, Clifford Geertz, Richard Schechner, and Victor Turner, demonstrate that cultural performances may be primary modes of discourse in their own right, casting in sensuous images and performative action rather than in ordered sets of explicit, verbally articulated values or beliefs, people's understandings of ultimate realities and the implications of those realities for action. Geertz's analysis of the court rituals of what he calls "the theater state in nineteenth-century Bali" are especially revealing in this regard.

In addition to formal reflexivity, performance is reflexive in a social-psychological sense. Insofar as the display mode of

performance constitutes the performing self (the actor onstage, the storyteller before the fire, the festival dancer in the village plaza) as an object for itself as well as for others, performance is an especially potent and heightened means of taking the role of the other and of looking back at oneself from that perspective, in the process that social philosopher and social psychologist George Herbert Mead and others like him have identified as constitutive of the self. Indeed, Mead himself cites the efficacy of drama in reporting situations through which one can enter into the attitudes and experiences of other persons. Such dimensions of consciousness of consciousness are not, of course, confined to cultural performances but may illuminate identity in any social context; a sense of being "on" or doing something "for the camera" in the course of ongoing social actions does constitute performance in the general sense developed here. However, when the attribution of a performance quality to social interaction carries with it a range of metaphorical meanings drawn more narrowly from theatrical performance in variations on the venerable "life as theater" trope, the analogy is best explored in terms of the conventions of theater or drama that are pressed into the service of the metaphor.

■ See also MUSIC PERFORMANCE.

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