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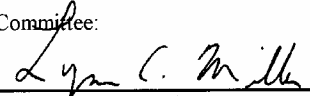
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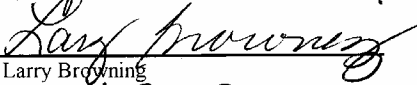
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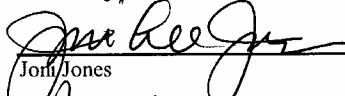
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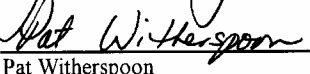
IN SEARCH OF THE PROFOUND

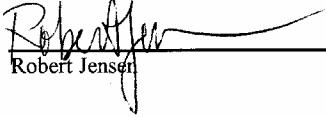
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PERFORMING TEACHING:  
IN SEARCH OF THE PROFOUND

by

Arthur Lawrence Wright, B.A., M.A.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of The University of Texas at Austin

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PERFORMING TEACHING:  
IN SEARCH OF THE PROFOUND

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Arthur Lawrence Wright, Ph.D.

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Supervisor: Lynn C. Miller

This study is a contribution to the ongoing project of scholars and practitioners of performance studies in particular and students of communication and teaching in general to understand something more about what it is to be human. Specifically, it examines the phenomenon variously described as ecstasy, flow, *jouissance*, nirvana, rapture, Zen, the Tao, grace, or simply the ineffable.

Performance as it is understood in communication is a special case of communication, and I understand teaching as a special case of performance.

But performance in my experience is more, and that is what I have set out here to explore. Performance cannot be completely situated in this discussion without exploring the philosophy of experience itself, without exploring how performance creates self and generates narrative, how performance mystically opens a window of opportunity to act, perhaps only now and then, in that liminal space of peace, wholeness, integrity, unity.

Performance is attractive in the study of the phenomenon variously described above because it offers one way I know to predictably recreate it. Teaching is attractive because it offers a yardstick to assess what audience members think and feel while the performer – the teacher – operates within the phenomenon. It is simultaneously a worthy project to seek to improve the process of teaching by dissolving the subject/object relationship of teacher/student that is the ultimate tyranny of pedagogy.

Principles of subversive pedagogy ably describe this circumstance of the teacher-as-performer and the students-as-audience and suggest that several fundamental human values – love, humility, surrender – form the backbone of an enlightened pedagogy.

Though several branches of performance theory ably set the stage to consider teaching as a performing act, no performance theory I have encountered explains or addresses either the mystical phenomena that can arise in teaching or how that phenomena relates to satisfaction of the audience – in this case students.

But I have found an explanation of sorts in the work of Gregory Bateson. He offers a framework that explains how application of these values through communication has the potential to elevate the conversation to a level where the inadequacies of self fade and all things become possible.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: THE PLEASURE OF PERFORMANCE .....	1
The question.....	4
An opportunity .....	7
Performer/audience, teacher/student.....	10
The answer .....	12
Performance defined.....	14
Method .....	18
Literature.....	18
Conclusion .....	31
CHAPTER TWO: PEDAGOGY AND PERFORMANCE: GENESIS, EVOLUTION, AND RELATIONSHIP .....	33
The roots of pedagogy .....	33
A philosophy of education.....	35
The roots of performance.....	37
Performance is synonymous with life.....	39
Performance is synonymous with society.....	41
Performance is synonymous with self .....	45
Performance is synonymous with language itself.....	45
Conclusion .....	47
CHAPTER THREE: PERFORMANCE AS autobiography, AS SELF .....	49
History of autobiographical performance .....	50
Why self performance.....	63

Conclusion .....	86
Chapter FOUR: Performance as narrative .....	87
Labov’s study of black vernacular .....	88
Five forms of personal narrative .....	95
The power of narrative .....	100
Narrative’s literary tradition .....	102
The vanishing narrator .....	107
The implied author .....	109
Evaluating representation .....	111
The implied listener .....	115
Relationship with the process itself .....	117
Narrative as inquiry .....	119
Conclusion .....	128
Chapter FIVE: A Mystical Sense of Performance .....	130
Flow as shamanism .....	132
The shaman’s tool kit .....	134
Conclusion .....	137
<u>Summary</u> .....	138
Inadvertently subversive pedagogy .....	138
What’s going on here .....	139
The awesome power of language .....	145
Performance as transcendence .....	153



Spirituality defined through leadership.....	158
Practical aspects of leadership .....	162
Sites of struggle.....	164
Conclusion .....	166
CHAPTER SIX: BATESON, THE 12 STEPS, AND LEVELS OF LEARNING.....	168
The 12 Steps.....	173
Learning III and the 12 Steps.....	174
Surrender, humility, acceptance, and love .....	181
A universal opportunity .....	184
Appendix.....	187
Appendix One: Performing Teaching.....	187
How students rated course .....	194
Appendix Two: Quantifying the characteristics of ‘performing teaching’.....	197
Accessibility.....	198
Safety .....	199
Respect.....	201
Fairness .....	202
Openness.....	203
Caring.....	203
Relevance.....	203
Appendix Three: My story.....	204
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	211

VITA.....	226
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## CHAPTER ONE: THE PLEASURE OF PERFORMANCE

*It can be argued that all perception and all response, all behavior and classes of behavior, all learning and genetics, all organization and evolution – one entire subject matter – must be regarded as communicational in nature.... (Bateson, 282-283)*

One night in a graduate course called Performance of Nonfiction at the University of South Florida, Professor Elizabeth Bell lectured for almost three hours on contemporary performance theory. The ideas were complex, arcane, and ultimately elusive, as it seems that all properly deconstructionist postmodern ideas must necessarily be.

“Of course,” she concluded off-handedly as she closed up her notes, “I think this is all bullshit.”

The putting-away-of-papers hushed.

“Performance,” Dr. Bell said as she gained our full attention, “is sexy.”

I was stunned. Two ideas burst simultaneously through my conscious.

The first was one of thankful identification. Though I wouldn't have chosen *sexy* to describe the delight I sometimes feel when I perform, it was certainly close and

immediately opened up a whole new realm of possibilities. The second idea that flashed through my mind was, of course, that I should have thought of this first.

Dr. Bell had explored this idea in some detail in an article that was to appear in the next issue of *Text and Performance Quarterly*. After class, she photocopied the galleys for me. I read at stop lights on the way home. I finished reading it before I took off my tie or said hello to my wife. I was enthralled with Dr. Bell's argument because it began to explain my own experience: Frequently when I perform, and sometimes when I am deeply involved in work or play, I lose track of time. I am completely in the present. Self-doubt and self-reproach vanish. The perpetual conversation in my head goes missing. I am overcome by a complete spiritual silence, which in its silence nonetheless has a powerful sense of well-being, confidence, clarity, purpose -- what I believe Emil Durkheim was talking about when he used the phrase "collective effervescence" (cited by Csikszentmihalyi, *Encyclopedia of Religions*, 361).

I had specialized in performance precisely because I wanted to further experience and understand this feeling, but until now I had no vocabulary to describe it, in truth no sense that anyone else ever felt this way.

To see if Dr. Bell and I were even talking about the same thing, I made a list of adjectives to describe how it feels when I deliver what I felt to be a good performance. When I'm good, when I'm really cooking, I feel *adventurous, engaging, evocative, focused, free, fulfilled, giving, intimate, invulnerable, peaceful, purposeful, provocative, and timeless*. But simultaneously I experience *absence* of perception.

- **I lose sense of time.** Past, future, and the extraneous present cease to exist. I am completely and effortlessly focused in the present.
- **I lose sense of self.** The object of my consciousness (me) and the subject of my consciousness (I) merge into unity. There is no one to talk, no one to talk to, and no one to talk about, so I stop doubting and criticizing and nagging myself. Self or ego cannot be damaged or hurt, so I stop struggling for control.
- **I lose sense of ambiguity.** My goals are clear. Audience feedback is unequivocal. Questions about life's meaning do not trouble me.
- **I lose sense of limitations.** With time, self, and ambiguity silenced, I feel agile and free, as if a monstrous burden has been lifted from my shoulders. I am at peace in myself and my world. I sense alignment with a greater good of some sort.

Except for matters of scale, this description of my feelings is as applicable to performance as it is to sex, alcohol, drugs, art, war, poetry, work, pharmaceuticals, gambling, and good rock. But as I savored Dr. Bell's idea, I sensed that performance's sexuality is about consciousness. Each of the words italicized above, one way or another, describes levels of consciousness. Performance seen in this light is one path to a quantum leap in consciousness. On the hard-wired end of the human spectrum, this leap in consciousness is the jackpot that drives reproduction of our species and causes us to simultaneously moan about God when we are thinking about nothing of the kind. Somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, in their recreational guises, fall sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll. Far out on the abstract end of the human spectrum, this leap in

consciousness is nirvana, the Holy Grail of spiritual enlightenment, Grace, Joy, the perpetual quest for order, meaning, security, and peace in a world where chaos rules and ambiguity is a step in the right direction.

### **The question**

I felt confident as a second-semester master's student that a Saturday afternoon in the library would readily define performance and explain the phenomenon I experienced in performance. I was naive. Performance theory is not physics. The broad, integrated performance theory I imagined I would find rather easily that Saturday afternoon remains elusive to this day. It seems instead that performance theory, like Clifford Geertz's anthropology theory, "flies rather closer to the ground." Writes Dr. Bell: "Performance studies has rarely indulged in theory for its own sake, instead tying analytical tools to specific texts, performance talk to specific embodiments" (102). When thinkers *do* attempt to fashion theory that is at all broad and abstract, Geertz warns, we tend to "drift off into logical dreams, academic bemusements with formal symmetry (*Interpretation*, 24). Geertz's views are influential in the realm of performance academia. What predominates in performance studies is not theory *of performance* but theory of performance *as*. I list here the *performance as*'s which I have found. There may well be more — I don't doubt there are — but here are most of them:

Performance as anthropology (Bateson, Levi-Strauss, Turner).

Performance art (Carr; Finley, Halprin, Lippard, Lynn C. Miller, Paglia, Rodden, Rothenberg, Russell, Sayre, Schechner (*Karen Finley*), Zarrilli).

Performance as autobiography (Miller, Smith) or personal narrative (Langellier, *Personal Narratives*).

Performance as communication (Back, Conquergood (*Jensen Lectures*); Ricoeur).

Performance as conversation (Austin, Crow, Gilbert, Hopper, Hyde & Sargent, Juhl, Kacandes, Miller, Modaff, Payne, Randall, Searle, Stucky, Stucky & Glenn, Tannen).

Performance as ethnography (Conquergood (*Performing*); Garfinkel; Levi-Strauss; Jones; Tyler).

Performance as inquiry.

Performance as knowing (Conquergood (*Performing as a Moral Act, 4*), Dolan (*Presence, 1*), HopKins & Long).

Performance as life (Austin (as action); Burke (*P&C, Grammar*), Goffman (*Presentation*), Merleau-Ponty, Schechner; Scheflen, Turner (*Ritual*)).

Performance as oral interpretation (Bacon, Bacon & Breen, Bauman & Kistenberg, Fine & Speer, Gray, HopKins & Long, Pelias, James Phelan, Roloff, Strine).

Performance as pedagogy (Bruner (*Culture*), Giroux (*Theory*, 42-71;

*Postmodernism*, 52), Peterson)

Performance as resistance (Artaud, Bell, Butler, Case, Champagne, Dolan,

Grotowski, hooks; Langellier, Carter & Hantzis; Martin, Miller,

Minh-ha, Moi, Peggy Phelan, Reinelt & Roach, Schechner (*News*,

*Sex*), Scott, Smith, Wiles, Worthen).

Performance as rhetoric (Back, Brandes, Briggs, Conquergood,

*Ethnography, Rhetoric*; Kuipers).

Performance as ritual (d'Aquili, Drewal, Durkheim, Goffman, Schechner,

Tambiah, Turner (*Drama*), Wittgenstein).

Performance as self (Gergen & Gergen; Kapferer, Langellier, *Breast*

*Cancer*; Miller et al).

Performance as shamanism (Belo, Conquergood, *Hmong Shamans*;

Eliade, Levi-Strauss, Schechner, Turner).

Performance as storytelling (Bauman, *Stories*; Livo & Rietz; Lord).

Performance as theatre (Artaud, Brook, Carlson, Chaikin, Grotowski,

Hallie, Innis, Jung, Kirby, Schechner, Sontag).

Performance as therapy (Downs, Jung, Roloff).

Performance as transcendence (George).

Performance as verbal art (Bauman, *Verbal Art*).



I could find no answer to my question about the nature of performance in literature or theory. I decided that what I needed was further opportunity to create this phenomenon, a vocabulary to discuss, and a yardstick of some sort with which to measure it. I decided that in my doctoral work I would answer this question as best I could.

### **An opportunity**

I had no formal classroom teaching experience when I came to Austin as a doctoral student. A matter of days after arrival I was entrusted with two sections of some 25 students each enrolled in a course titled Principles of Speech Communication but more accurately known as Introduction to Public Speaking. I had a syllabus that was 75% university boilerplate, the rest a paragraph course description, a list of how individual grades would be weighted, and the name of the required text. It was a page and a half single-spaced. I felt a shiver of loneliness. I knew *nothing* about teaching.

What would I do every class period, 50 minutes for three days a week for 13 weeks? There was no plan, no schedule. How should I teach the material so students would do well on tests? How would I teach them to be public speakers? The thought of standing up in front of a room to make a speech still scared *me*. How would I grade them? How would I judge their public work, and most inevitably their public failures? How would I judge them as human beings? (I'd spent a number of years practicing how *not* to judge people.) How could I attach numbers to the courage it takes when you're 19 years old to stand up in the front of a room for the first time – afraid, vulnerable, brave --

with nothing between you and oblivion but a stack of smudged, sweaty note cards? How do you put a number on that?

As a last resort I'd gone through a fat binder of other instructors' handouts and grading grids and found them all ultimately useless. Sitting in a cramped office, alone, I admitted to myself that I had no idea how to be a teacher. I'd been putting it off for weeks, but I could no longer avoid the obvious: I was beaten before I'd even started. It was hopeless. And so I made a most important decision: I surrendered.

That does not mean I quit. Surrender, properly done, is a masterly strategic move, and one I've used effectively before. John Dewey, whose eloquent philosophy of aesthetics and experience remains fascinating and evocative reading, says that surrender is implicit if one is to engage in aesthetic experience. But it is hardly the move of a loser. "Adequate yielding of the self," Dewey writes, "is possible only through a controlled activity that may well be intense.

In much of our intercourse with our surroundings we withdraw; sometimes from fear, if only of expending unduly our store of energy; sometimes from preoccupation with other matters, as in the case of recognition. Perception is an act of the going-out of energy in order to receive, not a withholding of energy (53).

Aesthetic creation, in other words, is impossible if one does not actively surrender to the experience. Put differently, surrender can be a first step to artistic performance.

When I surrendered, what I literally did was I said to myself, "I don't know how to do this. I'm going to look stupid. I'm going to make mistakes. If I'm going to grade

students I'm going to have to earn their trust, which means I'm going to have to trust them." I decided to do what I'd done successfully in the corporate world. I was going to find out who they were and tell them a little about myself. I would tell them where we'd have to be at the end of the semester. I would tell them that they already knew how to communicate, so I was just going to show them a little different way of doing it which might achieve things that would be valuable to them at some point. I would tell them that it would be scary, like a roller coaster, but everyone would step off safely at the end, so there was no genuine need to be afraid. Effectively, I said: If you're going to get out of this what you want, then we're going to have to work together. Finally -- probably my most important decision -- since I didn't have any experience dealing with undergraduates, I would simply treat them like responsible grownups. Also I had children their age, and that didn't hurt.

I decided not to tell them that this was the first time I'd ever taught a class of anything anywhere. I felt that I needed to let them believe in me, which would be okay as long as I didn't specifically lie about it. They were, after all, young adult paying customers, and I was the grownup. I decided I'd have to carry that last little piece all by myself, even though it ran contrary to general policy. Honesty can turn into catharsis and confession, which is in the end good only for the confessor and a selfish act. I thought they deserved better. But even if I surrendered in the process of making teaching an aesthetic experience, I *would* have to actually do *something*.

I thought about the several wonderful teachers I'd had in my life, mulled over the experiences, and it occurred to me that I might as a last resort simply try to *perform* them. All the ingredients for teaching and performance were present.

Performer = Teacher
Audience = Students
Script = Syllabus
Stage = Classroom

We had a performer (the teacher), an audience (the students), a script (the curriculum), and we had a stage (my classroom). Augusto Boal defines theatre even more simply: "Theatre is the passionate combat of two human beings on a platform." It made my job easier when I looked at it as performance rather than teaching. At least I knew something about performance.

### **Performer/audience, teacher/student**

An overly generalized, thumbnail distinction between performing and teaching is that performing is about the performer and teaching is about the student. In both cases the performer/teacher is the instigator (or at least is logically prior, as Kenneth Burke would say); in both cases the audience/student is voluntary (though obviously this ranges from the spectator who pays \$125 a seat for *Phantom of the Opera* to the first-semester freshman who dreads the necessity of English 301).

But neither case holds up well at all in application.

The Broadway actor enjoys the same role, night after night for years, because, he says, "Every time the audience is different." The chaired professor insists that students buy his own book and tests new material for his next Ivy League lecture tour on captive undergraduates. There are performers who only give and teachers who only take. "The

stage can try to transform the audience,” writes Augusto Boal, “but the audience can also transform everything, try anything” (42). Clearly the relationship between performer/teacher and audience/student is complex.

My experience on both sides of the equation is that arrogance is notably absent in good performers, good teachers, good audiences, and good students. As a young newspaper reporter I was urged to get into the heads of my readers and write to the person I found there. I learned quickly that the quality of my writing varied directly with the clarity of my perception of the reader’s interests. As a performer I continued that strategy because I found the audience most responsive when in performance I behaved in terms of their interests, and it works in teaching too. The less important I am in my own mind, the more I learn from my students. As long as I am conscious of my self, I act as my own audience, something we all do, Boal notes. “In the beginning, actor and spectator coexisted in the same person” (14). He calls us in this role “spect-actors:”

The Theatre of the Oppressed has two fundamental linked principles: it aims (a) to help the spect-actor transform himself into a protagonist of the dramatic action and rehearse the alternatives for his situation, so that he may then be able (b) to extrapolate into his real life the action she has rehearsed in the practice of the theatre (40).

Later I will argue that good teaching empowers students in the same way by tactically rejecting the classic subject-object relationship between teacher and student. Boal rejects this relationship in the theatre proper: “The observer observes, the spectator

sees: she feels, is moved, thinks, remembers, imagines. She remains a subject, separate from her object” (22).

In *Text and Performance Quarterly*, Bryant Alexander echoes Boal when he writes that performance – in this case autobiography – “beckons that I become empathically connected to the articulated lived experience, thereby generating in me my own autobiographical reflections” (97). In today’s theatre as in today’s classroom, those who privilege the performer/teacher over the audience/student miss a great opportunity. In performing I am entertained; in teaching I learn. But I still want understand both, and to learn to do both better.

### **The answer**

I set out in my doctoral work to understand, explain, and explore the possibilities and opportunities that arise when I perform teaching. Such performance is at its simplest a matter of experience, fitting naturally into the realm of phenomenology and sharing phenomenology’s validity and integrity. Performance theory overlays phenomenology and extends the opportunity for discussion by offering three distinct perspectives. The first theoretical perspective is the largely synonymous idea of performance as autobiography and performance as self. This perspective allows us to talk about performance from the inside out. A second theoretical perspective is performance as narrative, a perspective that allows us to examine performance from the outside in. A third theoretical perspective – performance as mysticism -- offers a way to talk about those fascinating and elusive aspects of performance (and indeed all living) that seem

always hovering like inviting shadows in the cool margins of ineffability, of liminality, of genuine community, of authenticity.

Atop a foundation of phenomenology overlaid with distinct yet continuous theories of performance as self, as narrative, and as mysticism I offer the substance of performing teaching in my narrative and in the quantitative and qualitative narratives of my students. These stories describe abidingly agreeable experiences for me and my students, but these stories are not unique. I find their traces not in performance theory but in the radical pedagogy of Myles Horton, Paulo Freire, Maria Montessori, even Ché Guevara. Here in this subtle confluence of teaching and performing and thinking and being I find core values of love, acceptance, humility, and surrender. The 12 Steps provide a way of amplifying and understanding these values in an operational, day-to-day sense, and Gregory Bateson's work on logical typing embraces these values in a profound dimension of meaning ultimately beyond language.

This way of performing I propose holds that the ultimate goal of performance is dissolution of the subject/object dichotomy that is the initial context of any performance and, indeed, the default context of life as it naturally presents itself. I conclude that my experience performing teaching suggests we as thinking and caring individuals need not accept what is best expressed in the First Noble Truth of Buddhism, that life is inevitably struggle. By performing life as I have performed teaching, we have the opportunity for a much more pleasant, useful, and meaningful experience. In other words, performing teaching presents an interesting model for performing life, for living.

This is unfortunately an ideal proposition, elusive for me, possible only on occasion, and difficult to sustain. It is like trying to live in a liminal state: desirable but extremely difficult. And it will remain so as long as we remain humans. What I offer is a strategy for teaching derived from a strategy of performing which suggests a strategy for living. This is what happened to me and why I think it happened. If the results appeal to you, perhaps you can adopt my tactics and you will achieve similar results. This is the part that begs to be tested scientifically: Are my results reproducible? If I did not suspect they are, I would not be justified in pursuing this work.

To the study of performance, communication, and teaching I offer that one who incorporates the ideas of love, humility, and acceptance as a foundation for whatever the actual performance text may be is likely to achieve enhanced intersubjectivity with the audience and, as a result, a substantially more meaningful and desirable experience for both.

### **Performance defined**

I believe performance is an unavoidable facet of everyday life. We are all always performing, to one degree or another. Erving Goffman nails it down solidly in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, when he says that any situation involving humans poses the question, “What’s going on here?” We as humans are compelled to suggest an answer, and the process through which we advance the answer we’d like the world to accept Goffman calls performing (13-15). Goffman addresses performance in a broadly social sense as “the common techniques that persons employ to sustain such impressions



and with some of the common contingencies associated with the employment of these techniques.... Performance may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (15). As for a definition of *self*, Goffman sees performance as inescapable. “Everyone is always and everywhere more or less consciously, playing a role... It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves” (19). In this broad, Goffmanesque sense, performance becomes one of phenomenology’s “background expectancies,” part of the broad and constant flux of nature and society. Even in a natural or social sense, however, performance can be bracketed to set it apart from the routine. It is quite common for a person to phenomenologically “pay attention to” or become “conscious-of” the performative opportunities presented by a given situation. This happens when one specific outcome is sufficiently preferable over other outcomes that we are willing to exert some effort toward securing it. Perhaps the project is making a good impression on a new professor on the first day of class. Perhaps it is trying to work out a registration problem with a University administrator in the Main Building. When a goal that is social and interpersonal in its fundamental nature is worth additional effort to achieve, performance is the method to achieve it. In this circumstance, we augment Goffman’s definition of performance with Richard Bauman’s more proactive definition:

Briefly stated, I understand performance as a mode of communication, a way of speaking, the essence of which resides in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative skill, highlighting the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content. From the

point of view of the audience, the act of expression on the part of the performer is thus laid open to evaluation for the way it is done, for relative skill and effectiveness of the performer's display. It is also offered for the enhancement of experience, through the present appreciation of the intrinsic qualities of the act of expression itself. Performance thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of both the act of expression and the performer. Viewed in these terms, performance may be understood as the enactment of the poetic function, the essence of spoken artistry" (*Story*, 3).

We can revise, simplify, and edit Bauman's text to define performance as:

1. A **way** of communicating that involves
2. **Assumption** of responsibility for a
3. **Display** of communicative skill
4. **Beyond** referential content,
5. **Entitling** the audience to
  - a. **Evaluate** the performer's display of skill and effectiveness and
  - b. **Interpret** the performance, and
  - c. **Experience** it with heightened awareness.

I take the word *performance* to mean a way of being that creates a willing relationship between performer and audience by inviting the audience's involvement and participation in an event choreographed by the performer. Performance uses language beyond its referential content with the understanding that the audience is invited and expected to interpret it nonreferentially. This performance as described by Bauman nests

comfortably and securely in the broader social and cultural context of performance defined by Goffman. The beauty of this definition is its broad applicability. It makes just as much sense for actors doing *Macbeth* at a Shakespeare Festival as it does to Labov's inner city homeboys telling life-or-death stories on a street corner.

There are no definitions of performance I can find which suggest that performance derives from anything other than actual, lived, real-world experience. The nature of experience itself varies greatly. Artaud's *The Theatre of the Cruelty* emerges from a strikingly different world than Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Miss Saigon* or *Phantom of the Opera*. But when you struggle toward the bottom of it all, when you bracket on phenomenology's second level and struggle to isolate the essences from experience itself, a broad unity becomes possible.

As a youngster in bible school or in the sanctuary looking at the stained glass, I recall thinking it peculiar (and not particularly imaginative) that in all the pictures God looked like a muscular white man and Jesus looked like a benevolent hippy, his eyes always turned down in humility. Many years later, as a graduate student in a course of Indo-European religious literature, I learned that the pantheon of 4,000 BCE Indian gods was organized almost exactly like the tripartite society of India itself. My observation is that we as humans, even the artists among us, the highest spiritual gurus and wizards, are incapable of imagining much of anything other than what our own experience shows us.

## **Method**

This paper employs as methods of inquiry (1) performance, (2) experience and its philosophy; phenomenology, (3) radical empiricism, (4) narrative, and (5) dialectics.

Performance is a way of knowing (Bateson, Bruner, Conquergood). Performance creates experience, which is also a way of knowing (Turner, Bruner, Bateson).

Recounting of the experience of performance is narrative, which is a third way of knowing (Bochner, 1997; Bochner & Ellis, 1992; Bruner, 1987 and 1990; Coles, 1989; Crites, 1971; Fischer, 1984, 1985, 1993; McAdams, 1993; Parry, 1991; Richardson, 1990; Stone, 1988; White, 1980). Radical empiricism is a way of knowing in which we "make ourselves experimental subjects and treat our experiences as primary data" (Jackson, 4). Critical exploration constitutes dialectics, which is a way of translating knowing into understanding and explanation (Deetz, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Schutz, Heidegger, Gadamer, Goffman).

This dissertation is primarily dialectical, relying on a foundation of personal experience, and on phenomenology, the philosophy of experience. In that vein, use of narrative to illuminate the ineffable aspects of performance is entirely appropriate.

Dwight Conquergood wrote: "Narrative is a way of knowing, a search for meaning, that privileges experience, process, action, and peril" (1993, 337).

## **Literature**

My graduate readings and coursework in performance studies produced nothing directly on point in explaining and understanding performance as I experienced it both on

stage and in the classroom. I seek to understand performance as a way of seeking that which is ultimately and completely intersubjective -- constructive, helpful, peaceful, pleasant, meaningful, and good.

Performance theory I find useful includes the work of (in no particular order) Artaud, Brecht, Bacon, Sayre, Gray, VanOosting, Elias, Vanden Heuvel, Pratt, Stucky, Roloff, Gentile, Champagne, HopKins, Hymes, Sidonie Smith, Jill Dolan, Lynn C. Miller, Joni Jones, Carr, Phelan, hooks, and Schechner.

Tangential theory broadly accepted in performance studies does resonate. In philosophy I have read Aristotle, Plato, what's left of the Sophists, Cicero, Quintillian, Augustine, Boethius, Christine de Pisan, Ramus, Laura Certi, Bacon, Margaret Fell, Sarah Grimke, Locke, Vico, Austin, Campbell, Blair, Whatley, Nietzsche, Bakhtin, Richards, Weaver, Perelman, Toulmin, Foucault, and Derrida. In phenomenology I've read Gaddamer, Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. In anthropology I've read Turner, Clifford, and Conquergood. In psychology I've read Bruner, Csikszentmihalyi, Jung, Freud, Lacan, Laing, and Bateson. Of the classics I've read Homer, Ovid, Euripides, Aphanassakis, and Sophocles. In sociology I've read Goffman, Weick, Berger and Luckman. In interpersonal studies I've read Nofsinger, Buber, Knap, and Daily. In linguistics I've read on Saussure, Austin, Wittgenstein, and Levi-Strauss. In religion and mythology I've read Eliade, Puhvel, Watts, and Campbell. I've read the stories of Buda and parts of the RgVeda, the Bible, and the Koran. In oriental philosophy I've read Confucius and Lao-Tzu, among others. In narrative and folklore I've read Fisher, Bauman, and Langellier. In literary interpretation I've read Hirsch, Beaudriard, Sartre,

Iser, Fish, and Prince. I rely on the work of Kenneth Burke, which I have no idea how to classify. In search of the edges, I've read I've read William Faulkner, Vaclav Havel, Stephen Hawking, Richard Feynman, Fritjof Capra, and Carlos Castañeda, among others.

I find particularly useful phenomenology's ways to understand and explain experience. It is experience, when all is said and done, that remains the foundation of my project: both my own experience and the experiences of my students. At issue is the quality of that experience. What follows is a discussion of phenomenology, a foundation for this project.

I believe performance derives from actual, lived experience. Indeed, there is nowhere else that it can come from. The philosophy of experience is the domain of the phenomenologists. *Phenomenology* is the name given to a way of understanding the world which says that human consciousness and perception create reality. 'Phenomena' are anything that a human can perceive — an event, an object, a circumstance, a feeling, a state of affairs. To live is to perceive and experience the world's phenomena. The belief that this is how we create reality — the active process of perceiving and experiencing the world — is called phenomenology. "In other words," writes Stephen Littlejohn, "phenomenology makes actual lived experience the basic data of knowledge" (216).

Phenomenology has three fundamental principles (Deetz). The first principle is that knowledge is not inferred from experience but is expressed in conscious experience itself. The second principle is that meanings are assigned to things based on how those things can be used. The third principle is that we experience the world through the same language that we use to define and express the world.

Edmund Husserl is generally considered the founder of modern phenomenology, and his work constitutes the ideas of classical phenomenology. Husserl believed that the way to discover the reality of things in the world and their truth is by actually experiencing them. Writing during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Husserl suggested that only through the application of conscious attention can truth be known. Phenomena are encountered or presented to us, and we come to know them by carefully analyzing our awareness of them. Husserl described three levels of experience.

The first level of experience — *lebenswelt* — is a natural way of experiencing the world that incorporates all manner of beliefs and perceptions of ordinary life. There's nothing *wrong* with this natural attitude toward life, from a phenomenological point of view, but neither does it permit any sort of insight. To begin to phenomenologically explore the truth of an experience or object, this undisciplined natural attitude must be set aside in a process called 'bracketing.' Bracketing does not eliminate life's normal distractions. Instead, it acknowledges them and sets them aside so that more rigorous and disciplined investigation can proceed. Husserl called this bracketing process 'phenomenological reduction' or *epoche*, which means the careful and systematic elimination of subjective factors that interfere with one's pure experience of a thing. These subjective factors include history, bias, personal interests, and others. When they have all been effectively eliminated, one's consciousness of the object reveals its true essence.

A second level of reduction is possible when this first level has been accomplished. This second level is called *transcendental reduction*. Bracketing is once

again applied, this time to eliminate from consideration the experience itself, as well as social life, which leads to one's beliefs, attitudes, and values. What remains Husserl calls the *transcendental ego*, a pure state of consciousness, what Littlejohn describes as "the true essence of the human mind,... the nature of human being and thought. If I can attend to what I am doing when I am aware, then I gain insight into what it means to have consciousness" (217).

Husserl believed that one can successfully understand the true nature of things by bracketing out their own history and ideas. This view is idealistic. Few modern phenomenologists agree. Because of the importance of language, communication, and social life to conscious experience, it may be impossible to remove them from consideration.

The ideas of social phenomenology cluster around this indivisibility of society, language, and experience. The two phenomenologists most closely identified with social phenomenology are Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Alfred Schutz. In his most important work, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty offers the notion of humans as body-subjects, indivisible physical and mental beings who create meaning in a dialogic relationship with the world. It is *people* who give meaning to the things in the world. There is no independent truth or reality, no empirical, positivist 'out there' where things exist in and of themselves. This being the case, it is easy to see why Merleau-Ponty finds Husserl's ideas of essences overly idealistic. If there is no independent, empirical, 'out-there,' then there is no place for independent essences to reside.



It is *people* who give meaning and essence to experience by communicating. We use speech to create meaning, and we use it to convey meaning to others. Like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological method calls for bracketing and reduction. But where Husserl sought to reduce experience to a true essence of reality located somewhere outside the perceiver, Merleau-Ponty seeks to reduce experience to the meaning of the object *as reflected in language*. A phenomenologist in Merleau-Ponty's tradition concentrates not only on the thing itself but also on the language used to describe the thing and the meanings reflected in this language.

Alfred Schutz was a contemporary of Merleau-Ponty's who investigated social events from the perspective of participants. According to Littlejohn (220), Schutz's work held that people going about their daily affairs operate on three fundamental assumptions. The first assumption is that the world's reality and structure are stable and will remain constant. The second assumption is that individuals' perceptions of the world are accurate and their experiences with the world are valid. The third assumption is that individuals have the power to act, to accomplish things, and to influence the world.

Schutz's work, like Merleau-Ponty's, considers communication central to the reality experienced by individuals. Our worlds depend on what we learn from others in sociocultural settings. People in various times and places experience the world differently. Knowledge is always situated historically, and reality is socially constructed within a group, which is why no universal reality can ever be found. What *is* real depends on the categories or generalizations which our cultures employ, categories that Schutz calls *typifications*. Within a given social group, then, people and things are understood

and dealt with by being placed within general categories that typify them. Language and signs are addressed to others who we assume share our schemes of typification.

Communication can only be successful to the extent that individuals within the same community share meanings.

The problem is that typifications and their associated meanings vary from group to group, location to location, and time to time. The solution is to avoid universal categories of meaning and instead seek social knowledge which is composed of specific truths of individual groups. This social knowledge Schutz sees as formulas or *social recipes*. They are typical, well understood ways of doing things in particular situations, according to mutually understood logic, behavior, role-playing, problem-solving. Schutz's ideas focus the observer on the individual meanings that different people bring to a communication encounter.

The chief critic of classical phenomenology is Martin Heidegger, who denies the ability to reach truth through any kind of reduction. Instead, according to Littlejohn (221), what is most important to Heidegger in human life is the natural experience of merely being in the world. For Heidegger, the reality of something is not known by careful analysis but by natural experience, and that natural experience emerges from communication or the use of language in everyday life. In sum, what is real is what is experienced through the natural use of language in context: "Words and language are not wrappings in which things are packed for the commerce of those who write and speak. It is in words and language that things first come into being and are" (Heidegger, 13).

Hans-Georg Gadamer was a protégé of Heidegger and proponent of philosophical hermeneutics. He is primarily interested in how it is possible to understand human experience. Gadamer says that we rely on the inescapable presuppositions of history, culture, and community to understand life's experiences. In Gadamer's view, we cannot separate the past from the present and from anticipation of the future. Still, the effects of time are important in how we understand experience of the past. As time passes, unessential features fall away, leaving a residue of highly relevant meaning. Thus interpretation of historical events and objects, such as texts, can be enhanced by time.

Like Heidegger, Gadamer believes that experience is inherently linguistic. Hermeneutics — the active process of coming to terms with a text — is dialogic, and as such texts themselves can be seen as proactive. They ask their own questions, and provide their own answers. "Gadamer's point," writes Littlejohn, "is that language itself prefigures all experience. The world is presented to us through language. Thus, in communication, two people are not using language to interact with each other; rather, communication involves a triad of two individuals and a language.... Gadamer brings phenomenology and hermeneutics together in one process. Phenomenology, or understanding through experience, and hermeneutics, or interpretation, are inseparable processes" (222).

This then is a simplified overview of phenomenology. I find phenomenology attractive as a way of explaining and understanding my teaching experience because of its calm, equitable situating of humans in the overall physical and metaphysical fabric of the cosmos — neither its saviors nor its satans. Language is essential to history, culture,

society, and life. Experience is the currency of life. Phenomenology's pervasive intersubjectivity is always seeking to blur subject and object in a continuum of experience. Phenomenology gives primacy to experience, which I see not as the result of phenomena in contact but as the evolving relationship between phenomena.

Phenomenology has a sophisticated, confident, humble kind of tolerance as a world view that makes room for vast amounts of ambiguity in critical places (multiple realities, for example) without seeming to get too nervous about its practicalities (oh god, we'll never be able to understand anything) or too neurotic about its implications (life is hopeless and we're all going to die).

I see a direct relationship between performance, experience, life, perception, understanding, reality and, ultimately, the quality of life itself — how content or how satisfied I am with the world and my place in it. This sense making is partly rational but mostly intuitive. The way that I understand phenomenology describes how the world works and corresponds quite closely with the way I experience the world's working. *Life* here is the context in which humans encounter phenomena and, alternatively, it is the encountering of phenomena which constitutes life. Neither is *a priori*. *Encountering* is the act of perception, becoming *conscious of*. The self becomes *conscious of* phenomena which in turn provide the self a context. *Experience* is the fundamental unit of currency in phenomenology, and experience is the fundamental unit of life. Experience *is* life. *Language* is the medium through which all this occurs. Without language there is no self, no world, no experience, no perception. In phenomenology there is no empirical reality, no objective "out-there." Instead there are multiple realities and multiple truths to

accompany them. The methodology of phenomenology is bracketing. The product of bracketing is *meaning*, of one form or another, the process of paring away extraneous experiences to focus in on the essence of experience which, when all is said and done, leaves us with only consciousness itself.

Each of us has a wealth of what phenomenology calls “background expectancies.” These are fundamental assumptions about day-to-day affairs that serve as a kind of norm for everyday life. Background expectancies are the normal ebb and flow of nature and society common to all humans, what Garfinkle calls “the underpinning of the commonsense world” (22). We use background expectancies to evaluate and ascribe meaning to events that stand out as unusual. A background expectancy would be that Goliath, a giant of a man and a skillful warrior dressed in armor, would easily defeat David in battle.

When the bible school teacher tells the story of David and Goliath, she relies on history, literature, storytelling, and language to create a realm of reality. We could say that she accomplishes this creation by focusing her phenomenological “consciousness of” on the legendary Biblical events. Schutz refers to this as “bestowing the accent of reality” (252). Indeed, he says, this process is evidence that the world is composed of “multiple realities.” Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman see the capacity to simultaneously handle multiple realities as an attraction of phenomenology.

Different objects present themselves to consciousness as constituents of different spheres of reality.... I am conscious of the world as consisting of multiple realities.

As I move from one reality to another, I experience the transition as a kind of

shock. This shock is to be understood as caused by the shift in attentiveness that the transition entails (21).

Phenomenology's capacity to tolerate multiple realities is attractive to people who are interested in narrative and performance, like me. What's important is not so much the even-handed way phenomenology acknowledges multiple realities as the way it insists that the various realities have an even footing. In *Frame Analysis*, Erving Goffman writes, "Realms of being are the proper objects here for study; and here the everyday is not a special domain to be placed in contrast to others, but merely another realm" (564). Here the lyrical flow of heart-felt hope expressed by a man alone on a barstool on stage is every bit as real as a phone call from the IRS or a parking ticket. Here the distinction between dreams and goals is immaterial. Here it seems that the merits of circumstance itself and the sincerity of the people involved overwhelm what culture or society might have to say about what is or is not possible. Poetry is not automatically trivial in comparison to physics. Hard work is not necessarily preferable to smart work — or the skill or good fortune to organize one's life with no work at all. Of particular interest to me is taking away the privilege of the "out-there" empirical reality's incumbent system of ethics and values. Of course, what we're really dealing with is the socially-constructed idea that this "out-there" reality is *the* reality and thus must be respected over all others, the idea that the "out-there" reality has a Christian god, a Protestant work ethic, and heterosexual lives. In a single reality system, hegemony is alive and well. Multiple realities on equal footing neutralize much of this intolerant thinking. Language becomes the building material of realities. Ideas such as faith, sincerity, coherence, respect,

balance, moderation, honesty, and utility take on new value. Lacking any status as absolutes, they seem to move between multiple realities more smoothly. Indeed, the possibility of multiple realities carries with it an implicit sense of humility both in deed and thought that seems to say, “I don’t pretend to know how all this is supposed to work, or what it is all about, or what people should or shouldn’t do. All I can hope for is what is good, and all I can do is the next right thing.”

This inclusive and indeed intersubjective way of thinking provides an excellent framework for exploring what happens when I perform teaching or, more correctly, the narrative of what happens when I perform teaching, my narrative of performing teaching. Goffman sees this as entirely appropriate for enquiry. He describes narrative as among “transformations for fun, deception, experiment, rehearsal, dream, fantasy, ritual, deconstruction, analysis, charity. These lively shadows of events are geared into the ongoing world but not in a way that is true of literal, ordinary activity” (1974, 560).

In particular, Goffman says that narrative can shift a person’s attitude from immediate engagement in life (telling us a story) toward reflection on what it means to be engaged in life (I wish I didn’t feel guilty when I hear stories like that). Thus if I am a teacher and I want students to grasp not facts but a value system (say, being Buddhist) then I can do no better than tell them a story.

In performance, the sense of intersubjectivity is always keenly felt, writes Park-Fuller. It is this process of appropriating another’s consciousness that is intersubjectivity (96). The performer’s goal here is not truth so much as it is understanding, realizing, sharing. The critical product of phenomenology is essentially a description of a human

encounter, just as it is the goal of performance. The encounter is human because it reveals through intersubjectivity something of the other; it blurs the subject/object distinction. This encounter seeks to explain, to give a sense of the performance's subject, through demonstration rather than description or evaluation.

A striking similarity between phenomenology and performance is that both are subject to claims of over-subjectivity. These claims arise from the fact that both literary criticism and performance as criticism are rendered as works of art. In both cases we find Jerome Bruner's idea that a work of art simultaneously promises a greater degree of communicative skill while rewarding the audience with an invitation to judge that creative work. In both literary criticism and performance criticism we find no objective standards for evaluation. Instead, evaluative criteria tend to insist on the intersubjective, posing questions such as — Does the criticism have a valid ring to it? Does it seem honest? Is it coherent? Do we get a deeper sense of understanding when we've completed it?

Phenomenology, instead, does two things in terms of real-life experience that are interesting and useful from a human point of view. The first thing phenomenology does is that it legitimizes multiple experiences or worldviews. This is a powerful move against hegemony. This tolerance says, 'there is no single correct way to see life, no single correct way to conduct it.' So long as your worldview derives from your experience and so long as it remains cohesive and consistent in many of the other ways we've discussed, your worldview is defensible. The other thing that phenomenology does in terms of permissible world view is that it places a substantial amount of weight on the process of



intersubjectivity. What is cherished here is not necessarily the correctness of the story or of the experience, but the story's capability or agency to dissolve and erode the *a priori* subject/object dichotomy in favor of a more unified and peaceful social structure.

Ultimately, it is only the category of *meaning* that enables us to *conceive an intrinsic affinity between the successive events in life*, and all that the categories of value and end can tell us is caught up in this synthesis. (Victor Turner, *Anthropology*, 96).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter began by noting that thinking of performance as *sexy* creates a broad opportunity to explore how performance feels and implies that such an exploration might constitute valid academic enquiry.

Performing as a master's student I had sometimes experienced an invigorating and enchanting sense that my self would vanish, time would stop, I would see my purpose with consummate clarity, self-doubt would vanish, and I felt one with my audience. I noted two things about this feeling: (1) I enjoyed it immensely and wondered both about its nature and how I could reproduce it, and (2) that I received the most compliments from my audience when I had been the most completely in that state. I surveyed performance literature and found no ready explanation.

When I came to The University for doctoral studies, I was assigned teaching duties. Knowing nothing about teaching, I resorted to performing teaching. I quickly noted that teaching provided me exactly the same deep personal satisfaction I had

experienced when I performed well on stage. I also noted when student course surveys were returned that my performance had created a remarkable experience for students as well.

I had set out without any clear direction to find out why performance feels for me the way it does, and I was unwittingly thrust into the ideal laboratory to study not only my sense of performance but to gauge its efficacy as a teaching model. With phenomenology testifying to the validity of experience and with an eclectic collection of respected thinkers contributing glimpses of what might be possible, I felt confident to move forward.

The following chapter examines the ideas of performance and pedagogy, their implications, and sets the stage for exploration of performing teaching.

## **CHAPTER TWO: PEDAGOGY AND PERFORMANCE: GENESIS, EVOLUTION, AND RELATIONSHIP**

This chapter lays further foundation for study of performing teaching with an examination of (1) the history and philosophy of pedagogy, (2) the history of performance, and (3) several aspects of performance that recommend it as tool for investigation, specifically (a) that performance is synonymous with life, (b) synonymous with society, (c) synonymous with self, and (d) synonymous with language itself.

Performance derives from earliest ritual and religion. Teaching derives from earliest culture and society. Both performance and pedagogy create and maintain society and culture.

### **The roots of pedagogy**

*The ideal condition would be, I admit,*

*that men should be right by instinct;*

*But since we are all likely to go astray,*

*The reasonable thing is to learn from those who can teach.*

Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, line 720, 450 or so BCE.

There was probably a time when human culture was transmitted spontaneously from one generation to another. The young of the species cannot survive to maturity unless they assimilate some beliefs about the world, some attitudes toward it, and some

skill in solving the problems it presents; and the only source from which they can derive this minimal wisdom is the culture of their elders. The tendency to imitate offers a ready-made mechanism for inheritance, and in primitive communities, where benign surroundings allowed a leisurely and spontaneous association with children or where a harsh environment spared no time from the effort to keep body and soul together, the education of the young must have proceeded without much thought or care. In societies that were a little more advanced, the need for instruction in tribal ceremonies and the apprenticeship of sorts of sons to fathers and of daughters to mothers may have covered spontaneous education with a thin veil of deliberateness. Still, in uncivilized communities generally, culture must have been passed on without the agency of persons especially devoted to that purpose. (The detailed description which follows comes primarily from Eliade, 230).

Through time, beliefs accumulate, attitudes grow more diversified, skills become more numerous and more complex. This increase in the volume of culture must have rendered obsolete the deliberate spontaneity of its transmission. Mastering what there was to know required special and enduring effort; teaching others to master it demanded more than a casual supervision of their lives. A culture thus enhanced could find lodgment only in a special class of persons — those who were able to encompass it. And this class — seers, priests, and scholars — must have become its chief dispenser to succeeding generations.

## **A philosophy of education**

Down through the ages, we can watch as a philosophy of education develops. Though important ideas of education changed over time, what did *not* change was the idea that education is intimately related to development of the human soul and of human society and culture. Even since the very beginning, according to Kingsley Price, two ideas with the philosophy of education held solid. The first idea is that educators, as specialists in culture, should continuously ask themselves how their culture could be improved. The second idea holds that scholars and laymen have the right to expect that some good purpose — in addition to preserving and extending culture — should be served by education. From this point on, education could tackle any number of projects. But at the heart of education would always be the pursuit of some greater good.

For Plato, the greater good emerged as justice both for both the state and the individual. First is recognition that the form or idea of a thing exists in perfection in a supernatural realm. The proximity of a real-world thing to its supernatural mate determines that thing's goodness. Second is a metaphysical explanation for the fact of human nature and society. Third is epistemology. This holds that knowledge is more useful in pursuit of justice than opinion, that rational inference is the only way to acquire knowledge, and deduction is the preferable form of reason when it is applicable (Kingsley, 231).

For Augustine, every human is a combination of body and soul. On one hand, humans act with a unity of purpose that constitutes family, city, empire, and the community of people and angels. On the other hand, humans act in selfish self-interest.

For Augustine, the ultimate objective of education grows out of the corruption of human nature and God's concern over it. Augustine's philosophy of education contained three fundamental ideas. First, education is inevitably based on language. "Teaching is not informing," writes Kingsley, "it is reminding others or ourselves of the knowledge supplied by God" (233). Second, the justification and objectives of pedagogy derive from God. Because God is the only eternal thing, He is the only dependable object of desire. Third, God created everything, either in its existence or its potential. Because human nature is corrupt, conversion must be the ultimate purpose of education.

Throughout the more modern philosophy of education, we find the same commitment to the greater good, expressed in different ways. Comenius (1592-1620) held that human nature, though corrupted by original sin, is capable of absolute perfection — knowledge, virtue, and piety. The reward for striving after this perfection through education is immortal blessedness. Locke (1623-1704) held that the purpose of education is to produce people who will advance the happiness of the community. These people are students already equipped with virtue, good breeding, and a hunger for learning. Rousseau (1712-1778) held that education should support and renew national institutions already in good health. He was the first to advocate an educational program specifically for women, and he likewise advanced a program for the genteel classes of the day. Rousseau concluded that the "good life" is one which permits neither shallow desires nor abuse of power over the lower classes. Kant (1724-1804) emphasized development of individuality in the student, conceiving of the individual as cognition, desire, and will. Kant wrote that it is the ultimate objective of education not to advance

the welfare of individual students but to promote realization of the international state as the embodiment of human perfection. Mill (1806-1873) holds that the best society is the one that offers the greatest number of people the greatest possible happiness. The chief purpose of education, Mill wrote, is to bring humans closer to the social ideal. Spencer (1820-1903) wrote that each individual is charged with finding his or her own happiness and that government's role is to minimize interference in this process. Consequently, education itself is a private matter.

### **The roots of performance**

When we talk about performance, most of us think of symphonies, plays, operas, ballet, concerts, films, or lectures. These are examples of cultural performance, the most common and popular form of performance. If I suggest that we broaden the list to include civic celebrations (the Fourth of July), rites of passage (a gold watch at retirement), legal proceedings (O.J. Simpson's trial), politics (the State of the Union message) and sporting events (the Superbowl), I would likely get little objection. Cultural performances, as a rule, are scheduled events, restricted in setting, clearly bounded, and widely public, involving the most highly formalized performance forms and accomplished performers of the community (Bauman, *Verbal Art*, 28). Cultural performance is visible, public, often repeated, easy to study and so often studied.

Everyday life is what happens between and during cultural performances — life *does* go on. It is not scheduled but perpetual, intruding even in our sleep as dreams. Everyday life is not restricted in setting — it happens wherever we go. (As Buckaroo

Banzai said, “No matter where you go, there you are.”) Everyday life is conducted in public but treated, by social convention, as private. Everyday life seems not the least bit formalized but, rather, frustratingly random and spontaneous. With our ideally democratic society, even the most unaccomplished person is entitled if not destined to fifteen minutes of fame.

Everyday life performance is often difficult to observe, off-limits by social convention, spontaneous, seldom repeated, and thus difficult to study. And yet writers such as Victor Turner, Jerome Bruner, Richard Bauman, Kenneth Burke, and Erving Goffman see cultural performance as one end of a spectrum whose other end is anchored securely in everyday life. Nor are cultural performance and everyday life exactly opposites. It is better to think of the line upon which performance is arrayed instead as a dynamic circle within the social fabric, constantly returning to support and inform itself, constantly embarking to heal itself and create itself anew. Cultural performance and everyday life are society alive. Turner includes everyday life as a form of social performance (*Anthropology*, 11). He explains the relationship between cultural performance, life, and social drama:

Every type of cultural performance, including ritual, ceremony, carnival, theatre, and poetry, is explanation and explication of life itself (*Ritual*, 13). I regard the ‘social drama’ as the empirical unit of social process from which has been derived, and is constantly being derived, the various genres of cultural performance” (*Anthropology*, 90-91).



“All the world is not, of course, a stage,” Erving Goffman tells us, “but the crucial ways in which it isn’t are not easy to specify” (*Self*, 72). Turner’s idea of social drama and my idea of performance go hand in hand.

### **Performance is synonymous with life**

Victor Turner says that social drama is the product of nature’s clash with culture, or more often, of one cultural rule colliding with another. “Man’s ‘original sin,’ perhaps,” Turner writes, “is the plurality of equally valid rules he imposes on himself, so that whatever virtue he may display in obeying one is negated by the fact that he is in all honesty transgressing another” (*Anthropology*, 100). Erving Goffman says that social drama is inevitable because humans inevitably prefer the company of some and not others:

Since we all participate on teams we must all carry within ourselves something of the sweet guilt of conspirators. And since each team is engaged in maintaining the stability of some definitions of the situation, concealing or playing down certain facts in order to do this, we can expect the performer to live out his conspiratorial career in some furtiveness (*Self*, 105).

Kenneth Burke describes drama as a clash of pieties. “Piety,” writes Burke, “is the sense of what goes with what.... a sense of the appropriate” (*Permanence*, 74-75). It is *impious* to ask anyone to alter that sense of what goes with what, of what constitutes the right thing to do. Even an evangelist, Burke reminds us, asks the crowd to change, and regardless of how ultimately high-minded that change might be, it calls upon the

audience to set aside one set of values and adopt another. If you are Catholic, you cannot be Jewish. If you are married and starting a family, you cannot be an ascetic on a mountaintop. If you live in a bustling city, you cannot be a small-town character. Each has its attractions, and each represents a piety to those who chose it. But each choice represents an *impiety* toward others. Ultimate morality has nothing to do with it.

In *Permanence and Change*, Burke suggests the extreme example of Matthew Arnold hanging out on a downtown corner with a gang of street-savvy homeboys. Everything about Arnold would be wrong and thus impious in the perspective of his associates, Burke points out. “Consider the crudeness of his perception as regards the proper oaths, the correct way of commenting upon passing women, the etiquette of spitting. Does not his very crassness here reveal the presence of a morality, a deeply felt and piously obeyed sense of the appropriate, on the part of these men, whose linkages he would outrageously violate?” (*Permanence*, 77).

As long as there are thugs and aristocrats, as long as there are individual human beings, struggles of piety will continue. No single human could possibly adopt *all* value systems. Conversely, each individual can be seen as a synthesis of those value systems he or she accepts — *and* those rejected. The question becomes, How much impiety are we willing to tolerate? The idea of *self* and *other* is rooted here, the very idea of human individuality, culture, and society. The schizophrenic who seeks the assistance of doctors is no longer willing to tolerate voices in his head that tell him to hurt others or himself. (It’s not the actual voices that cause the problem. If that were the case, I would have been locked up long ago, as would many others. The problem can be directly linked to the

*pieties* attached to those voices. When the *pieties* of the voices say I should kill myself, but the *pieties* of my self say otherwise, I become willing to act. In truth, I am *forced* to act.) Much the same thing is true on an interpersonal level. I am not troubled if my upstairs neighbor celebrates Hanukkah or bows and prays to the east many times daily. But if he and his wife burn foul-smelling things, cut the heads from chickens and disembowel goats (this happened upstairs in Miami once), then I would probably want to chat with the condo police.

On a broader level the distinction becomes easier. Quantitative and qualitative scholars co-exist pleasantly in many academic disciplines. But beneath the surface, gruesome tests of power and will are fought. *Pieties are the bond that holds us together as individuals, families, groups, and societies. Yet for every piety embraced, scores are rejected, and it is in integrating those rejected impieties (which are accepted as pieties by someone) that social consciousness evolves and the process of society occurs. Social drama is the process of society.*

### **Performance is synonymous with society**

If we are to rise above chaos, Kenneth Burke says, we must forego some choices in favor of others. Order stipulates sacrifice. Sacrifice creates guilt. Guilt hurts. Pain relief comes through mortification or scapegoating. Key here is Burke's fine suggestion that humans are rotten with perfection. It is the nature of language to encourage its application to create perfection, and it is the nature of the human mind to take language to

its perfective extreme. The idea is found in Burke's famous description of humans in *Language as Symbolic Action* (3-20):

*Man is  
the symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol misusing) animal  
inventor of the negative (or moralized by the negative)  
separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making  
goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order)  
and rotten with perfection.*

Four elements are fundamental to performance: performer, audience, text, and context. Differences in performance theory depend on which of the four is privileged. Since all performance is a live event of some sort, it must take place in a location and at a time. Context is inescapable — whether or not it is acknowledged. The same holds true with text: even if it's only actors and audience, the actors must perform *something*. Even *not* performing is performing in a fashion, and all behavior is communication. Thus, whatever it may be called, there can be no performance without text, without narrative.

While performance recalls and relies on narrative, it simultaneously *creates* new narrative — the text that is the *experience* of being an audience member or of being a performer. In a conventional performance, someone stands on a stage and does things, while others sit watching, trying to figure out what it all means. Without an audience, the person on stage is not performing. Without a performer, the people in the seats are not an audience. Performance emerges as an inevitable partnership between the performer and the audience in a dance of meaning, involving a text of some sort within a context of

time, place, values and aesthetics. Every partnership implies a motive, and the motive in performance (as in probably all communicative acts) is reduction of ambiguity and creation of meaning. Fisher is insistent: "The meaning and significance of life in all of its social dimensions require the recognition of its narrative structure" (1984, p. 3).

In *Frame Analysis*, Erving Goffman says that individuals in any situation [whether strolling down the street, watching stars at night, or sitting in a theatre seat] face the question "What's going on here?" a question no doubt as ominous to stone-age dancers in the cave at Tuc d' Audoubert as it is today. Goffman says the question is answered by how the individuals in that situation "proceed to get on with the affairs at hand" — in other words, how they *perform* (Frames, 8). To that extent, meaning resides not with the performer, the audience, the text or the context, but instead emerges from the confluence of all these forces acting simultaneously. This idea of *betweenness* is found in the works of Bakhtin, of Buber, the Symbolic Interactionists, and others, but is particularly well stated by Martin Heidegger (760-761):

*Since time has been time,*

*Ever since then*

*The basis of our existence*

*Has been a conversation.*

*The proposition that language*

*Is the supreme event of human existence*

*Has through it acquired*

*Its meaning and foundation.*

*We — mankind — are a conversation.*

Just as Watzlawick and Bateson both hold that one cannot *not* communicate, so too one cannot *not* perform. And yet there remains a vague cynicism about performance broadly construed, as if performing is somehow shallow, fake, or — ghak! — dishonest. We need only consider the many roles that we each play daily as social individuals — student, teacher, child, parent, supervisor, friend, lover, neighbor, you-name-it — to see that the metaphor holds. Ask someone, “Which is the ‘real you’?” and the answer will be, to a greater or lesser extent, “all of them.” William James wrote (128-129): “... We may practically say that he has as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion he cares.” This *everything is performance* perspective might seem to render subsequent thinking nonsensical. But the elegance of performance as a broad metaphor for human interaction is that it can be located in its most refined form anywhere and studied ad nauseam. One need only look to Broadway, to MTV, to a clever web page, or to CBS news to find different though still highly distilled versions of answers to Goffman’s performance-identification question, “What’s going on here?” At the other end of the spectrum, we have Robert Hopper’s keen observation that even the dullest, most mundane telephone conversation is performative to the extent that it is poetic. Goffman summed the whole thing up in his classic word-bite: “All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it different are not easy to specify” (Self, 72).

This more-or-less universal recognition of performance's ways and means suggests that what is true of communicative events that are typically considered performative (plays, dances, and monologues, for instance) will hold true in the most mundane and quotidian human communication. In other words, if it works in performance, it works in life.

### **Performance is synonymous with self**

Society *everywhere* is performative because people universally cherish the idea of free will, the opportunity to select some pieties and reject others. This idea is inexorably related to the fundamental idea of *self*. C.S. Lewis elaborates:

There is no reason to suppose that self-consciousness, the recognition of a creature by itself as a 'self,' can exist except in contrast with an 'other,' a something that is not the self.... The freedom of a creature must mean the freedom to choose: and choice implies the existence of things to choose between. A creature with no environment would have no choices to make: so that freedom, like self-consciousness (if they are not, indeed, the same thing) again demands the presence to the self of something other than the self' (*Problem*, 29).

### **Performance is synonymous with language itself**

Paul Watzlawick says that language arises because no single individual can live apart. In any system — whether it be family, team, or society itself — the observer of human behavior is an observer of relationships.

Every child learns at school that movement is something relative, which can only be perceived in relation to a point of reference. What is not realized by everyone is that this same principle holds for virtually every perception and, therefore, for man's experience of reality. Sensory and brain research have proved conclusively that only relationships and patterns of relationships can be perceived and these are the essence of experience.... Even man's awareness of himself is essentially an awareness of functions, of relationships in which he is involved, no matter how much he may subsequently reify this awareness (*Pragmatics*, 27-28).

The idea of relationships is the idea of what goes with what – and what does not. Relationships are the substance of culture – what is socially appropriate and what is not, how we do things around here, who we can and can't talk to, how we talk when we do. When we all agree about these relationships, we experience an expanse of social calm. When we do not, we are compelled by the winds of social drama. Even in language itself there is drama. Each word chosen reflects a host of words that are not.

The concepts of performance and pedagogy both seek to embody what their authors take to be humanity's highest calling: the process of creating, energizing, and sustaining the individual happiness and efficiency of the state and its citizens.

Performing is how we teach ourselves and others what we've learned. Teaching is how we perform for ourselves and others the highest and best use of being human.



## Conclusion

In this chapter I've shown that pedagogy in general and the teaching in particular are both worthy pursuits. I have also established that the classroom – as a place where language is used, order is created, where self and even life are created – is a fine venue for performance.

The next move is to select, from among many, which performance perspectives will be most useful in my study of the performance in the classroom. This is not simple. There is no broad, unified performance theory, no Newton to deduce from a falling apple the natural laws of everything. Performance theory is esoteric; frustratingly particular in nature. There is theory of performance as anthropology, as art, as autobiography, as communication, as conversation, as ethnography, as inquiry, as knowing, as life, as oral interpretation, as pedagogy, as resistance, as rhetoric, as ritual, as self, as shamanism, as storytelling, as theatre, as therapy, as transcendence, and as verbal art. I do not doubt there are others, but this is a list garnered over time, and it represents all those types of performance represented in performance literature.

Yet there is hope if we take a step back to cast a loose framework over Goffman's question, "What's going on here?" from the perspective of a teacher performing in a classroom. We can think of the teacher performing teaching as inevitably acting out some version of his or her own story. After all, he knows no other. This is performance as autobiography. We can think of the experience created by the teacher in this performance, both for the students and for the teacher. This is performance as narrative. At this point we should be done, because we have covered the inside and the outside. But

I am also interested in looking beyond the recognizable edges of experience, into the emergent, the ineffable, the inexplicable aspects that present themselves as very real. To provide a basis for this exploration, I propose as a theoretical foundation performance as mysticism.

### **CHAPTER THREE: PERFORMANCE AS AUTOBIOGRAPHY, AS SELF**

*How can I know who I am until I've heard what I have to say?*

- Karl Weick

This chapter is the first of three which lay a firm foundation for the exploration of performing teaching. In this chapter we consider the performance of teaching as inevitably being one version of the teacher's own story because, after all, he or she knows no other. In performance studies this is performance as autobiography and performance as self. In other words, this is what we can see of the inside. In Chapter Four, we think of the performance of teaching as being inevitably a narrative. This is what we can see of the outside. In Chapter Five, we examine performance as mysticism to give us leverage on everything that is left over when we're done looking at the inside and the outside.

Performance of self is essentially an ongoing, seamless autobiography. This chapter traces the development of autobiographical performance theory and practice within the discipline of performance studies. It includes significant theorists, critics, and

representative performances. It explores defining examples of performance practice in this area and key goals and effects or outcomes of autobiographical performance.

(In separate sections in the appendix I'll describe how, once I had decided to perform teaching, that I then had to decide more precisely what it was that I would perform. I decided to draw upon my own fortunate experience of excellent teaching, choosing to perform a version of teaching based on the values I'd learned from four extraordinary teachers.)

### **History of autobiographical performance**

“As an entertainment event, the one-persons show is as old as humankind, dating back to the ancient oral poets and storytellers,” writes John Gentile as he traces evolution of the one-person show. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, platform entertainers enjoyed a golden age of unprecedented popularity. But even then, solo performance already had a rich tradition, dating back to the *rhapsodes* of classical Greece, the *scops* of Anglo-Saxon England, and the *jongleurs* of medieval France. Samuel Foote delighted London audiences in 1747 with entertainments in mimicry called *The Diversions of the Morning*. Foote's *Diversions*, which he performed for the next 30 years, inspired two other performances, Goerge Alexander Stevens' *A Lecture on Heads* and John Collins' *Brush for Rubbing Off the Rust of Care*. These two solo productions, performed later in the 1700s in America by other actors, effectively established the tradition of the professional one-person show in our country. (Gentile, 3).

In the mid 1800s, the morality of theatre itself was deeply suspect, as it had always been and, indeed, remains somewhat today. Theatre was a place of vain amusement, enemy of peaceful domestic life, and foe of God. Actors had low morals. Audience members were degenerates. Prostitutes worked the crowds. The stage was an illusion, aimed at seducing the unwary into a false world of fantasy.

But solo performances were considered something quite different. In solo performances, the stage was not a stage at all but a *platform*, and those who commanded it did so in the literary tradition, without gaudy makeup or props. They were instead seen as genteel, dignified, respectable, an asset to the intellectual progress of a nation. It is quite reasonable to see the modern-day college teacher as benefactor of the platform performance tradition, for the platform performers were themselves seen as educators in their time.

Following the Civil War, the emerging middle class displayed a powerful hunger for socially acceptable entertainment. The Victorian Era was indeed the age of the novel. Literacy spread, and with it reading as a national pastime. General audiences had access to such eventually great authors as Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle, Matthew Arnold, and Oscar Wilde. Not all of them were able to transfer their literary talents to the platform, but many *did* — Dickens and Charles Matthews among them. Wrote one critic of Matthews' performance: "His characters were real to him, and he makes them real to his readers: and therein consists the spell that he wields, no less as an actor than as a writer" (cited in Gentile, 13). Cultural conditions were ripe for platform performance to thrive. The moral pond-scum context of theatre v. the high morality of platform

performance made public interest not only tolerable but laudable. As America's lower classes joined the ranks of the literate in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, mass audiences became an economic and cultural force to be reckoned with. With this enthusiasm, with the prejudice against the theatre, with the demand for a non-theatre form of entertainment, all was in place. The last piece in the puzzle was an obstacle of economics overcome by the technology of transportation — how could a platform performer work often enough to different audiences to make platform performance economically feasible? America's growing railroad network provided the solution. Gentile reports: "The American enthusiasm for reading in the nineteenth century was indistinguishable from a kindred enthusiasm for speaking" (Gentile, 9).

The elevated moral propriety of the platform (in comparison to the depravity of theatre) opened it as a form of performance to women, an avenue not otherwise available. Though it was not routine for actors and actresses to cross over to solo performance on the platform, it *was* done on special occasions, such as fund-raising efforts for charity, and it was done consistently by artists and celebrities such as Anna Cora Mowatt, Fanny Kemble, and Charlotte Cushman. These women brought "a prestige previously unknown to solo performance," wrote Gentile (25), "and an acceptance that allowed women of a later age to enjoy professional platform careers."

Anna Cora Mowatt debuted as a public reader on the platform of Boston's Masonic Temple in October 1841. She had no experience or public reputation of celebrity in solo performance or any other field. She was, however, motivated: She needed to support her family. Her husband had lost his fortunes in speculations, and his health was

failing. She was widely read and had experience performing before her family. She had talent as an actor, but the idea of taking the theatrical stage was morally reprehensible. Thus the platform beckoned. As a text, she chose material from major poets such as Byron and Scott. Minor American poet Epes Sargent composed two dramatic texts especially for Mowatt's platform debut. Overall, critics were warm to her work, though some in New York dismissed it in totality. She fell ill, and when she recovered she resumed her work, eventually becoming a playwright and then an actress.

Unlike Mowatt, Fanny Kemble was already a talented and experienced actress when she took the platform as a solo reader. But like Mowatt, financial considerations drove her move to the platform. Already a successful young British actress, she toured in America in 1832. She met and married Pierce Butler, a wealthy American plantation owner. Her life during their early married years on Butler's plantation (with its complement of slaves) proved intolerable, and she left him to return to Britain. Now approaching middle age and single once again, she needed to support herself. She chose the platform as a mode of performance and Shakespeare as her text. It was a good choice. Her father had built a successful a career by doing platform readings of Shakespeare's more popular plays. He retired just as she emerged, and the audiences were ready and waiting. She expanded greatly on his work, performing from Shakespeare's lesser known plays to avoid, she reported, "becoming mechanical or hackneyed... by perpetual repetition of the same pieces." The readings put her in touch with Shakespeare in a way that could not be duplicated otherwise: (cited in Gentile, 31).

My great reward has been, passing a large portion of my life in familiar intercourse with the greatest and best English mind and heart, and living almost daily in that world above the world into which he lifted me.

Fanny Kemble's retirement from the platform left a vacancy that Charlotte Cushman seemed destined to fill. Like Kemble, Cushman already had performance experience as a successful actress. Like Kemble, she was an expert reader of Shakespeare, perhaps Kemble's only peer. And she was capable of enchanting an audience. Wrote one critic: "With one comprehensive glance which seemed to gather in all her audience and hold them, as it were, by a spell peculiarly her own — the spell of a potent and irresistible magnetism — she set aside all feeling of personal identity, and lived, and moved, and acted the varied personages of the story as they each came upon the scene; they lived before us..." (Cited in Gentile, 35).

The history of 19<sup>th</sup> century platform lectures and performance can be divided into three periods: the early lyceum (1826-1850), the lecture system (1851-1874) and the Chautauqua lyceum (1874-1925). Touring performances became common in the 1850s, made possible by improved railroad transportation, growing desire for educational and cultural activities, and the antislavery movement. Their popularity lasted into the 1860s, providing writers and poets of the day with both additional income and an excellent opportunity to promote their published work.

The Chautauqua movement that began in 1874 was founded on two fundamental propositions. The first is that education is a life-long process, not one completed with graduation from high school or college. The second proposition is that the true basis of



education is religious. Even today, the Chautauqua Institution in New York focuses on comprehensive educational and cultural programs about secular topics addressed in a nondenominational manner. Here again we see the autobiographical performance as, fundamentally, teaching.

What started off in 1874 as a two-week session of lectures, sermons, lessons, conferences, exercises, concerts and fireworks (but no evangelism) fifteen years later amounted to 100 independent Chautauqua institutions nationwide. By the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the number of Chautauqua institutions had doubled. Chautauqua organizers, promoters and participants maintained the lyceum era's widely held Victorian contempt for the theatre, and this attitude contributed to the continuing success of one-person platform performances — both as acceptable entertainment *and* edifying discourse. Chautauqua performances had different forms and styles, but the majority today would be considered restrained readings of literature. Chautauqua's dedication to education and morality demanded that the text of performances be literature of a high standard delivered in performances that disdained the theatrical. As a result, Chautauqua performers created one-person shows that were essentially (with the exception of Shakespeare) readings of nondramatic — that is, nonfiction — literature. These one-person Chautauqua shows would pave the way for performance of biography and autobiography, two forms able simultaneously to satisfy audiences' seemingly paradoxical hunger for both nonfiction *and* drama.

It was during this time, during this third phase of platform performance evolution, that vaudeville became popular. The differences couldn't have been more marked.

Chautauqua evolved from Sunday School. Its aims were religious and educational, targeting a respectable audience that was middle class and educated, with cultural aspirations. Vaudeville evolved from popular variety acts and comic monologues, targeting working-class male audiences that enjoyed crude humor and physical slapstick. But as the century drew to a close, the gap between Chautauqua and vaudeville narrowed. Chautauqua became more entertaining, and vaudeville more sophisticated. Inevitably, the more genteel Chautauqua performers still disapproved of the low-brow vaudeville. To succeed at vaudeville, platform performers often broadened their appeal by including character impersonations while sustaining the genteel dignity of their platform heritage. It would not be long before distinctions between Chautauqua and vaudeville became so subtle as to survive in spirit only.

As the genres of platform performance and vaudeville blurred beyond recognition at the turn of the century, a new force came into play. Mark Twain (unlike Charles Dickens, for example) could not be considered a dramatic reader. He was not known for his characterizations. Instead, Mark Twain earned his fame as a major platform talent in a new way: He became famous for the personality he projected. It was the very real, down-to-earth personality of a lazy, drawling Southern gentleman, a gentle critic of life's lunacies. Audiences loved it.

Twain was without question an American humorist — a contingent well represented on Chautauqua and lyceum stages. John Gentile notes that many of the best humorists at the time were platform personalities (52) — people such as Charles Farrar Browne (Artemis Ward), David Ross Licke (Petroleum Nasby), and Edgar W. Nye (Bill

Nye). Most of these performers were newspaper columnists. They created comic personas with identities so tangled with that of the author and performer that the two became indistinguishable. Typically, the stage personas took an attitude of ultimate sincerity in their relationships with the audiences. Thus they could provoke the audience to laughter, all the while remaining oblivious to their own humor. At the same time, these personas were distinctly American, speaking in a lower-class American vernacular, using the naive wisdom common at the time within American rural life. Also common among Twain's platform contemporaries is the ephemerality of their performances. Written for performance and performed by their authors, these works were jewels as performances but duds if depended upon to stand alone as written text. Of the American humorists, only Twain's writing transcended the ephemerality of performance, wrote John Gentile (54).

Though Mark Twain charmed his audiences with the slow, easy, genuine personality that he created before them, Twain left nothing to chance. His stories were memorized, just as Dickens memorized his own stories. Twain's casual platform manner was artifice itself. He often spoke with his hands in his pockets, leaning against a desk, disregarding the polished diction expected of lecturers. He spoke slowly and lazily, as if he were about to fall asleep. As the low-brow entertainment of vaudeville commingled with the education and morality of Chautauqua, Mark Twain offered his audiences the best of both worlds, performances so meticulously genuine that they seemed anything *but* performance — a delightfully entertaining mix of drama and nonfiction.

Ten to 15 years into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chautauqua was becoming a major commercial venture. At the same time, elocution — perceived by the less culturally secure as a way to offset the low-brow forces of vernacular speech — began to work its way into America's mass culture. The elocutionary movement was founded on the prestige and glamour of professional platform readings by celebrities, enhanced in home reading circles and schoolroom elocutionary lessons. By the turn of the century, elocution had become a mass culture fad, one that led to its denigration as a serious academic discipline. Chautauqua had, in the process, become the major and inadvertent market for elocutionists. By the late 1920s, the golden age of one-person shows had passed, flooded by inferior, amateurish performers, diluted by commercialization, overextended by its own growth.

During this same period, the Victorian age came to an end. Victorian values began to lose their force which (in opposition to theatre's inherent sleaze) had for so long secured high moral ground for Chautauqua. These same Victorian ideals suffered philosophically and politically in the wake of the First World War, a conflict that seemed to engender all that was evil and wrong with Victorian thought. Literary tastes began to change, for the most part seeming to reject prose and verse that in retrospect seemed so clearly smug, so trite, so naive. In its place arose poets such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, obtuse and dense, hardly the stuff of a clean and orderly staged reading pleasantly acceptable to a middle-class audience. At a social level, Victorian ideas that had so neatly authorized racist and sexist WASP society fell quickly under intellectual assault. In the classroom, the many voices of an ethnically diverse America did not take long to

overwhelm the standardized, authorized ideas of elocution... a field anyway no longer suited to the complex, diverse literature being produced by the 1920s. Elocution's subfields identified with effective communication — public address and oral interpretation — moved into distinct academic areas of their own. The significance of the move from elocution to oral interpretation was profound for the professional performer of one-person shows. Since the 1920s and elocution's transfiguration into oral interpretation, the solo performer had but two training options. One was theatre school training, which involved ensemble performance of dramatic scripts. The other option was self-training. Then again, the limited choices were not as restrictive as they might at first seem: Chautauqua became increasingly performative as the decades passed, and the audiences loved it. In the wake of World War I, Victorian intolerance of the stage had all but evaporated. In the 1930s, Chautauqua as a tent circuit vanished forever. The demise of the lyceum circuit in the next decades was not so dramatic or clear cut, but it was nonetheless every bit as final. Education and entertainment provided by Chautauqua and lyceum had been increasingly usurped by theatre, universities, films, radio, and much later, television. If the one-person show were to survive as a genre, it would have to survive the transformation from platform performance to solo theatre. Between 1925 and 1950, that is what happened.

As long as Chautauqua and lyceum sustained their moral superiority over theatre, their platform performances neither desired nor needed the trappings of theatre. But once the balance of power in one-person platform performance began its shift from education to entertainment, the shift to theatre-like productions was inevitable, and the model for

such solo-theatre productions was Broadway. According to John Gentile, two solo performers more than any other performers “are responsible for initiating the change in our critical perspective from one that had viewed the one-person show as ‘platform performance’ to one that accepted it as ‘solo theatre’” (96). They are Ruth Draper and Cornelia Otis Skinner.

Ruth Draper dominated solo theatre during the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her solo performances differed from those normally seen in the lyceum and Chautauqua circuits. Instead of performing selections from published literature, she performed original character sketches and monologues — she was unable to perform material other than her own. Her texts were not written but were composed orally and modified during performance, drawn out or abbreviate in accord with individual audience reaction. Draper was foremost a performer yet extremely talented (in the minds of talents such as Oscar Wilde, Thornton Wilder, Robert Sherwood, and Brooks Atkinson) as a writer. She objected to the word “recital” just as she objected to that terminology (platform, elocution, declamation, reader) associated with platform performance. She characterized herself as a character actor and preferred the stage to the platform. Her characters tended to be subtle and understated.

When Draper performed her monologues, she portrayed a single character while suggesting the presence of on-stage listeners. She did not enact a speaker then enacting a listener, nor did she enact multiple characters in succession. Typically, she used the dialects of foreign languages. She blended humor and pathos. Her performances were centered about a single female character. Her characters offered a rich texture of social,

economic, and professional statuses. She uses costuming lightly, to suggest rather than demand. Her sets were likewise minimal, usually calling for nothing more than a table or chair. Concludes John Gentile:

Draper's one-person shows were an appeal to the audience's active use of imagination. Her talents as a performer link her to all the great solo performers of the past in their ability to help their audiences create, without the trappings of realistic stage accouterments, an entire world (111).

Cornelia Otis Skinner followed closely in Ruth Draper's path as a solo performer. When Draper began her career as a solo performer, the genre was down at the heels and desperately in need of a rejuvenation. The good news is that Skinner, who first appeared in the late 1920s, was able to ride the crest of public enthusiasm for solo performance, kindled by Draper. The bad news was that Skinner drew inevitable comparisons to Draper, "whose very name had become synonymous with the best in solo performance" (Gentile, 111).

At first, Skinner's solo performances consisted of a series of short, disconnected monologues, much like Draper's solo performances. Soon Skinner's arrangements became more complex, more unified in their dramatic nature, more like Draper's linked monologues. Skinner's performances differed in structure from Draper's, and they also differed in substance. Draper had based only one of her performances on historic incident. Skinner "made a unique contribution to the American one-person performance" by creating and performing full-length monologue dramas based on historical figures (Gentile, 112). Where Draper's staging had been representational, Skinner's was

presentational. She used a minimal set but full costume. Like Draper, Skinner did not move back and forth as a performer doing different characters, nor did she perform both speaker and listener. Like Draper, she remained a single character for the duration of the performance.

Skinner's most ambitious effort was a 1952 production called *Paris '90*, which opened on Broadway with elaborate sets, lighting, costumes, and original music. In the evolution of solo performance, the move from platform to theatre was now complete.

Gentile concluded (114):

Draper and Skinner deserve a special place in the history of solo performance for their success in winning respect for the one-person show when it could no longer claim a wide, select audience. The platform, along with the Chautauqua and lyceum, had fallen in public esteem and the violent backlash against Victorianism had swept away respect for anything smacking of elocutionary declamation....

They helped earn for the one-person show an integral place in the American theatre....

Since 1950, popularity of solo performance has continued to increase. Within solo performance, a genre of biographical solo performance began to evolve, though in retrospect we can see that it's been there, silently, all along. Precisely how biography is performed differs vastly, but the distinguishing characteristic is the solo performer's impersonation of a single historical figure. The impersonation may be close or impressionistic. Letters, books, and other historical props are usually incorporated, with the result that the audience is offered insight into a slice of the figure's life.



Emelyn Williams, who performed Charles Dickens, and Hal Holbrook, who performed Mark Twain, provide interesting examples of this emerging genre. Though in hindsight we can see that it was always there, in a fashion, the genre of solo performance biography seriously took hold in 1966, when Holbrook took *Mark Twain Tonight!* on a successful Broadway run and received the American Theatre Wing's Tony award. The solo biography performance took off. In place of the platform performance's elocutionary rendering of a featured character's literary work, we get intimate portraits of the authors' private lives. Few of these shows use the ultimate dramatic convention of the fourth wall, which tends to appear conceited in practice. Almost all involve the audience directly in the performance. The audience *is* the other character, and therein lies dramatic potential. But this potential can be successfully manifested only when there is a clear and reasonable answer to the question, *Why?* Why is the character telling the audience these things? Without a good answer, the performance is ludicrous. *With* a good answer, the audience can suspend disbelief and enter the private world of the central character.

It is a short step from solo performance to biography, and another short step from biography to autobiography. Popularity of the genre seems to have no trouble following that progression. Biographical performances such as *Mark Twain Tonight!* continue to sell out, and solo performance autobiography seems nothing less than a next step in a logical progression.

### **Why self performance**

Popularity of the solo biographical performance arises from the audience's desire to see and experience what we are denied by death and the passage of time. Popularity also arises from a growing public interest in biographies and nonfiction work in general. The interest in autobiography shares these and more. Ultimately, we as humans are interested in other humans and in the process of being human. On the practical side, as Goffman says, we seek to predict with some degree of confidence what people will do. Without some level of predictability, life would be chaos, and so we create, sustain, benefit, and sacrifice for the good of society, for the good of order, which really means no more than for 'the good of predictability.' To predict what someone is likely to do, it is important to understand them, so we want to know about people: how they work, how they think, why they do what they do. Someone worth citing (if I could just remember who) said that each of us as individuals is a walking-around-bundle of solutions, seeking those problems we know how to solve. In the case of famous or fortunate or wealthy or talented or successful people, we wonder how they got that way, and whether we could too, if we wanted. In the case of people who fail or lose or get caught or self-destruct, we wonder how they got that way, and whether we could too, if we are not careful. Autobiography can be seen as a window of the soul.

On the less practical, more aesthetic side, we live and learn and teach and understand life through stories. All of us, to a greater or lesser extent, are compelled to tell and listen to stories. Stories are how we learn. They are how we teach. Autobiography is a special kind of story. Performing is a special way of telling a story, and being an audience member is a special way of listening to a story. An autobiographical

performance presents a unique opportunity (among literary and performance genres) for both performer and audience. On one level in autobiography, there is almost unlimited access to information. Though some material may be forgotten or repressed, in autobiography the author has a complete record to work with, easily a hundred times more information than with the most thoroughly researched biography. On a second level, there is experience. The process of compiling and performing autobiography is something that each and every one of us does, every day, from the time we crawl out of bed in the morning until we say our prayers at night. I find it interesting how Richard Schechner defines the difference between solo performance and autoperformance (such as the work of Spalding Gray). In solo performance, there is an author, a director, and a performer. Only in autoperformance, says Schechner, are these three roles combined in a single person (1982, 44). This is a workable distinction in the world of theatre, but it disappears in life as most of us live it. In life as in autoperformance, each of us simultaneously plays the roles of author, director, and performer. Thus, even without applying the performance terminology, each of us as the 20<sup>th</sup> century draws to a close knows what it is to construct and perform autobiography. This familiarity and experience may well explain today's interest in and attraction to performance of autobiography. Yet we as a society have not always been so interested in autobiography. The birth and evolution of autobiography as a literary genre tracks the cultural development of the idea of *self*. Literary historians tend to agree that the impulse toward self-representation is tied in inevitable and inextricable ways to the cultural milieu of Western civilization over the last four hundred years (Smith, 21). Today we traffic in the idea of self as if it were

something durable, tangible, and concrete, like the moon or the seasons or arithmetic. Yet in the history of humans, the concept of self is relatively new and certainly evolving. The idea of self that we factor into our lives as a constant today evolved in England and Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. It emerged gradually, at the confluence of forces that were theological, socio-economic, scientific and technological, philosophical, political, and literary.

One force affecting the idea of *self* prevalent in the West today is the theological force of Christianity. The Sermon on the Mount, a central text in Christian theology, focuses attention on one's inner intentions in addition to the more traditional theological attention given to actions. The idea of personal responsibility was accompanied by a more flexible idea of human possibility. Individuals were encouraged to assume greater authority for their own spiritual destinies and to examine themselves more independently, in less ritualized ways. Self-examination achieved a central role in Christian life. Personal testimonies became beneficial to Protestant communities. In Catholic churches after 1215, formalized confession effectively reinforced a preoccupation with the truth of an individual's inner struggle (22).

A second force affecting the idea of *self* prevalent in the West today results from socio-economic forces and disintegration of the feudal system, which carried within it rigid social relationships. Rule by divinely sanctioned monarchs failed. Emerging political agendas encouraged individuals to challenge authority, to question identity, and to redefine relationships of wealth and power. People gradually came to see that roles which had seemed destined and inviolable could indeed be quite flexible. This flexibility

and potential lent great power to individual human effort, its study and contemplation, and it suggested that through correct behavior one could improve one's station in this life as well as the next.

A third force affecting the idea of *self* prevalent in the West today results from a changing scientific understanding of the world and how it works. The seemingly arbitrary nature of the universe began to succumb to human intellect, and the human sense of powerlessness over nature began to fade. Individuals found that they could conceive of mastering some facets of earthly existence. As a benefit, these scientific developments led to greater agency on the part of individuals and a second way in which *this* life could be enhanced. As a liability, that same growing sense of agency created ambivalence, insecurity, and anxiety. Individuals began to struggle with an understanding of their role in the grand scheme of things, a role they had never before even needed to consider.

A fourth force affecting the idea of self prevalent in the West today results from a change in technology as simple as the creation of more distortion-free mirrors. This more exacting sense of the physical self proved surprisingly disconcerting, bolstering an interest in self-examination, according to critics. More profound in the technology department was the spread of literacy and the printing press, opening all things to renewed scrutiny.

A fifth force affecting the idea of *self* prevalent in the West today results from developments in political and philosophical theory. Descartes privileged individual authority and experience while challenging time-tested forms, styles, and methodologies. He argued clearly that “the modern assumption whereby the pursuit of truth is conceived

of as a wholly individual matter, logically independent of past thought” (24). The emphasis on human reason in Descartes’ work was reflected in the later social and political theories of Locke and Rousseau.

A sixth and final force affecting the idea of *self* prevalent in the west today results from developments in literature and language. In the lower and middle classes, increasing social mobility and resulting insecurity generated an increased interest in family stories and family histories. In the upper classes and aristocracy, the erosion of wealth and social power likewise put a premium on family histories. Regardless of motivation, literary historians tend to agree that in England and on the Continent in the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, “individuals became to consider their life stories to be potentially valuable to their culture and therefore began to write about themselves with increasing regularity.” Smith’s conclusion (26) is worth quoting at length:

Together those phenomena coalesced to foster an environment in which a realignment of the human subject occurred and in which autobiography as the literary representation of that human potentiality became not only possible but also desirable. That environment became the precondition of what would eventually emerge as the ideology of individualism, that tenacious set of beliefs that fostered in the West the conception of “man” as a metaphysical entity, “a self existing independently of any particular style of expression and logically prior to all literary genres and even to language itself.”

Though the forms that these reports of self could and did vary widely, certain common denominators tended to surface:

- Stories of *self* considered success and good fortune to be personal achievements rather than gifts of the fates, somehow divinely ordained, or otherwise not a direct product of intent.
- Stories of *self* treated personal identity as something unique, a function of both social reality and cultural convention.
- Stories of *self* celebrated the challenge of authority, praising the subject's interpretive and questioning stance in relation to convention.

It becomes clear then that, as the *self* emerged over several hundred years to join the flux of social, cultural, political, theological, economic, and other forces that constitute reality, a genre of expression for this newly emerging force — the genre of autobiography — likewise emerged. It makes sense to think of *self* as temporally prior to autobiography (the self-told account of the self), but the truth is that self is created through thought, language and their expression, and without a genre for that expression there could be no self. This chicken-and-the-egg-thing involving self and autobiography was relatively well advanced when we entered the discussion of the history of platform performance at the beginning of this study. Some 200 to 300 years had passed. What began to evolve only *then* — in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century — were (1) the viability of solo performance of biography and (2) the idea that the solo performer could be a woman. It would be another hundred years (well into the third quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) until (1) solo performance of *autobiography* became viable and, (2) solo performance of autobiography ceased to carry with it since feudal times the same implicit cultural values that valorized men and denigrated women. To succeed in this newly

viable field of solo autobiography performance, a woman was completely free to be herself, as long as she walked, talked, acted, thought, wrote, behaved, and responded like a man. It makes sense to spend some time now talking about the theory of autobiography.

In *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith provides a detailed discussion of autobiography. Though some parts of the discussion contain much “doubling,” “blurring,” “collapsing,” “undermining,” and other postmodern buzz, there also are some clear ideas that help situate autobiography as a literary and performance genre. On one level, autobiography is narrative that draws upon experience. It contains all the elements one normally associates with narrative: plot, characters, setting, time. It also contains a set of ethics and a commentary on the leading character’s ethical and moral relationship with his or her world. The test of autobiography is the same as the tests Walter Fisher recommended for narrative: fidelity and coherence. A concern with “fidelity” asks if the story displays consistent and believable relationships between its internal elements and the world that we as readers or audience members know it. A concern with “coherence” asks the same question about the internal elements of the story: Do they hang together? Do they make sense?

Stories deal in meaning, and people use stories to make sense of experience. Any set of experiences can be ordered and edited to suggest a variety of meanings. There is no single truth, no single meaning. Thus autobiography, like narrative in general, is problematic from the very beginning. This makes autobiography inherently unreliable, but certainly no more so than any other form of narrative. At the same time, autobiography is how we make sense of our lives. Smith suggests (46-47):



The nature of truth is best understood as the struggle of a historical rather than a fictional person to come to terms with her own past, with the result that she renders in words the confrontations between the dramatic present and the narrative past, between the psychological pressures of discourse and the narrative pressures of the story... Precisely because the self-representation is discursively complex and ambiguous, a “radical disappropriation” of the actual life by the artifice of literature takes place at the scene of writing.

In other words, the action of self-telling renders the self-told unreliable. At the same time, what can be more reliable than a self’s own account of itself? Who would know better? Autobiography requires one to be, simultaneously, both creator and creation. In that sense, autobiography at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a sort of postmodern literary kitten chasing its tail in an empty bathtub (a new and interesting event at our house). Without the kitten, there would be no tail to chase. Without the tail, the kitten could not play the tail-chasing game. Does the kitten ever catch her tail? No, but then she doesn’t need to; it was attached all along and had never really gotten away. Does this tail-chasing process require an audience? Not really. Sometimes the big cat watches, but he sits Buddha-like in the middle of the bathmat and cannot see into the tub where all the ruckus occurs. And finally there is this: Does the question of *truth*, in this case of playing kitties, make any sense? Does the question make any *more* sense in human performance of autobiography? I think not.

In the introduction to *Autobiography and Postmodernism*, editor Leigh Gilmore sees a defining relationship between postmodernism and autobiography, a relationship

that is reciprocal yet contested, “evidence of an emerging critical focus on the mechanisms of value by which some autobiographers and autobiographical practices have been marginalized” (4). Postmodernism’s suspicion of typification leads Gilmore to suggest that autobiography is not and need not be a genre to be understood. And yet the idea of genre serves as handy diversion for the contradictions of autobiography. Because autobiography’s subject is also the author, the researcher, and interpreter of events, autobiography can be seen as devoid of objectivity. At the same time, autobiography relies so heavily and keenly on the real that it can be challenged as *so* objective that it is not even art. What we have here then is a figure-ground relationship between autobiography and postmodernism, which highlights some of the more interesting contours and patterns of each. Attention in this collection of essays, however, eventually focuses on that ultimate mark of autobiography — “I” — and postmodernism’s ultimate struggle with identification, self-representation, gender, repression, multiple constructions of meaning, object, subject, truth, who gets to decide, how and why.

One facet common to gender, genre, and autobiography (a facet alluded to earlier) is that their functions and forms have become so familiar that we no longer perceive their processes nor the ideological work that these processes perform. Chief among them, of course, is the inherent androcentrism in autobiography. This is itself a broad and fine topic, a silent and powerful presumption of autobiography as well as many other forms of personal discourse, literary expression, and performance. This androcentrism serves to include and exclude who gets to talk, it serves to dictate what can be said, and how it should be understood. This is a topic we discussed at some length in Dr. Lynn C. Miller’s

Performance of Autobiography course in the spring of 1998, and it was the focus of many readings during the semester. I have touched upon it once earlier, and I will not go into it at any further length here because I feel the topic is better handled by others' work that is immediately accessible. The case is particularly well stated in Sidonie Smith's work.)

At the beginning of this chapter, we discussed the historical evolution of solo performance up to what Richard Schechner calls "autoperformance". We noted Schechner's observation that of all theatrical work, only autoperformance brings together in one person the roles of writer, director, and performer. I commented then that what Schechner finds rare in theatre is common in everyday life: Each of us goes around all day every day researching, writing, directing, performing, critiquing, booking and promoting our own ongoing autoperformance. If Kenneth Burke, Walter Fisher, Gregory Bateson, and so many others are correct that we as humans understand our lives and our world in terms of stories, then it is every bit as logical to say that autoperformance is quite how we *live* our understanding of this world. It is interesting that much literature on autobiographical performances begins with platform and lyceum work in the 1850s and progresses painstakingly into the 20<sup>th</sup> century with attention to first biography and then autoperformance. Why is this seen as such an apparently natural progression? Academics who mine this lode of logic from a theatrical perspective quickly get stuck when they get to autoperformance. With only one character on stage in autoperformance, where is the drama of traditional theatre? Where is the drama that arises when multiple characters work the stage? We as a discipline so carefully manipulate the equations and variables to derive that it's okay for one person to be on a stage by him- or herself, performing his or

her own work, about him- or herself. But why must autobiography be a solo act? It doesn't *have* to be, of course. Why must we *perform* autobiography as a solo act when it could just as easily be presented with multiple performers? The answer, I think, is that we *need* to position autobiography as a solo act because autobiography as we all know and recognize and critique it essentially and fundamentally *is* a solo act. In that sense, the absence-of-genre argument advanced by the editors and essayists in *Autobiography & Postmodernism* makes perfect sense. *Genre* is a category of musical, artistic, or literary composition, an arbitrary classification, as such something that does not naturally occur in life. Sonnets are not natural. Symphonies are not natural. Impressionism is not natural. Each is a category of expression — part form, part frame — that exhibits certain concrete phenomena which are mutually and internally consistent. Inconsistencies in these genres *do* occur, but their occurrences are for the most part minor and inconsequential. The same is not true of autobiography. In the introduction to *Autobiography & Postmodernism*, Leigh Gillmore writes (6):

Construing autobiography as a genre had depended, at least in part, on domesticating its specific weirdness. Its doubled nature confounds definition through preexisting generic categories, even as the judgment of its duplicity follows from these categories. What we can call autobiography's resistance to genre can now be taken as a crisis in genre itself, rather than the cause of autobiography's dismissal or rehabilitation.

Autobiography makes such a problematic example of genre because -- unlike our examples of sonnets, symphonies, and impressionism -- autobiography is a natural

phenomenon. And as a natural phenomenon, autobiography is replete with all the weirdness, all the contradictions, and inconsistencies that plague anyone who has ever tried to fit gathered real-world data into textbook equations. (This is precisely my experience with solo performance of autobiography: The more honest, responsible, trustworthy, and truthful I try to be, the more frustrating the performance effort becomes.)

The final step in this discussion of solo autobiography performance is application of what we have talked about to a performer who is arguably one of the best: Spalding Gray. I choose Gray for a variety of reasons. First, his work among all that I know of seems to me the most natural. Gray is smooth, relaxed, confident. He seems to be enjoying himself. He takes the stage without costume, with minimal set, and with only his Big Chief tablet for prompting. Second, Gray is a storyteller who relies on the *orality* of his text. When he is creating a new performance, Gray decides what he wants to talk about, what stories he will tell in the process, and their order. But the text itself is developed in front of an audience and always remains there in the *betweenness* between performer and audience. It is not written down and so is never accorded the authority that accrues inevitably to a written text. The text instead is fluid and always changing. A third reason I'm interested in Spalding Gray is that his political positioning. On one hand, there is probably no performer of solo autobiography as mainstream as Gray. He is a white, male, heterosexual, upper-middle class American. On the other hand, Gray's performance credentials could hardly be more contemporary: He has worked with Sam Shepard and Richard Schechner, to name two. He was a star with the avant-garde Performance Group before going out on his own. Critics routinely praised his work. And yet, in a

performance world where postmodern impenetrability is often considered the mark of good performance, Gray's work is both entertaining *and* understandable. Video tapes of his work are available in virtually any neighborhood Blockbuster. The next important reason I selected Gray is that he, like me, gravitates to solo autobiographical performance because it is fundamentally an example of life itself — an idea I alluded to earlier which Gray explained in an interview. "What I came to understand in the '70s was that I wanted to control the whole thing — to be director, author, performer. I first formally tried that in 1979 after returning from the West. I speak rather than write. My words on a page are like everyone else's, but when you give it voice, it's different. The Spalding Gray of the monologues is a combination of Huckleberry Finn and Candide" (quoted in Georgakas & Porton, 37).

Finally, I selected Gray because — in addition to topic of control in autobiography — Gray found himself involved in one of the primary genre problems of solo autobiography performance cited in *Autobiography & Performance* and briefly discussed earlier: How can there be theatrical drama when there is only one character on stage? Gray had realized that rather than work with and off of fellow actors, he preferred the relationship between himself and the audience: "I even found I was more intensely alive during the performance than I was when I wasn't performing.... Everything disappeared in the room and the audience and I were one.... That was the most exciting point for me because it allowed a confrontation with the audience's eyes that I would never forget" (Dasgupta, 176-179). (Though I would describe it differently, this is precisely how I feel when I teach.)

To establish some order here, I've divided the discussion of Gray's work into categories corresponding to fundamental components of performance: text, performer, audience, and context.

Gray does not consider himself a biographer, and autobiographer, and actor, or even a performance artist. "Up until recently I've compared myself to Woody Allen. I have an enormous sense of humor in public space and I can make people laugh. I help people laugh. But I don't laugh a lot myself. I'm rather morbid and have a somewhat depressive nature... So there is a kind of taciturn, not really open person, a rigid New Englander who wishes he had been on Ken Kesey's bus but knows he would have been kicked out.... I'm one thing on stage and people think I'm like that all the time.... There is the extroverted side, the *me* of the performances, and then the me who retreats and listens and tries to get in touch with what is going on" (Georgakas & Porton, 36-37).

Gray's performances focus on his experiences in the world of performance and art, commingling with an obsession for the unattainable — life as art, encapsulated and preserved (Brewer). Even in his monologues, he acknowledges this obsession, "the search for paradise and perfect moments and the mistaken idea of paradise as being a place outside of the mind" (Wachtel, 34). "Perfection" in this context constitutes a release from the restrictions of Gray's hyperactive mind. The integration of mental and physical approaches a rare spiritual gratification, grounded in the central importance of the body (Brewer).

Gray's autobiographical monologues seem like uncensored emotional outpourings, but they are actually the result of carefully calculated artifice — a creation

identified by its author as part fiction and part real, a synthesis of innocence, wit, and adventurousness. The monologues' sudden shift in tone from uproarious comedy to unmitigated anguish have stymied critics who, rather clumsily, compare Gray to such unlikely precursors as Mark Twain and Frank Harris. It might be said that Gray tempers the down-to-earth irony of humorists such as Jean Seaward and Garrison Keilor with a manic-depressive lyricism that resembles the confessional zeal of his fellow New Englander, Robert Lowell (Georgakas & Porton, 34).

The idea of a definitive text in Spalding Gray's work is rendered impossible by his constant revision of his material. He uses notebook outlines, with key words and phrases highlighted, to guide live performances. While the filmed version of a monologue may contractually signal an end to its stage life, the published work merely commits to print a monologue at some point on the continuum of its development. Gray eschews the notion of a completed text that would inhibit a fresh presentation (Brewer). Gray explains: "My monologues are not pre-written. They are developed with audiences. When you begin to know the information, you can play with it and comment on it and reflect on it and then you can turn it into music and begin to play all the rhythms... You play phrases like a jazz musician might. It would never be there the first night. There would just be the struggle of telling a story... [E]very performance is a rewrite. The audience doesn't know that. It knows what it sees, and what it sees is not a rewrite, it's what the monologue *is* at that point. To make a monologue is a long process" (quoted in Georgakas & Porton, 35).



Gray the performer consistently outranks Gray the author, which is fine with him. “My words on a page are like everyone else’s, but when you give it voice, it’s different,” Gray said in an interview. “The Spalding Gray of the monologues is a combination of Huckleberry Finn and Candide... I am a fan of the spoken word. [In college] I listened to Dylan Thomas every night.... Ginsberg was a great influence.... I had a photograph of Kerouac on my wall.... There was also a jazz influence. *On the Road* was one of the first books I ever sat down to read. What I liked was that he was alive. He had voice.” (quoted in Georgakas & Porton, 37).

Michael Vanden Huvel summarizes the relationship between text and performer in the realm of contemporary solo autobiography performance:

In its purest form, performance art privileges the spontaneous and physical activity of performing as an autonomous form of artistic expression. That expression is said to differ from literary, textual, or “closed” forms in that it does not impose a preformed hierarchy of discourses or meanings upon the spectator.... Certainly the power of performance to induce pleasure, catharsis, or any other spectatorial response still resides within the performer, who has simply displaced the author (11).

“Art is the act of making, not the thing made,” Henry Sayre explains. A written text is fixed, permanent. A spoken text is contingent, variable, alive, tenuous. “If the written text is demystified and desanctified, then the spoken word — by virtue of its very contingency and invisibility — is reconstituted with mystery and awe. In the “breath event” we discover the new sublime — that is, the old sublime reconstituted in the lyrical

self (183). Victor Turner sees the performative text as a “text in context, and not in a static structural context but in the living context of dialectic between aesthetic dramatic processes and sociocultural processes in a given place and time” (28).

This mostly postmodern talk about text can obscure a most important point: contemporary Western thought, especially popular thought, holds that (1) reality is concrete and “out there” to be discovered, and (2) because it is concrete and “out there,” only one account of it can be true. If only one account is true and we have multiple, changing accounts, then (this reasoning goes) some of the accounts must inevitably be false, at best insincere or misguided, at worst lies, but inevitably wrong.. This fluidity of text, which Gray acknowledges in his work, illustrates an important and enduring contradiction. Unless there is an exact and complete one-to-one correspondence between life and art, then art is necessarily a lie. The first is not possible. The second is not true. Related in the same sort of way is a second contradiction, one involving the poetics of performance.

There are two separate poetics of performance, according to Sayre. One is a largely modernist one which sees in the “present” the immediacy of experience, something like an authentic “wholeness,” a sense of unity and completion that is the “end” of art. (Here again is a description of how I feel when I teach.) The second is a largely postmodern one which defines the present as perpetually and inevitably part of an ongoing process, inevitably fragmentary, incomplete, multiple (175).

The postmodern avant-garde has asserted its opposition to the dominant brand of modernism — and its continued ascendancy in the world of art at large — by attempting

to strip the idea of “modernism” itself of the consistency, univocality, and autonomy... It has done this by offering an art of its own founded upon contingency, multiplicity, polyvocality. Performance, which was (and remains) styleless, diverse, and conspicuously unprogrammatic, has consistently proved one of the most readily available means for realizing this strategy of opposition. This is of course a style of its own, and it has come to be known as “postmodern.” (xii).

There is a subtle tension in Gray’s work between the modern and the postmodern, just as there is a subtle tension between those paradigms within the context of his performance. This tension created by this contradiction arises because for so many people, recognition of postmodernism in no way mitigates their nostalgia for the modern (175). It is a fine line to tread, and Gray’s mainstream successes seem to indicate that he accomplishes this with some skill.

A third contradiction latent in Gray’s performance involves the identity politics of the self who is performing. At first glance, it would seem that Spalding Gray’s performances are almost devoid of politics. This is of course impossible: *All* communication is rhetorical, and all stories come complete with a full set of morals and ethics — pieties, Kenneth Burke calls them, strategies for living, world-views. As performers we are merchants of morality (Goffman, 251). It is *because* Gray is so mainstream himself that his politics take on a transparency. The pieties of the dominant culture always seems transparent. But they are still there, and their subtlety encourages us to examine them even more closely. “All politics is quarrel,” Clifford Geertz writes, “and

power is the ordering such quarrel sorts out: that much is general. What is not general is the nature of the quarrel or the shape of the ordering” (39).

Gray’s “quarrel” is about himself and about situating that self in the world. Gray’s central preoccupation — the loss of self and submersion of the “I” — is evidenced in *Swimming to Cambodia*, when he went for a swim in the huge breakers. In the film, he explains: “Suddenly, there was no time and there was no fear and there was no body to bite.” Two aspects of selfhood are regarded as universal. The first is *agency*. “Selfhood” derives from the sense that one can initiate and carry out activities on one’s own. Since agency implies not only the capacity of initiating but also for compelling our acts, it also implies skill or know-how. The second universal aspect of selfhood is evaluation or *self-esteem*. We evaluate ourselves, and we are evaluated within our culture by others. *Self* increasingly takes on the flavor of these evaluations (Bruner, 36-37).

Gray says that the politics of his performance is about “surrendering to the rhythms of spoken language; audience reaction is imagination and *project cinema* of the skull.” He adds: “I see my monologues, at their best, as a Tibetan wheel of life, and I spin it real fast like a wheel of fortune, and you see this blur of heavens and hells and funny and sad things overlapping. I like to objectify my neurosis” (Johnson). Many productions since the 1960s attempted to dispense with the “character.” Ironically a metaphysics of “presence” which reifies the immediate actor/audience interaction helped to destabilize the “normative” fictional character (Zarrilli, 20). Even an artist like Spalding Gray — whose work tells the ongoing story of his own life — uses an “I’m-not-acting” persona, which is removed at some level from a “real” self (Carr, 123). Despite

being a performer ostensibly empowered by talk, Gray in *Gray's Anatomy* reveals the body to be as important as the voice. The body locates the performer and offers itself to be witnessed and adored. Without a foundation in the physical, "perfect moments" sought by the mind/voice cannot be sustained (Brewer).

Spalding Gray, representing the dominant culture in just about every conceivable way, is anything *but* mainstream in the world of solo autobiography performance. Because it is an economical and efficient art form, solo performance is highly attractive to those on the margins, particularly those with things to say. Poems are tough to sell, and plays are expensive to cast and produce, but solo performance of autobiography requires only a performer, and someone to watch, and a street corner as a set. An important idea in any discussion of what constitutes performance is the idea of marginality and the attractiveness of performance as a communication medium. Performance practiced from the margins is what Sayre calls "a strategy of opposition." Performance artists do not tend to be corporate tycoons or Junior League. Instead they are voices struggling to be heard above the tyranny of the majority — voices of gays, lesbians, people of color, victims, the oppressed, and feminists of many varieties. The idea that solo performance of autobiography contests a densely tangled web of dominant culture values — male, white, heterosexual, Christian, western, you name it — is not surprising. This has been the case, to a certain extent, with all forms of expression. What is interesting about solo autobiography performance is that its sanctions are so pervasively powerful in their androcentricity.

What we haven't yet talked about is the role of the audience in solo autobiography performance. It is a powerful role. Richard Schechner writes: "Performance is licensed by its audience which can, at any time, re-ratify or withdraw that license. This is true of all performances, though most of the time the audience doesn't know its own power — or is provoked only occasionally into exercising it" (Schechner 1977, 194).

The meaning which results from performance is co-constructed by the audience and the performer. To that extent, there is nothing different or unusual in Spalding Gray's work. What *is* different and thus remarkable is Gray's orientation toward the audience. Because the solo autobiography performer often speaks from the margins and because the message from the margins is often aggressive if not angry, the possible relationship between performer and audience falls somewhere between two extremes. One extreme is that of traditional persuasion. At this end of the persuasion tactics spectrum, the performer seeks to win the hearts and minds of the audience through identification or intersubjectivity. On the other end of the spectrum is what one often now sees at performance, particularly performance art. It is a strategy of provocation, and it is bold and challenging.

In performance art, the *integral audience* is composed of people who know the performance artist's work, who support its politics, and agree with its strategies. This audience shares pieties with the performer. Performing for these people is like preaching to the choir. Co-construction of meaning is a foregone conclusion. Agreement about what is appropriate in performance and what is not is not likely to cause problems. The integral audience is a group of loyal followers. The *accidental audience* in performance art is

another matter entirely. This audience is composed of people who may *not* have decided whether they support the performer's politics or agree with his or her strategies. They may have different views about what constitutes acceptable performance language or behavior. Because of the polar politics of performance art in general, it is most likely that the accidental audience will be more mainstream — which renders them entirely vulnerable to being “shocked,” as Lenora Champagne explains above.

It is no great performative challenge to shock an audience. Shocking behavior is not difficult. What is difficult is to use shock as a successful rhetorical ploy, to shock someone out of complacency, to turn them in a desired direction rather than turn them off. Spalding Gray, considered in the context of performance artists such as Annie Sprinkel, Carloee Schneeman, or Rachel Rosenthal, is as mild as Wonder Bread. Anyone who watches *Oprah* has seen worse. In his attitude toward the audience, Gray differs appreciably from theorists such as Artaud and these other performance artists I mentioned earlier. The avant-garde, at its extreme, seems to consider the audience as people whom performers can treat cruelly.

Spalding Gray seems to have a much more amiable understanding of his relationship with the audience. Rather than a group of people to be shocked or scolded, Gray sees the audience more like a dance partner. He needs the audience. The audience makes him whole. He wants the audience to take his hand and go for a nice walk.

There can, of course, be no perfect match of audience and performer. Jill Dolan says that “someone seems always to be excluded, the other in the binary on which the

whole system depends. It's fashionable to talk now of multiple, intersecting identities, but very difficult to really think through and practice them all at once" (17).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter surveys performance theory of autobiography and self, which combined are one way to look at performing teaching, the view from the inside. This perspective is particularly applicable in demonstrating that the personal experience of teaching detailed in Chapter Six is not only valid data for study but valid in terms of the validity of performance of self.

The next chapter considers the second avenue of understanding performing teaching, the view from the outside. This is performance as narrative.



## CHAPTER FOUR: PERFORMANCE AS NARRATIVE

The previous chapter delved into performance as self and as autobiography, explaining in the introduction that it was one of three perspectives applicable in this study. The second perspective is performance as narrative – life as experience, life as stories. Walter Fisher described humans as story-telling animals, *homo narrans*. But he is certainly not alone in looking at the performance of stories as the making of humanity, of society. In this chapter, the thoughts of 22 different narrative theorists are examined. This chapter distinguishes between two contemporary takes on the nature of narrative: (1) the “natural narrative” frequently attributed to William Labov, developed by Mary Louise Pratt and utilized in the field of communication by Kristin Langellier, and (2) “fictional narrative” as that concept emerges in Robert Scholes, Wayne Booth, Susan Lanser, Norman Friedman, Gerald Prince, and utilized in our field by, among others, Joanna Maclay and Thomas O. Sloan, Mary Frances HopKins, and Robert Breen.

This chapter concludes that the sheer force of intellect represented in the work of those cited here provides an unusually strong foundation for the validity of the narrative that is produced in Chapter Six by performing teaching, regardless of its inherent biases, shortcomings, omissions, and errors.

### **Labov's study of black vernacular**

American sociolinguist William Labov's interest in oral narrative stems from his study of black vernacular, spoken particularly by inner city black youth in the U.S. (The summary of Labov's work that follows is drawn primarily from the work of Mary Louise Pratt.) In his first book, *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* (1966), Labov showed that phonological speech variations among New Yorkers could be explained only by social pressures acting on the speaker in a given speech situation. A 1972 volume, *Language in the Inner City*, featured essays speculating on whether dialect differences had any relationship with consistent reading problems of inner city black children. Labov determined that reading problems resulted from political and cultural conflicts in the classroom and that dialect differences are important symbols of this conflict. The crux of the matter was that the children Labov studied were quite talented. The conflict arose because their talents did not help them read better.

Though Labov was not interested in aesthetics when he began his work, he soon developed an interest. He was fascinated by his subjects' talents and by the value placed on these talents within the subjects' peer group. His findings appeared in two papers, "Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience" (1967), written in collaboration with Joshua Waletzky, and "The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax," in *Language in the Inner City*. In this latter paper, Labov defined "natural narrative" as a method of recapitulating experience, the method resulting from

constructing a sequence of clauses (360). The “natural narrative” clause sequence can be quite basic need not be the least bit interesting. An example from Labov’s own data:

Well, this person had a little too much to drink and he attacked me and the friend came in and she stopped it.

A “complete narrative,” according to Labov, is more complex. It begins with an abstract, moves through an orientation which gets complicated then evaluated. Some resolution follows evaluation, and a coda completes the telling of the narrative (369). In more detail:

*Abstract:* This sentence-or-two summary serves to secure the typically longer-than-usual conversational turn required for the telling of a story. It usually foreshadows the “point” of the story, building interest and simultaneously creating a degree of redundancy to improve likelihood that the audience will understand the story.

*Orientation:* The orientation identifies the story’s time, place, characters, and action. Some information was offered in the abstract. The orientation fleshes out the abstract with more information and detail, often including a detailed sketch of the main character. It frequently tells that was going on before the first concrete verb of the narrative.

The *complicating action* and *resolution* constitute the core of the narrative. The first narrative clause is found in the complicating action. The last narrative clause is contained in the resolution.

Labov considers *evaluation* — following the narrative clause itself — to be the most important point of a narrative. Evaluation tells us as audience the point of the story, its moral, what the teller is getting at. Labov explains in some detail:

To identify the evaluative portion of a narrative, it is necessary to know why this narrative — or any narrative — is felt to be tellable; in other words, why the events of the narrative are reportable.... The narrators of most of these stories were under social pressure to show that the events involved were truly dangerous and unusual, or that someone else really broke the normal rules in an outrageous and reportable way. Evaluative devices say to us: this was terrifying, dangerous, weird, wild, crazy; or amusing, hilarious and wonderful; more generally, that it was strange, uncommon, or unusual — that is, worth reporting (371).

The general function of the *coda* is to draw the narrative to a close. The coda says, in effect, that nothing which comes afterward is important to the story. The coda frequently returns the story-teller and the audience to that point in conversation when the abstract launched the story. These six points demonstrate some of the things that Labov learned about narrative as a subcategory of ordinary talk, and it is the relationship between narrative (“literature” at its most elaborate) and ordinary talk (“small talk” at its *least* elaborate) that interests Mary Louise Pratt. Her own assessment at this point in the study of narrative as a subcategory of ordinary talk is that the relationship seems self-evident. First, Pratt suggests that oral narrative describing personal experience “is a speech act exceedingly familiar to us all” (50).

We are all perfectly aware of the “unspoken agenda” by which we assess an experience’s tellability. We know that anecdotes, like novels, are expected to have endings. We know that for an anecdote to be successful, we must introduce it into conversation in an appropriate way, provide our audience with the necessary background information, keep the point of the story in view at all times, and so on. And as with any speech situation, literary or otherwise, we form firm judgments all the time about how “good” an anecdote was and how well it was brought off by its teller.... When narrative speech acts fail, we can almost always say why: the experience was trivial, the teller long-winded, or we missed the point.

The second reason Labov’s categorization of narrative within ordinary talk seems self-evident is that this is the kind of organization we are each traditionally taught in school. Pratt’s conclusion: literary and natural narration are formally and functionally very much alike (66). “Put another way,” Pratt writes, “all the problems of coherence, chronology, causality, foregrounding, plausibility, selection of detail, tense, point of view, and emotional intensity exist for the natural narrator just as they do for the novelist.... *These are not rhetorical problems that literary narrators have had to solve by inventing a poetic language; they are problems whose solutions can readily be adapted from spoken to written discourse*” (emphasis mine).

Pratt’s fundamental position is that Russian Formalists, Prague School poeticists, Anglo-American structuralists, present-day French literary semioticians, and others of like mind are wrong when they insist that literature is linguistically autonomous, wrong

when they insist that literature possesses intrinsic linguistic properties which distinguish it from all other kinds of discourse (xii). “The greater part of this study,” Pratt writes in her introduction, “is ... devoted to the development of an approach which allows us to describe literary utterances in the same terms used to describe other types of utterances.... I have advanced the hypothesis that a descriptive apparatus which can adequately account for the uses of language outside literature will be able to give a satisfactory account of literary discourse as well.... The hypothesis itself finds ample support in some fairly recent developments in sociolinguistics and speech act theory, the two areas of linguistic inquiry most deeply concerned with language use” (xiii).

It is impossible to have much of a conversation about literature and ordinary speech without broaching the idea of truth. The idea arises in one form or another that literature is inevitably less truthful than ordinary speech, and it is often this relaxed truth requirement of literature that structuralists and formalists variously credit with literature’s entertainment value, its aesthetics. “The question of veracity simply doesn’t seem to matter much when the point of the utterance is understood to be pleasure” (97). From Labov’s work we can see that, according to Pratt, “the relation between a work’s fictivity and its literariness is indirect” (92). I argue more: fundamentally, truth is elusive and overvalued, one of those types things that people tend to count because they are so convenient to count. To millions of people, the truth of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, the Book of Genesis, and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is dubious, a value assessment that renders these stories otherwise trivial. To others, their truth is assessed intuitively and individually, in a mythical or narrative fashion, along the lines of Walter Fisher’s ideas of

fidelity, coherence, cohesiveness. Paul Watzlawick nailed down the idea in a page 60 footnote in *Pragmatics of Human Communication*: “‘èè’”

By the midpoint of *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*, Pratt has built a solid case that natural narrative is a conversational device that derives from ordinary talk. It is not, as some have argued, independent and separate. If literature is indeed a special case of ordinary talk, then it should follow the rules of ordinary talk as suggested by the research of conversation analysts such as Harvey Sacks, Gail Jefferson, and Emmanuel Schegloff, particularly the rules of turn-taking. And if natural narrative follows these rules, then that adherence suggests literature is not some *thing*, out *there*, objective, concrete, and durable, but evidence of a *process*, social and cultural, that operates in the betweenness that identifies narrator and audience, part of the web of ordinary talk that constitutes each one of us and everything in between. Pratt delves into some detail about the various aspects of this turn taking and how natural narrative differs from other types of ordinary speech. She makes a case. The interesting implication of the way Pratt sees what's going on in natural narrative turn-taking is its similarity to the way that Jerome Bruner describes what's going on with activation of a performance frame. I'll return to these ideas later, when our discussion turns to the relationship between narrative, talk, and performance.

This is a good point to circle in more closely on a definition of natural narrative as Pratt uses it. The narrator creates a verbal version of unusual or problematic experience and then invites help in its resolution. As such, natural narrative is not necessarily a specific, accurately reported state of affairs. Instead, the *telling* is more important than the

thing told. The narrator enjoys the act of verbal display itself. He enjoys enabling his audience to join him in contemplation, evaluating, interpreting, and responding to the reported state of affairs. This is all a fundamentally human activity, Pratt says (though I'm not sure how one would know), an activity that is both crucial to our social well-being and one that affords us endless pleasure. Pratt suggests (140):

One of the most important ways we have of dealing with the unexpected, uncertain, unintelligible aspects of our lives is to share and interpret them collectively. Carrying out this re-creative, interpretive process is one of the most important uses we make of language.

I find this idea striking. If you think that life is difficult because it's fundamentally ambiguous, and if you think of narrative as a sense-making process which people sometimes use to reduce some of life's ambiguity, then it is difficult to dismiss the truth as a critical factor in narrative. We use narrative as a framework, and the substance within the framework still needs to be somehow "right" or "correct" if ambiguity is to be reduced and life's problems made more palatable. If, on the other hand, you think of narrative as a process that renders life more palatable, then it is not the sense-made by narrative which is important (true or not true) but the *sense-making*. The exercise itself is the correct answer, whether or not the answer itself is correct.



## **Five forms of personal narrative**

William Labov advanced fundamental ideas on natural narrative in 1966 and 1972. Mary Louise Pratt elaborated upon the idea of natural narrative in 1977, using Labov's collected data to demonstrate that narrative and literature are special cases of ordinary speech. In 1989, Kristin Langellier — also drawing on Labov's work — identified and explained five forms of personal narrative. She defines personal narratives as first person stories, usually composed orally, based on real incidents in the tellers' lives. These stories belong to the teller, primarily because the teller has recognized them as interesting and tellable, and because it is the teller who brings events together into a story and delivers it on appropriate occasions. Citing Labov, Langellier says that personal narratives both refer and evaluate. "Together the referential and evaluative functions," Langellier writes (245), "require that a narrative present a past experience in the order it happened from the point of view of a narrator who interprets the significance of the experience." Each position, implicitly or explicitly, defines that personal narrative is, what a good story is, how stories are told, preferred models of telling, what a story does, and whose interest it serves. The five personal narrative forms that Langellier identified are story-text, storytelling performance, conversational interaction, social process, and political praxis.

Personal narrative as story-text retells a remarkable experience from the past in a linear, temporal sequence (247). The evaluative function makes the story's form more complex. The fully developed story moves through Labov's six stages of development,

cited earlier. The story must make a relevant point in the narrator's world, which the narrator must both know and illuminate in the telling. The best narrators make effective use of drama, efficiency, and evaluation, showing themselves in the best light. Erving Goffman describes this use of personal narrative as an act of self-presentation. In this model, Labov overlooks ideas of audience and context, according to Langellier.

Personal narrative as storytelling performance is a way of talking about the dynamic social relationship that storytelling creates between narrator and audience (250). Langellier refers to the ideas of Richard Bauman to draw out this topic. Bauman, like others (particularly Schechner) notes that performed narrative has a doubling quality. As it creates an experience in the present — the telling of the story -- it simultaneously recreates an experience from the past — the story being told. Langellier cites Bauman's definition of performance in explaining the social dynamics of narrative performance. Bauman defines performance as “a mode of communication, a way of speaking, the essence of which resides in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative skill, highlighting the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content (Bauman, 3). The impending act of performance (*I think maybe I'll tell the Aggie story now*) is signaled by invoking of the performance frame, and idea developed by Gregory Bateson. The performance frame, according to Bauman, is a metacommunicative device that says to listeners: “Interpret what I in some special sense' do not take it to mean what the words alone, taken literally, could convey” (*Verbal Art as Performance*, 9).

The truth of the narrative, even if absolute before its telling, cannot remain so in its performance. The telling of a narrative unavoidably mediates experience, Langellier says. “The very fact that experience is put in the shape of a narrative renders it subject to the desires and choices of the teller, to the constraints of the audience, and to the forces of narrative tradition” (254). It is entirely possible, Langellier notes, for the cart to get ahead of the horse here. She notes Labov’s observation of causality — that there can be no story without the experience which serves as its foundation — and suggests that even *true* stories can be the product of teller, listener, and tradition to such an extent as to “precede and even produce particular events” (254).

Performance of personal narrative serves an eternal and abiding purpose.

Langellier cites folklorist Sandra Stahl:

The personal narrative is the primary mode for expressing the traditional attitudes of a culture because the stories recount an actual behavior. “Existentially, the personal experience narrator not only acts or experiences but ‘thinks about’ his action, evaluates it, learns from it, and tells the story — not to express his values, but to build them, to create them, to remake them each time he tells his stories’ (Stahl, 274).

Personal narrative as conversational interaction sees the telling of personal narrative in the context of conversation, the ordinary talk of conversation analysts.

Personal narrative seen as an informal, conversational mode of conversation differentiates it from more literary or formal evaluations, or as performance. Following this line of thinking, personal narrative is simultaneously constructed during its telling

according to the rules of shared knowledge and conversational interaction. To this extent, a specific story at a specific time and place serves to make a conversational point. It can be a cultural point, dealing with shared cultural values, beliefs, and world view. It can be a social point, having an appeal limited by social membership. It can be a personal point, narrower still in interest but likely deeper in meaning to those who find it congruent with their own experiences.

The rules of shared knowledge and interaction place constraints on both the teller and the listener, enumerated by Livia Polani in *Conversational Storytelling* (200).

Constraints on the conversational storyteller:

1. The story must be coherent with the conversation. Within the story, there is meaningful change.
2. The story's topic must be worth the additional time it takes to tell.
3. The story must be introduced so that it relates with previous talk.
4. The story must be appropriately structured.
5. The story must manage time smoothly so that listeners don't get lost.
6. The story's substance should be evaluated so that its meaning or message is clear to listeners.

Constraints on the listener:

1. The listener must agree to listen to the story or offer a reason why not.
2. The listener must refrain from turn-taking except to clarify its points or to demonstrate that it is being followed.

3. The listener must demonstrate at the end that he or she recognizes the meaning, message, or point of the story.

The idea of social process sees personal narrative as simply one of several ways of talking that a culture permits. Here we are concerned not with the relationship between a story and its past, between a listener and a teller, or between turn-takers in a conversation, but in the social roles that narrative plays in present and future events. Analysis from this social perspective requires consideration of the multiple contexts in which stories are told — the form of narrative varies according to its function and relationship to surrounding discourse. It is important here, according to Katherine Young, to distinguish between *context* and *proximity*. Context bears on the narrative regardless of context's proximity. Proximity — which she calls “surround” may or may not bear on the narrative (70).

Looking at stories as social events means we need no longer be concerned with what a story is or isn't, whether it's good, who gets to tell it, or what its deep literary message might be. “What first appears to be incompetent storytelling is,” Langellier tells us, “in fact, another kind of ‘good’ storytelling which strategically accomplishes the function of explanation in a social setting” (262-263). Among the social roles narrative can play:

1. It can instigate action within a group, particularly if the group considers itself socially marginal.
2. It can establish who has the right to tell certain stories, what language or dialect is used in the telling, and which version of events gets told.

3. It can advocate a set of rules and ethics that may or may not be adopted or followed.
4. It can help to understand people who operate by different rule systems.
5. It can unite a group, as family stories unite a family under a single world view.

In general, from a social standpoint Langellier argues that the narratives we tell shape us as individuals, small groups, families, cultures, and societies. Considering narrative as social process focuses on relevant social contexts and how people within those speech communities use narrative.

The final way that Langellier suggests we consider personal narrative is to see it as political praxis, because narrative is ultimately political. Courtney Cazden and Dell Hymes explain that narrative's political nature emerges in two forms. The first is that narrative is a legitimate source of knowing. The second is that not everyone in society has equal storytelling rights. These two considerations arise from narrative's political utility. Together they ask one of the fundamental questions of political power: "Whose interest does this serve?" Langellier says that study of personal narrative on this level raises questions about power, knowledge, ideology, and identity (266).

### **The power of narrative**

Beyond form, beyond syntax, beyond substance, much of narrative's power emerges in the actual process of performance. None of the previous four approaches to narrative have dealt directly with this power. Searching for the political in narrative

focuses attention on narrative's seams, which are generated by process and where much of narrative's power resides. Langellier elaborates:

Performance always implies a relationship between sender and receiver and between the collective social and cultural forces controlling language and the individuals putting narrative into practice. Thus, the analysis of personal narrative text as political praxis must consider a performed text which is examined for its relation to the enhancement of experience and the politics of control, power, and knowledge (266-267).

Here we take hyperstrides into the depths of narrative. Narratives are how we make meaning. The act of telling a story is the act of organizing experience. As we tell a story, we organize nature's motion and human action into a whole. This whole gives form to the understanding of a purpose in life. "In a most profound way," Langellier says, "our stories tell us who we are and who we can — or cannot — be, at both surface and deep-level meaning" (267). As ways of establishing meaning, narrative tends to legitimate the dominant forms of reality, restricting the meanings or interpretations that can be applied to an activity. Some realities inevitably prevail over others. Langellier writes: "All personal narratives are ideological because they evolve from a structure of power relations and simultaneously produce, maintain, and reproduce that power structure" (267).

In conclusion, personal narrative as political praxis sees narrative as inherently political because every narrative suggests a way of seeing the world that privileges some and marginalizes others, authorizing this behavior and condemning that. Only when the

question “Who benefits from the telling of this story?” can be answered can narrative’s social role be completely understood.

These then are the cases made by the three researchers who discuss narrative or personal narrative. At this preliminary point, it seems that they share an interest in narrative primarily from its surface outward. In several places we did breach narrative’s surface or glance within. We talked about coherence and fidelity, but for the most part these tangents served as a way of talking about narrative’s proper place in a conversation, its relevance to other topics. Labov of this group went deepest when he listed the six elements of a fully developed narrative, but this served primarily to suggest that narrative is more like ordinary talk than it is like literature, and it is important to recall that Labov sought to learn what a study of storytelling could teach him about failure in the classroom.

It is an interesting move to shift from the macro to the micro. In the following discussion of narration, we move from the world of sociology, ethnography, conversation analysis, and similar disciplines into the older and much more traditional world of literature. In other words, having argued strenuously and solidly that narrative is not literature but a special case of ordinary talk, we now swing over into the world of literature and examine the literary aspects of narrative, or narrative as fiction.

### **Narrative’s literary tradition**

The definition of narrative here is familiar enough: we need a story, we need a storyteller, and nothing more (Labov, 6). The purpose of this work is to examine some of



the lines of continuity in the 5,000 year-old Western tradition of narrative by considering some of the varieties of narrative literature, patterns in historical development of narrative forms, and similarities of continuing or recurring elements.

Written narrative literature emerges from an oral tradition, preserving many of the characteristics of oral narrative for some time. It often takes that form of heroic, poetic narrative that we call epic. Behind the epic lie a variety of narrative forms: sacred myth, quasi-historical legend, and fictional folktale. These have coalesced into an amalgam of traditional narrative of myth, history, and fiction. A myth is a traditional plot, a skeleton, that can be articulated in its transmission. One of the greatest developmental processes in Western literature is the gradual movement *away* from the mythic impulse to tell a story with a traditional plot. In this course of development, traditional narrative tends to evolve in two antithetical directions. One direction is empirical. The other is fictional. Both are ways of avoiding the tyranny of traditional storytelling.

Empirical narrative (13) replaces allegiance to the traditional plots of myth (*mythos*) with an allegiance to reality. This fondness for reality is itself severable into two branches: historical reality and mimetic reality. An interest in the historical past is an interest in how things actually were, not how myth says they were. This historical interest required precise concepts of measurement, time-keeping, and recording. It further requires more disciplined thinking about human and natural causality. Biography tends to be mimetic. An interest in the mimetic branch of empirical narrative stems not from an interest in truth of fact but in truth of senses, feelings, environment. This mimetic interest required increased understandings of a vocabulary for sociological and psychological

processes of thinking and behaving. Mimetic narrative tends toward slice-of-life reporting. It is the antithesis of myth because it tends toward plotlessness. Autobiography tends to be mimetic.

Fictional narrative (13-14) replaces allegiance to the tradition of myth with allegiance to creation of the ideal. This form sets the writer free from the dual tyrannies of tradition and empiricism. Like empirical narrative, fictional narrative can be divided into two branches: the romantic and the didactic. Just as empirical narrative aims at a form of truth, fictional narrative aims at either beauty or goodness. The world of romance is ideal. Poetic justice prevails. All the art and adornment of language are present. Romantic narrative presents thought in the form of rhetoric; the author wants us to not only feel what the characters feel (as would be the case in mimetic narrative) but to agree that the characters' feelings are the correct feelings. The didactic component of narrative fiction is like a fable. If romance is ruled by aesthetic sensitivities, then didactic narrative is ruled by an intellectual and moral sensitivities.

It is often said that we construct meaning by telling and listening to stories. Common to all narrative then is the idea of meaning. When we say we understand a story, Robert Scholes tells us (82), we are saying that we have found an acceptable relationship between the fictional world created by the author and the real world — the apprehensible universe — in which we the readers or audience live. There are several fundamental problems to be explored here, all involving issues of reality and truth. The first is the relationship between the storyteller and the audience.

Back in the good old days of oral culture, the ideas of reality and truth did not pose a problem. The singer of the tale and its audience members came from the same world and saw it in the same way. Differences or misunderstandings between them about reality were weeded out over time, and the tale itself served to illustrate and promote a consistent world view. As culture began to rely on written texts, however, the process of amiable fluid change was slowed by writing's permanence. Language could and did become archaic and obsolete. Assumptions about who humans are, how they should behave, how a story should be told also changed with time, leaving the living alienated by a past that would not die. The solution here is for the audience member to recognize the gulf that separates his or her world from that of the storyteller and to learn about the storyteller's world so the story can make sense. This learning will bring the storyteller and listener as close together as possible "before confronting the ultimate mediator between them," Scholes and Kellogg write (83), "the literary work itself."

More complex and less easy to resolve is the relationship between the real world of the singer and the fictional world of the singer's tale. The relationship between the singer's worlds can be either representational or illustrative. If the art tends to serve as a replica of some original, then it is considered representational. Representational art is mimetic; it seeks to duplicate the original. Illustrative art, on the other hand, tends to suggest some aspect of the reality of the original. The illustrative is symbolic. Much interesting literature, Scholes and Kellogg say, derives from authors who try to work in both worlds, to make their characters at once representative and illustrative.

A third problem in the study of narrative occurs when the connection between real and fictional worlds of the narrative is so tenuous as to be virtually nonexistent. The characters become so stylized that they come forward like characters in impressionist paintings — their being is purely aesthetic.

There is within the meaning created by fictional narrative a second set of problems beyond truth and reality; these are problems of control. The fictional generalization of reality is governed by two opposing impulses: the aesthetic and the intellectual, the desire for beauty and the desire for truth, the romantic and the didactic. Within didactic there are two forms — allegory and satire. Two problems emerge. One is that the word *didactic* tends to be used pejoratively; it is morality thinly cloaked as narrative. The second problem is the distinction between allegory and symbolism. Symbolism is seen as organic, natural, while allegory is some form of intentional trickery. A third set of problems arise from an effect of modern empiricism, which has been to blur the distinction between historical and mimetic forms and the novel.

In the relationship between the teller and the tale, and that other relationship between the teller and the audience, lies the essence of narrative art. The narrative situation is thus ineluctably ironical. The quality of irony is built into the narrative form as it is into no other form of literature (240).

Irony, Scholes says, occurs when someone knows something that someone else doesn't. In narrative, there are three points of view — those of the narrator, those of the characters, and those of the narrator. As narrative becomes more sophisticated and a clear distinction emerges between narrator and author, a fourth point of view needs to be

considered. “If we push far enough the question of why irony makes the effects it does, we shall end up in the largely unexplored territory of how and why stories play a part in the life of man” (241). One possibility is that stories interest us because they allow us to experience without consequences. A second possibility is that the irony in stories usually elevates the reader to a position above the action, and that can be pleasurable. It’s always exciting to know what others don’t.

### **The vanishing narrator**

We are now talking about what goes on inside narrative, about what makes a story good. Robert Scholes told us that narrative requires only a story and a storyteller. In *Point of View in Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept*, Norman Friedman looks closely at the storyteller, seeing great potential in who the storyteller is and how he or she positions him- or herself in the text to tell the story. Done properly, the prize is artistic truth (1184).

William Labov suggested that narrative is a combination of reporting and evaluation. The report is a linear, temporal recreation of events that comprise some tellable experience. The evaluation is what the author thinks about the events and his or her relation to them. Of all the arts, Friedman says, the verbal arts pose by far the most difficulty: “The writer is torn continually between the difficulty of showing what a thing is and the ease of telling how he feels about it” (1161). And yet,

Literature derives its very life from this conflict — which is basic to all its forms — and the history of its aesthetic could in part be written in terms of this

fundamental tension, to which the particular problem of point of view in fiction is related as part to whole.... The relationship between the author's values and attitudes, their embodiment in his work, and their effect upon the reader have been and continue to be of critical concern (1161).

At the bottom of this discussion is that single piece of literary advice — as old as dirt itself — given to every aspiring writer: *Show, don't tell*. Friedman credits Percy Lubbock (a name I find highly improbable) with distinguishing between direct and indirect presentation. The act of fiction, Lubbock writes, does not begin until the novelist begins to think of his story as a matter to be shown, to be exhibited so that it will tell itself rather than being told by the author. “The thing has to *look* true, and that is all” (cited in Friedman, 1164). The two rules for accomplishing this call upon the author to consistently adhere to a narrative plan, and to use no more latitude than required. The result is that a reader perceives a story as it filters through the consciousness of a character and yet perceives it directly, avoiding the removal to a distance required by retrospective first-person narration. Mental awareness is thus dramatized directly. The story tells itself. The story speaks for itself, speaks itself. The author is transparent, nonexistent. Friedman (1162-1162) cites James Joyce discussing the phenomenon:

The narrative is no longer purely personal. The personality of the artist passes into the narration itself, flowing round and round the persons and the actions like a vital sea.... The dramatic form is reached when the vitality which has flowed and eddied round each person fills every person with such vital force that he or she assumes a proper and intangible esthetic life. The personality of the artist, at first

a cry or a cadence or a mood [lyric] and then a fluid and lambent narrative [epic], finally refines itself out of existence [drama], impersonalizes itself, so to speak.

When the narrator disappears, the story improves. It becomes intense, vivid, coherent. Friedman sums up his idea nicely: “All this is merely to say, in effect, that when an author surrenders in fiction, he does so in order to conquer; he gives up certain privileges and imposes certain limits in order the more efficiently to render his story-illusion, which constitutes artistic truth in fiction. And it is in the service of this truth that he spends his creative life” (1184).

### **The implied author**

Lots of things must happen in the performance of a text. First, of course, all the words must be there, and in the right order. Then there are intellectual and emotional meanings. There is the subtext, all the actions of all the speakers, and there is the aesthetic form. Last, HopKins suggests, and until recently ignored is the role of the implied author.

Here’s what the implied author is *not*. The implied author is *not* the storyteller or a character in the text. The implied author is *not* an agent, cannot perform acts or do things. Here’s what the implied author *is*. The implied author is the reader’s sense of the being who created the text. We sense the implied author’s presence in the text but we cannot hear it or see it. The implied author emerges from the experience with the text, as a whole. The implied author has a personality, sense of human, values, beliefs.

What is most important about establishing a sense of the implied author, says HopKins (concurring with critic Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*) is eliminating moral distance between the reader and the implied author. HopKins explains (4): "We must see the world of the text as the author sees it, share those sympathies and priorities, or the text will pass us by. We can abide a sense that the author we perceive is wiser, wittier, stronger, of a different sex. But we cannot properly respond to the text if we cannot embrace its — that is, the implied author's — system of values."

This notion manifests itself clearly in performance of a text, according to HopKins: "It seems to me that the author must become one with the implied author and view the audience as the author views a reader, sharing with the author the responsibility for shaping the audience so that it will have the proper experience of the text. *Part of the performer's moral responsibility, then, is to examine the norms of the work and to be sure he or she can embrace them; otherwise the performance may be a distortion or an act of hypocrisy*" (6, italics mine). These are the other characteristics of performance that HopKins enumerates (6-9):

1. Performance is an unmistakably personal, authentic, primary experience.
  2. Performance as a way of knowing rests at the core of the humanities. It is knowing from both the inside and the outside, though publication is a difficult way of sharing on the outside about this knowing.
  3. Performance is a way of meta-knowing. It leads to knowledge of what is worth knowing. That literature is worth knowing is an axiom. It needs no defense.
- Performance engages us in meaningful ways with issues that are central to



humanity. We do not deal directly with survival of the species, but we do deal with what makes survival worthwhile.

### **Evaluating representation**

Recall that William Labov's narrative requires a story, a storyteller, and nothing more. Recall also, in the work of Labov, Mary Louise Pratt, Kristin Langellier, and Mary Frances HopKins, that narrative does two things: it reports an experience of some sort, and it evaluates that experience. Wayne Booth broadens the discussion of narrative — and particularly what constitutes good narrative — by holding the idea of representation more or less constant and conducting a book-length exploration of the idea of evaluation.

Booth explains (3):

One of the most obviously artificial devices of the storyteller is the trick of going beneath the surface of the action to obtain a reliable view of a character's mind and heart. Whatever our ideas may be about the natural way to tell a story, artifice is unmistakably present whenever the author tells us what no one in so-called real life could possibly know.

In Booth's world, when an author stops showing and starts telling, immediately the quality of the work suffers. And yet an author can never just *not* tell: "We must never forget that though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear," Booth says (20). The result of Booth's investigations into how this process of evaluation might be managed is a series of four general rules. The first rule says that "true novels must be realistic." The second rule says that "all authors should be

objective.” The third rule says that “true art ignores the audience.” The fourth rule relates “emotions, beliefs, and the reader’s objectivity.”

Booth’s dialectic move is to see the evaluative aspect of narrative as rhetoric. His point is that showing is always preferable to telling. From a practical standpoint, “our main quarrel is with the author who makes his personal appearance a substitute for the artistic presentation of his subject, thinking that talking about the subject is equivalent to presenting it” (25). Beyond fundamental considerations of workmanship, there is a strong relationship between the amount of rhetoric present in narrative and that narrative’s perceived veracity. One measure of narrative’s literary quality is its sense of reality, its sense of truth. Booth suggests that an intense sense of mental and moral reality is captured when the author’s rhetorical role is minimized (50). the less present is the author in the piece, the more real the piece tends to be.

Booth’s General Rule No. 2 says that authors should be objective. When an author takes a neutral position, he or she is forced by circumstance into a minimal rhetorical position or at worst a self-canceling position. An objective position forces the author to rely on representational aspects of the story to carry the day — lacking bailing wire, duct tape, or Band-Aids, the job must be done properly the first time. Seen a bit more generally, the idea of a neutral or objective author looks a lot like that author who has disappeared from the text, an idea previously nominated by Booth and others as a good one.

Booth’s General Rule No. 3, says that true art ignores the audience. Readers are essentially tyrants, Virginia Woolf said. Booth argues that a writer governed by readers’

concerns and interests has consented to tyranny. In terms of pure art, the concessions a writer might make to render a text “reader friendly” are precisely those kinds of discourse that are deemed in fiction to be rhetorical. The need for these reader-friendly tactics is a sign of bad writing. Booth says: “If someone is rude enough to ask who the serious writers are, the answer is easy — they are those whom one would never expect” (90).

And he elaborates:

Most of us can accept the essential poetic truth first formulated by Aristotle — that each successful imaginative work has its own life, its own soul, its own principles of being, quite independently of the prejudices or practical needs of this or that audience, and that our poetic devices should be an integral part of the whole. The poet, we will say, “should speak as little as possible in his own person” (93).

But this minimization of rhetoric has its own practical limits. The first limit is that, even if a poet or writer concentrates on the great universals of human existence, the reader will respond to them only if the writer provides good reasons. These good reasons, regardless of how smoothly they are incorporated in the text, nonetheless remain rhetorical devices. he or she must still contextualize those universals. The second limit arises from the inherent ambiguity of dramatic events. For the reader to respond to life’s natural drama, it must be contextualized. Rhetoric is how an author situates these dramatic events in an understandable context. Any story will be unintelligible unless it includes enough telling to familiarize readers with the story’s value system and, more important, to persuade the reader to accept this value system. The third limit is brought

about by the nature of human universals: they are not always obvious, not always clear. Often the writer must make sure we see them and understand them. Finally, some of the most interesting narrative springs from illogical twists of plot, unexpected action by a story's characters. These twists, however, only work when the reader recognizes their illogic — and that often requires rhetorical assistance.

Booth's General Rule No. 4 addresses emotions, rules, and the reader's objectivity. It is a fine paradox to think, as Booth does, that preoccupation with the human content of a work runs contrary to aesthetic qualities in principle incompatible with the best literature. "Not only must true art exclude rhetoric," Booth says, "it must exclude reality itself in so far as reality is made up of human content" ( 119-120).

The ultimate problem in fiction, Booth says, "is deciding for whom the author should write" (396). Some authors say they write for themselves. That idea makes sense only when the author writes for is a kind of public self. Other authors say that they write for their peers. That idea works only when peers are perfect peers, which of course they are not. Even the best will need *some* guidance, and that guidance is by definition rhetorical. What is needed, Booth says, is a repudiation of all arbitrary distinctions among "pure form," "moral content," and the rhetorical means of realizing for the reader the union of form and matter. He explains (397):

When human actions are formed to make an art work, the form that is made can never be divorced from the human meanings, including moral judgments, that are implicit whenever human beings act. And nothing the writer does can be fully

understood in isolation from his effort to make it all accessible to someone else — his peers, himself as an imagined reader, his audience.

An author, Booth says, “makes his readers.” If that author tends toward purified art, waiting for the true peer who needs no rhetorical guidance, his poor craftsmanship can be forgiven. If, on the other hand, the author makes his readers well — shows them things they’re never seen before, moves them into a new order of perspective and understanding — then that author can take pride in the peers he or she has created (397-398).

### **The implied listener**

William Labov tells us that narrative requires only a story and a storyteller. The picture is not complete, however, without someone to tell the story to. In the notes on Wayne Booth’s work above, I touched on his ideas of purity and audience, with the conclusion that some degree of rhetoric is necessary if an audience is to be involved and that some deterioration of purity is thus unavoidable. Gerald Prince sets questions of aesthetic purity aside and argues that every narrative implies a listener, someone who the narrator is talking to. Prince says that much about a work of fiction can be understood if we understand the narratee. “By interpreting all signals of the narration as a function of the narratee, we can obtain a partial reading of the text, but a well defined and reproducible reading” (12).

The narratee is not the actual author. Though the two do occasionally coincide, that is the exception rather than the rule. The narratee is not the virtual reader. Every

writer, Prince says, has in mind a certain type of reader with certain qualities and certain duties that must be respected. The narratee is not the ideal reader, one who understands perfectly and approves wholeheartedly

Prince develops the concept of “zero-degree narratee” as one way of exploring a text for traces of the narratee. The zero-degree narratee is sort of a blank person. This narratee knows the narrator’s language, is knowledgeable and reasonable, and has no particular social characteristics. The narratee knows nothing about facts or events. He is neutral and objective. These are his general characteristics. He has no bad ones. The narratee’s more individual characteristics emerge from those passages in the text that address him. There are two major categories of these passages. First, there are passages that do not specifically identify the narratee or do nothing to change the zero-degree narratee as original equipment. Second, there are passages that define the narratee as someone different from the zero-degree narratee, someone with unique personal characteristics.

Narrations can be characterized by the type of narratee to whom they are addressed. Some narratives are addressed to no one in particular. Some narratives are addressed to a person who is not a character in the story. Some are addressed to a character in the story.

All narration involves a dialogue among the narrator, the narratee, and the story’s cast of characters. This dialog develops as a function of the distance between characters. From this dialogue spring the function of the narratee. The narratee sometimes acts as relay between narrator and reader or between author and reader. The narratee is

sometimes responsible for characterization within the story. Sometimes the narratee is responsible for thematic development. Finally, the narratee can hold the key to the narrative's fundamental thrust.

The narratee, Prince concludes, is fundamental in all narrative. When the role of narratee is considered, a more sharply delineated reading and deeper understanding of a literary work is possible.

All this makes perfectly good sense if we are to look at a teacher performing teaching to students in a classroom. Price told us that the narratee sometimes acts as a go-between for the author and reader. I understand the narratee as the "betweenness" Martin Buber writes about. If we are to look at the active relationship for clues of its nature, then this *narratee*, this *action of relationship*, this *betweenness* is really all there is.

### **Relationship with the process itself**

Every speech act implies a point of view, a relationship between the speaker and the context, the listener, or the content of the communicative act. In addition, every speaker has a relation with the communicative act itself. This means, Susan Lanser writes, that there is another relationship worth mentioning, a relationship that comes before all those listed. It is the relationship between the author and the process of writing (64). This last relationship is ideological as well as aesthetic. The act of writing, just like the act of communicating in general, is both constrained and conventionalized by beliefs, values, and perceptions of the world. In other words, even before there is a text, there is a point of view.

Point of view is one aspect of discourse whose meaning changes markedly in the transition from formalist to speech act theories of literature. If we are to understand how point of view operates, we must examine the narrative situation of a text as produced in its fictional context and also see that fictional context as the result of a communicative act in the historical world. Clearly, this is an expanding sphere. Those who seek to understand point of view in a text must ask questions that go far beyond the formalist text itself. (78). These questions can deal with conventions and limitations posed by the narrative structure itself. These questions can look into the relationship between the writer as communicator and the narrator, empowered by the writer with a parallel task. These questions can explore the complex psychological dynamics between author and audience. These questions seek understanding of the author's and narrator's world view. And finally, from these questions we can ask about the relationship between this text (the one under consideration) and all other texts. With the answers to these questions, we seek the answer to a fundamental question: not what the text says, but why.

This is a natural question to ask of the teacher performing teaching. We can see the experience of the relationship in the classroom as the text, and we can gauge the results, and we can and will later in this study ask the question: why?

As content, point of view communicates attitudes between all the players in a narrative — author, reader, characters, narrator, narratee. As aesthetic method, point of view represents a set of collective social and cultural tactics that permit reality to be narratively interpreted. At a deep level, point of view offers a look at power and its ability to speak when it pleases and censor others.



Of all ways to influence the interpretation of a text, Lanser says, point of view is at once the most subtle and the most versatile because it can

...appear to be natural and innocuous or it can blatantly display its own artifice.

Point of view can either crystallize and thereby lay bare the constraints of censorship upon representation of social life, or it can function precisely as ideology functions with respect to material production: to hide its artificiality, engendering ...an illusion of the spontaneously, unmediated real, thereby providing a context in which the text can appear as a natural object, typically denying the determinant of its productive process (101).

Fictionalized narrative's point-of-view represents the relationship between consciousness, discourse strategy, and aesthetic form. Point-of-view also represents the relationship between the narrative voice and the material, social, ideological and psychological aspects of writing.

To most theorists, ideas such as the narrator's gender, authority, and values are inconsequential. Human perception is based on the relationship between perceiver and perceived — a relationship called "point-of-view."

### **Narrative as inquiry**

Performance of literature was once viewed as an art form itself. This older view has been complimented and in many cases replaced with the realization that one can gain powerful understanding of a literary work by giving it voice. Interpretation of literature is criticism and then some. To the important intellectual understandings that arise from

criticism, interpretation adds those sometimes irrational considerations that arise only in the necessity of performing it. The interpreter thus becomes one who experiences a literary work, and the work itself is transformed from marks on a page to an actual live experience. "To create anew the experience of which these words are part is in large measure an existential process, that is, something that is going on right now in someone's body and mind. Creation, in short, is four-fifths of interpretation," according to Maclay and Sloan.

Though other authors on similar subjects deal in the dualities of opposing ideas, Maclay and Sloan cite quite a number as they explore what is involved in giving voice to literature, and the list itself is instructive. The first is a tension between the sequential ordering of a text and the idea that the text can be meaningful only its entirety. The second is a tension between literature as speech (something that happens) and words on a page (something that just sits there). A third tension is the disparity between criticism and interpretation. A fourth tension is the disparity between temporal and spatial organization. A fifth tension is the disparity between the narrator as simultaneously a speaker and a member of his or her own audience.

The main point I see in this work relative to narration is that these authors do an excellent job of drawing out the subtleties of the different voices likely to be found in any fully developed narrative. There is the audience, the implied audience, and the fictive audience. There is a persona who can be actor, rhetor, communicator, or mediator. There is an implied author, who can be a rhetor or communicator. And there is an interpreter, which can be an actor or rhetor, or who can mediate or communicate. As with

interpretive schemes in general, understanding the existence of these persona and answering questions about the role they play in the narrative is critical to a convincing and useful interpretation.

Narrative seems to be a form of discourse well suited to communicating life's more complicated issues. Throughout the history of language — both written and oral — we see stories used to share ideas. The RgVeda, oldest Indo-European text, is a collection of stories about humanity, the gods, and how human society is ordered. Greek and Roman myth are collections of stories about where things come from, why they behave as they do, and how they can be influenced by people. The Christian Bible is heavy with stories and light on commentary. In the New Testament, Jesus seldom speaks directly in answer to a question. Instead he tells stories. One example is the story about the return of the prodigal son. It explains what *unconditional love* means. Another good example is a story about walking on water. In this story, a boat containing the disciples begins to sink and Jesus invites Paul to step out into the churning waters and walk upon them. Paul does, and everything is fine until he realizes exactly what he is doing. Then he begins to sink. This story illustrates with a parable what is possible through faith. What's going on here? In the Book of Matthew, the disciples ask Jesus why he speaks in parables.

Jesus responds: “To you [the disciples] it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.... The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand’”(Matthew 13.10-13, New Revised Standard Version). Though I can see several ways to read this response, the most logical to me is that Jesus is saying,

“Because these people do not know the secrets of heaven as you do, I must communicate with them through stories.”

My favorite along these lines is a Buddhist story about the inevitability of death. One day a woman came to see the Buddha, the story goes. Her infant son had just died, and she was overwhelmed with grief. She begged the Buddha’s help. Unless he could bring her son back to life, she could not bear to live another day.

The Buddha agreed to help her. “But first,” he said, “I want you to visit each house in the village and collect a mustard seed from everyone who has not suffered death.”

Late that afternoon, the woman returned to the Buddha’s quarters, exhausted but not quite so stricken with grief. The Buddha asked to see her mustard seeds. “I have none,” she said. “There is not a household in the village that has not been touched by death.”

I’m interested in narrative because it is a powerful way to share complex, subtle ideas. I am using the term “narrative” here in a broad sense, roughly synonymous with the idea of a “story.” The way I use it, narrative is a constantly changing mix of lyric, epic, and dramatic discourse. Of all the theory and commentary cited above, I find nothing particularly disagreeable, and I think this is because narrative works quite well on a number of levels simultaneously. I’d like to touch on some of them.

Narrative can be defined as a verbal account of real or imaginary events, delivered by a storyteller to an audience. Narrative thus construed has four elements: a story, a storyteller, a listener, and a circumstance for the telling. (This maps nicely upon the four

elements of performance: a text, a performer, an audience, and a context.) From Labov's studies and Mary Louise Pratt's work, it becomes clear that narrative is not some sort of special linguistic or literary beast. Rather, it is a logical outgrowth of common, ordinary, everyday talk. This suggests, as Labov and others have confirmed, that narrative is highly democratic. One need not be influential or educated or privileged to both use *and* understand the full range of nuances available in storytelling.

Narrative can serve, according to Langellier, a number of purposes: as story-text, as storytelling performance, as conversational interaction, as social process, and as political praxis. In any given story at any given time, each of these purposes are to some extent being served. Under the umbrella of narrative, we can collect, assemble, and combine forms of talk such as epic, lyric, dramatic, and even rhetoric. Regardless of which we choose at any particular moment, narrative always has four components: plot, characters, a setting, and passage of time.

Narrative has two functions: the referential function and the evaluative function. The referential function is the storytelling part of narrative, a more or less linear recollection of events. The evaluative function allows the speaker to interpret and comment upon those events. In contemporary narrative, the way that the evaluative function is used has a major impact on assessment of the narrative's quality. The evaluative function itself has two manifestations. One is subtle — it is how a storyteller enriches a story with ethics, morals, and values. This is one source of narrative's power. Each story, it is said, contains a complete set of ethics and morals. The evaluative function's second manifestation is called "rhetoric" by critics such as Robert Scholes,

Wayne Booth, and Susan Lanser. This facet of evaluation occurs when a writer tells the reader directly what things mean, which are good, which are bad, how they should be taken. The fact is that this sort of advice is not particularly welcomed by readers or by critics. On one level, we as readers would hope that the story is sufficiently well written that it does not *need* explanation to be understood. Like a joke, if you need to explain it then you probably did a lousy job of telling it. On a second level, we as readers find rhetorical discourse to be distracting and insincere — I'd prefer to read the story and form my *own* opinions, thank you.

The outgrowth of this attitude toward blatant rhetoricizing is that the ideal text — pure art — contains no noticeable rhetoric at all. When the rhetoric vanishes, so does the sense of inauthenticity that rhetoric produces. It is the difference between manipulation and management. No one likes to feel manipulated. Most people don't much mind being managed, especially when the management is so skillful as to be transparent.

All that now on the record, I believe it is both interesting and useful to think of narrative not as a finite object or deed but as an evolving relationship over time that can wear away at life's ambiguity and produce knowledge. It is often said — and I have said often — that we use stories to understand our selves, our lives and our world. I do not doubt that this is true; it has certainly held true for me. At family reunions, we tell stories that describe who we are as a family. At work we tell stories that explain the local culture — how you go about getting things done around here. As a teacher I tell stories about previous classes. When I want to learn about someone or something unfamiliar to me, the facts never quite do it. They seem like they will be, but they're never quite enough.

It's only when the stories about the subject begin to flow that understanding begins to germinate. It would be easy to conclude here that narrative provides answers which clinically rational, empirical, facts-and-figures thinking and talking cannot. But that raises a pesky problem: When the souls have been peered into, the stories have been exchanged, and the tension begins to relax, just what exactly was the specific answer that we derived using narrative? By my experience, it's hard to say. After we've traded stories all evening about struggling with God and fate and determinism and free will, I still don't know the purpose of life. But I do know that I'm no longer so deeply troubled about it. And I suspect I know what's at work here. I suspect that narrative is no more (and no less) capable of producing answers to complex questions than any other method of reasoning or thought. What differs is not the answers but the processes. It is the *process* of telling stories that generates meaning. Pratt says (140):

One of the most important ways we have of dealing with the unexpected, uncertain, unintelligible aspects of our lives is to share and interpret them collectively. Carrying out this creative, interpretive process is one of the most important uses we make of language.

This *process* of narrative goes on constantly for all of us, all the time. I'm always telling myself stories of one form or another, always trying to fit events into some sort of logical framework to make sense of them. When my wife comes home from work, I ask about her day, and she'll tell me several short stories. When I think about a conversation I need to have tomorrow, I conduct the it in my head and see how it goes. Often I rewind, edit, and try again. I call this "rehashing the future." I do the same thing with the past.

The power of stressing narrative's process over its product is two-fold. First, it explains how narrative can solve a problem without ever actually deriving a solution. (I still don't know the meaning of life, but I am not troubled about it anymore, and that's probably better than I could hope for if I actually *were* to know the meaning of life.) The second benefit of stressing narrative process over product is that it moves us into the dynamic world of performance. Performance is the *process* of narrative, its embodiment. It is not so much that performance involves language as that performance *creates* language.

Victor Turner explains:

Human experience, both male and female, is ransacked for telling symbols, metaphors, and images which can provide the building blocks -- or better, the alphabet blocks -- for a liminal language, as much nonverbal as verbal, in which potent messages are delivered to those undergoing changes of state

*(Anthropology, 133)*

Performance is the enactment of narrative for a specific audience, supplementing the more concrete language of narrative with the more ineffable experience of the performer, his or her body, and the context of the performance. At the center of performance is theory of self. Narrative constitutes the self (Fisher 1984, 3-6; Gergen and Gergen 1983, 255; Manis and Meltzer 1978, 437; Richardson 1990, 126). Surrounding self is theory of narrative -- the telling of the self's experiences -- and surrounding *that* is performance and frame theory, involving the relationship between the audience and the self. The performance frame enhances narrative by adding, to the story that is the self, the *telling* of the story, and the deepened meaning which performance and the performance



frame make possible (Goffman 1959, 1974; Fine and Speer 1977, 376). Looking outside the individual, the self becomes a performer when he or she forms a relationship with an audience (Bauman 1975, 293). Though we continually tell ourselves stories, we are not actually performing until we make a commitment of competence to an audience, a commitment that triggers or keys the performance frame (Bateson 1979; Bauman, Goffman). It is the frame that makes a world of heightened, nonreferential meaning available to both the self and the audience (Bauman 1975, 292; Langellier 1989, 251). But the frame also makes the self vulnerable by empowering the audience to evaluate the performer (Bauman 1975, 293), and within that performer, the self (Goffman 1974, 252-253). To perform – and to perform teaching -- is to risk the self in a ritualistic rite of passage, described by Victor Turner in *Blazing the Trail*. It is in this risky process that transcendence becomes possible, and it is the opportunity for transcendence which gives performance as a way of looking at communication and living its strength and utility.

In my estimation, performance is the process of organizing life's bits and pieces into some kind of cohesive whole. Without the need to perform them, without the need to understand them, these bits and pieces of facts and experience would be perfectly content to remain as randomly distributed and meaningless life junk, just so much flotsam and jetsam. Organization is the first step in performance. Presentation of what's been organized is the second step, the one that completes the performance process. Stories can serve a number of purposes, well enumerated by Kristin Langellier. I suspect that at any given moment, any given story is doing all five to some extent or another.

Narrative which constitutes the content of performance has two components. One is representational, the other evaluative. The representational aspect of narrative is the story itself, the account of events which is usually seen as more or less objective. The evaluative aspect of narrative situates the story's objective content and itself can be divided into two aspects. One evaluative aspect is the value structure of the story itself. The other evaluative aspect is more superficial — it is commentary which tells the reader or audience how the story should be interpreted. The value structure of the story itself is woven throughout the story's fabric and is one of the fascinating characteristics of narrative: Every story comes with a complete scheme of values and ethics. The more superficial value structure delivered in the author's commentary is not so desirable. It is frequently viewed as artifice — manipulation on the part of the author — the sign of either a ham-handed writer, a weak story, or both. To that extent, the best performance parallels the best narrative. In both, the presence of the storyteller is so minimal as to be rendered virtually invisible. The presentation is confident, effortless, smooth, relaxed. The reader or audience need not constantly struggle with tracking the plot. Everything seems natural, organic, orderly. When performance organizes experience into narrative, this is the ideal.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has surveyed theory of performance as narrative, applicable in this study because the performance of teaching is at once both *self* and *narrative* – self from the inside of the performer, narrative from the outside (which constitutes *experience*). It

would seem that, having viewed performance from the inside and performance from the outside, we'd be done. But there is one more important avenue to explore: performance as mysticism.

## CHAPTER FIVE: A MYSTICAL SENSE OF PERFORMANCE

In Chapter Two, I addressed the inside of performance by looking at performance as self and as autobiography. In Chapter Three, I addressed the outside of performance by looking at it as narrative. On one level that covers the entire waterfront – there's the inside and the outside, and there's nothing else to talk about. But neither performance of self nor performance of narrative addresses the key issue of this study: What is it that happens during performance that produces its ineffable pleasures?

A third perspective on performance proves interesting and useful here, a perspective on performance that can be seen as a context for both self and narrative, underlying them just as context underlines text, as metacommunication underlies communication. It is performance as shamanism. Performance as shamanism allow us to look at and talk about the insides, the outsides, and *everything else*, which is much that is intriguing here.

Missing in self and narrative that is hinted at in the ultra-rational work of phenomenologists: What of that which cannot be described? That which cannot be spoken? That for which there are no words? What's going on when the self and experience seem to momentarily disappear? Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi provides one explanation in the idea of *flow*, a

subjective state [that] has been reportedly experienced by creative artists when working, by athletes at the height of competition, by surgeons while performing difficult operations, and by ordinary people in the midst of most satisfying

activities. In other words, states of optimal experience in a wide variety of contexts, including meditation, prayer, and mystical union, are described in terms of very similar subjective parameters (Csikszentmihalyi, 362).

The flow experience has these characteristics (362):

1. A narrowing of conscious focus.
2. A focus on the unfolding present and simultaneous exclusion from consciousness of thoughts about the past, the future, or other extraneous matters.
3. An absence of doubt and critical reflection about the current activity.
4. A sense of confidently knowing where you stand. Goals are clear, feedback is unambiguous.
5. A lack of concern about any inability to control the situation.
6. A vanishing of self-consciousness that may lead to a sense of transcending ego boundaries and union with something mystically larger, in some cases a sense of greater good.

I have experienced all of these things in performance, and I've talked with others who have too. I have also experienced these things when I am teaching. I believe that these characteristics arise sometimes in performance because performance sometimes works at a fundamental level of human existence, where ritual, story-telling, life, language, and death all converge. I believe that these feelings arise for other practitioners — artists, athletes, surgeons, to name but a few — because they also work at the same fundamental level.

### **Flow as shamanism**

Before I was introduced to Csikszentmihalyi's idea of flow, I could express the feelings under scrutiny here in no way other than as some sort of religious or spiritual experience. Of the explanations I found available through research, the idea of shamanism came closest and was the most interesting. (Shamanism turns out to be doubly interesting here, in the context here of performance/pedagogy, because the shaman is one who both performs and teaches.

Shamanism is a religious phenomenon of Siberia and Central Asia, later spreading to the Americas, Indonesia, and Oceania. The word *shaman* comes from the Manchu-Tungus word *saman*. Literally, it means "he who knows." The word *shaman* is often used synonymously with *sorcerer*, *magician*, *medicine man*, and the shaman is all these things, but the practice of these pursuits individually does not make one a shaman. Shamans do not conduct sacrifices. In its simplest form, shamanism is the technique of ecstasy, the ability to achieve a state beyond reason and self-control. Shamans are not possessed by spirits; instead they *use* spirits to achieve various ends. Shamans form a mystical elite who not only direct the critical parts of a community's religious life but guard the community's soul. "*The shaman is the great specialist in the human soul; he alone 'sees' it, for he knows its 'form' and its destiny*" (Eliade, 4-8).

Shamans are believed to perform miracles and can also be priests, mystics, or poets. Of poetry and truth, Ben Jonson wrote: "Hence hee is call'd a Poet, not hee which writeth in measure only; but that faineth and formeth a fable, and writes things *like* the

Truth. For, the Fable and Fiction is (as it were) the forme and Soule of any Poeticall worke, or Poeme” (cited in Smith, 10).

Shamans receive their call in a variety of ways, depending on their cultures. Some inherit it. Others are called to shamanism by gods or spirits. Still others pursue shamanism on their own or at the insistence of their community. Regardless of the form of election, if ecstatic experience does not soon follow, the process ends. Those who *are* capable of ecstatic experience go through a grueling initiation, both in the spiritual world by the gods and spirits, and in the here-and-now by trial and ordeal at the hands of master shamans and their own community. Common to all initiations is some form of real or symbolic death, ordeal, and rebirth.

In the contemporary literary world, shamanism is alive and well. Ezra Pound considered himself a shaman. He saw himself as a visionary, a traveler between worlds, a self-healed healer, a guide of souls — the mysterious figure who more than likely represents the primordial *homo religiosus*.... (Eastham, xiv). William Faulkner created a major character (Darl) in *As I Lay Dying* who one critic sees as a shamanistic refraction of the author — the performing consciousness of a narrator experiencing life through others; an uncanny ability to know things not experienced; a hint of madness; a desire to uncover secrets; a search for healing; a journey into the world of the dead (Anderson). Walt Whitman approached his work as if he were a shaman, seeking throughout his life to pin down the single origin of all poems and of all religions in an attempt to reunite soul and body in some sort of cultural and social harmony. In *The Sleepers*, for example, Whitman has created a protagonist who is a healer and prophet, aided by spirits, troubled

by the suffering of others, who cures them and in the process experiences a religious vision (Hutchinson, 59-67) — a prototypical shaman.

### **The shaman's tool kit**

Out-of-body experience is *the* major tool in a shaman's kit. In a trance (real or feigned) the shaman's soul flies to heaven, descends into the underworld, or wanders the earth. The shaman learned during initiation what he must do when his soul leaves his body, how to orient himself in the unknown regions, how to explore new realms of existence. He knows the obstacles he will face and how to overcome them. In short, writes Eliade, "He knows the paths that lead to Heaven and Hell" (1987, 205).

Falling into a trance may seem extreme, but readers do it all the time. Have you ever completely *lost track of time* while you were reading? Have you ever *gone* somewhere in a book where you've never really been? Can you explain how you *got* there? Was it effortless? Did it cost anything? In a story, have you ever identified deeply with an *animal*, like Bambi, or a *machine*, like The Little Engine That Could? Did you at some point *know* what a character would do, without knowing *how* you knew? Have you felt your heart pound? Your breath quicken? Even though you're snuggled comfortably in a chair in your living room? Have you ever learned a painful lesson from a story or a poem, without having to experience the actual pain? Have you ever said to yourself, "My god, that was horrible! I don't *ever* want to go there / be like that / make such a stupid mistake / get hurt that way?"



Those who read literature *as* literature (and not for information) know this trance. An avid reader has gone places and done things through the magic of moveable type that a shaman of old could ever dream of. There are two keys to the literary trance. One is the pre-existence of a healthy mystic consciousness, which makes your mind fertile for the new, the profound, the unexpected. The other key is a willingness to turn yourself over — as completely as possible — to the realm of the story. The more fantastic the story, the more difficult this can be. In this “letting go,” the self disappears, later to be reborn. In all but the most innocuous circumstances, it can be scary. Though symbolic, there is a tiny bit of death involved. But that, according to Eastham, is the price of admission: “We cannot leave our proper reality without ceasing to be who we are” (7).

There is a classic sequence at work here, both for the reader of literature and for the shaman’s community of followers. The sequence parallels the shaman’s initiation ceremony, shamanic performance, and rights-of-passage ritual in general.

These three phases of ritual are separation, liminality, and aggregation (Gennep). In the liminal phase, people involved are “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial,” writes Victor Turner. Liminality blends lowliness and sacredness, homogeneity and comradeship to produce timeless moments outside the social structure (95-96). Society, Turner writes, is produced and maintained by the dialectical ebb and flow of the opposing human needs for structure and for a finely-tuned notion generated in liminality that Turner calls *communitas*.

It is as if there are two major 'models' for human relation, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is *structure*, the differentiated, hierarchical system of positions within the worlds of politics, law, and economy. Structure separates people into those with property and those without, those with power and those without, those with choices and those with none. The second model emerges recognizably in times of transition or liminality. This second model is a society of fellowship and equality, "an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals..." (96).

The distinction between structure and *communitas* is more than the difference between secular and sacred or between political and religious. *Communitas* operates on a different plane. Turner describes it as an "essential and generic human bond, without which there could be *no* society" (97; emphasis original). *Communitas* can emerge spontaneously or in the fellowship of crisis. *Communitas* can also be generated -- though not enduringly -- through ritual. *Communitas* is what we might expect if a group of people were to read and understand Walt Whitman's elusive cosmic proto-poem, or have a veteran shaman intervene with the spirits on their behalf.

Both keys to contemporary literary ecstasy — a healthy mythical imagination and the willingness to let go — are readily available to the modern reader. Coherent mystical experiences *are* possible at any and every degree of civilization and of religious situation (Eliade, xix).

## Conclusion

If that is the case – that mystical experiences, or *communitas* – are readily available – then it is entirely logical to presume that they might be created in the classroom just as they can be created on stage or in the reading of a book.... Not in every performance, certainly, not in every book, not in every class on everyday, but the potential is there. Turner says that in performance we have the opportunity to work in the liminal world, and in performance we have the opportunity to entice the audience into the liminal world. In this study we have seen this occur in performance of self, performance of narrative, and performance as shamanism.

We now have a theoretical foundation that allows us too look at the *action* (in a Burkean sense) of a teacher in a classroom as performance itself. In the next chapter we examine the primary data for this study, my own experience as performing teaching, and the teaching experiences and observations of several notable teachers and theorists.

## **Summary**

I set out to perform teaching – a performance for which I had script and no experience – by adhering to several basic principles that I will explore in the next pages. I can attest here that the experience was satisfying (though exhausting) for me. I also conclude from the survey results that my performance of teaching was satisfying for the audience as well.

These two observations underscore that my pursuit of the mystical aspects of performance is not necessarily selfish or hedonistic but entirely appropriate classroom behavior. Below I will compare my teaching experience with those of others of some renown in search of common denominators and further understanding.

### **Inadvertently subversive pedagogy**

*I think if I had to put a finger on what I consider a good education, a good radical education, it wouldn't be anything about methods or techniques. It would be loving people first. If you don't do that, Ché Guevara says, there's no point in being a revolutionary. – Miles Horton (1990, 177)*

Above I asserted that my performance of teaching was based on certain fundamental values or principles, but I was not explicit. In the text that follows, I will review the work of three widely respected educators – Miles Horton, Paulo Freire, and

Maria Montessori – and demonstrate not only what those key values are, but that they are held by each of these teachers.

Both then and in retrospect I am pleasantly surprised that I got away with my performance of teaching. I got more satisfaction from it than I did from performing, and my audience took something more away with them than they wouldn't have gotten from performance – they had mastered to one degree or another a specific, required curriculum and a useful skill to boot. Of 60 or so students, all but three or four seemed to actively enjoy the experience. Without setting out to, I believe I had achieved what Yale Professor Emeritus Seymour Sarason says should be the overarching goal of pedagogy: to kindle the desire to *want* to learn (142-143). No one is as surprised as me.

To further the discussion we can ask Erving Goffman's definitive question, the question that defines everyday life as performance. Goffman says that in any situation we face the question "What's going on here?" and we answer the question by how we "proceed to get on with the affairs at hand" — in other words, how we *perform* (*Frames*, 8). (I appreciate Goffman's theory both for its parsimony and for its immediately incontrovertible segue into performance.)

Of my experience outlined in the previous chapter, I ask Goffman's question: What's going on here? Did I get on with the affairs at hand in a manner that affected the outcome? What specifically happened?

**What's going on here**

For one thing, I surrendered as a strategic move. This act of surrender, an act whose continuous practice in the ideal constitutes humility, has a solid foundation in today's radical pedagogy. Paulo Freire, the highly regarded Brazilian Marxist educator and author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, puts it quite simply:

My first position has to be a humble one vis-à-vis the very process of knowing, and vis-à-vis the process of learning in which as teacher and the students as students are engaged. ... One of the virtues we have to create – because I am sure also that we don't receive virtues as gifts; we make virtues not intellectually but through practice – one of the virtues we have to create in ourselves as progressive educators is the virtue of humility" (1990, 195, my emphasis).

Freire is in good company. Maria Montessori, in her landmark work *The Discovery of the Child*, says much the same thing. In the novel system she proposed early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the teacher "must acquire a moral alertness which has not hitherto been demanded by any other system, and this is revealed in her tranquility, patience, charity, and humility. Not words, but virtues, are her main qualifications" (150, my emphasis).

One of Freire's projects was teaching the illiterate in Brazil's Recife slums. His account is important, because it defines love (a Burkean *God word* if there ever was one) as it will be used in this paper. Freire said he could not have worked in the slums without unique relationships with the people, specifically, "loving people.

It's very dialectical.... In going to the slums and to the peasants I had to be consistent with the reasons why I went there. I did not have any other door but to

love the people – that is, loving people, believing in the people, but not in a naïve way. To be able to accept that all these things the people do are good just because people are people? No, the people also commit mistakes. I don't know many things, but it's necessary to believe in the people. It's necessary to laugh with the people because if we don't do that, we cannot learn from the people, and in not learning from the people we cannot teach them. (1990, 247)

Miles Horton, an American radical of the Labor and Civil Rights movements respected in radical pedagogical circles, spent his life teaching adults on the margins how to assert their rights in a mainstream world – how to organize so they could work without exploitation; how to write so they could vote and have a voice. A contemporary, friend, and co-author of Freire, Horton is not quite so philosophical. Freire's experience is primarily in higher education; Horton's is primarily outside the system entirely. Horton expresses the idea of surrender a little differently: "I believe that there are many truths, many untruths, and there are many right ways to do things and many wrong ways to do things" (1990, 197) But he is just as clear about love:

I think if I had to put a finger on what I consider a good education, a good *radical* education, it wouldn't be anything about methods or techniques. It would be loving people first. If you don't do that, Ché Guevara says, there's no point in being a revolutionary. (1990, 177, his italics, my emphasis).

Says Freire: "The pedagogy of the oppressed... is a task for radicals; it cannot be carried out by sectarians" (21).

These two strategies – love and surrender – reflect an attitude about my audience that I tested and accepted early on in my graduate studies. It is an attitude of acceptance and value for the audience, respect and faith in the performance process itself, an abiding confidence in my own intuition, a willingness to negotiate meaning with the audience. I concur with general postmodern thought that performance can and should lead the audience to critical thinking, but I flinch at the violence of Artaud. I’m more comfortable in the world of Brecht, who allows that even as a device of social reform theater still can and should still be interesting... and even “amusing” (Brecht, 72).

If this attitude toward my audience is mildly noteworthy in performance, in education it bucks the traditional model. Many have written about the faults of the traditional model, Thomas Dewey among them. Sarason summarizes what he called Dewey’s “staggering corpus of writings” on education in these key points (which I have further summarized here):

- *From their earliest days children are curious, questing, questioning, exploring organisms.* When they start school, they are not mindless, unorganized characters.
- *The classroom should be a place where children's constructive characteristics are recognized and respected.* One does not start with a predetermined curriculum that ignores individuality and requires the child to set aside what is in his or her mind to learn what grownups think he or she needs.
- *Children have assets and strengths for productive learning.* If they are viewed as empty vessels or as deficit-ridden, you end up proving you were right in the first place.



- *Schools are not preparation for life; they are life itself.* If problems of life in a democracy are not discussed and reflected in teacher-student and student-student relationships, then children are shortchanged.
- *Teachers should not be "commanders" embodying the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of classroom government.* Filling empty vessels with facts should never be confused with communicating with active minds about what they know and want to know.
- *The role of the teacher is one of coaching, managing, and arranging the learning environment.* This role appears messy in contrast to one where the teacher is essentially a well-meaning autocrat (Sarason, 41-42).

Freire calls his model of traditional education the “banking model,” one which not only “mirrors oppressive society as a whole” but serves to maintain and enforce it. Some of his key points (54):

The teacher teaches and the students are taught.

The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing.

The teacher thinks and the students are thought about.

The teacher talks and the students listen – meekly.

The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined.

The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting.

The teacher chooses the program and the students, who are not consulted, adapt to it.

His most important points are more general ones that deal directly with power and objectification: The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with professional authority, which is set in opposition to the freedom of students, and most succinctly, “the teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects” (54).

Freire’s entire program – like Sarason’s, like Dewey’s, like Horton’s, like Montessori’s -- opposes this archaic (yet imminently present) educational structure. The traditional teacher does not realize, Freire says, that “One cannot impose oneself, or even merely co-exist with one’s students” (57). Delightful for my purposes here is that Freire elevates communication to a spiritual level as he explains the answer to oppression in traditional education and, indeed, to oppressive society in general:

Solidarity requires true communication, and the concept by which such an educator is guided fears and proscribes communication. Yet only through communication can human life hold meaning. The teacher’s thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students’ thinking. The teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose thought on them. Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication. If it is true that thought has meaning only when generated by action on the world, the subordination of students to teachers becomes impossible (57-58).

## **The awesome power of language**

In performing teaching I have been struggling (quite unintentionally ) to live out this awesome model of teaching and, more broadly, an awesome model for living. I am only a beginner. Yet it was just this *possibility* that drew me into the study of communication at first – my suspicion that we humans communicate not only because we can but because we *must* – that to communicate *is* to be human, and that one way to be the most fully human we can be, the most complete, the most perfect (the closest to God; the most God-like?) -- is, as Freire says above – through authentic communication.

My greatest satisfaction comes from teaching (which is big-bore communication) based on ideal commitments to humility, love, surrender – not because I am in the least spiritual but because they are strategies that provide me with the most intense rewards. They are attitudes that I have tried, tested, and learned.

There is nothing about this that is not self-serving. My experience is pleasurable to a fault. At its ultimate it is essentially ineffable yet imminently present. It is the *ecstasy* of the shaman, the *flow* of Csikszentmihalyi, the *jouissance* of Elizabeth Bell, the authenticity of Freire, the love of Miles Horton, the humility of Maria Montessori. It is Zen, the Tao, grace, or simply the ineffable. The remarkable thing is that this is a strategy in which everyone wins.

Kenneth Burke noted in *Grammar of Motives* that to create (with a lower-case “c”) is how we as humans mimic our Creator (with a capital “C”). “This prototype (of the term *act*) we find in the conception of a perfect or total act, such as the act of ‘the Creation’ (1945, 63). One needn’t even consider the idea of a higher power to accept that

communication can be emergent – that things that weren't there before appear from places and in ways unknown through the process of communication. I find this thread of the possibilities of communication in each of the following observations, each by a respected thinker in communication.

Paul Watzlawick wrote: It seems that, quite apart from the mere exchange of ideas, man has to communicate with others for the sake of his own awareness of self.... (84-85)

Kenneth Burke wrote: "Might not the *single song of one poet*, under certain conditions, put us on the track of something that the *typical platitudes of a group* could give us no inkling of?" (1941, 409, italics original).

Jerome Bruner wrote: "One of the great triumphs of learning (and teaching) is to get things organized in your head in a way that permits you to know more than you 'ought' to" (1996, 129).

Richard Bauman wrote: "Every performance will have a unique and emergent aspect" (1986, 4).

Victor Turner wrote: Performers "make ugly or beautiful events or relationships which cannot be recognized as such in the continuous flow of quotidian life in which they are embedded" (1987, 22).

Erving Goffman wrote: "We all act better than we know how" (1959, 74).

A sense of the creative power of words predates the Sophists by centuries. Myth of ancient Samaria provides the earliest example (somewhere between 5000 to 3000 BCE) of the creative power of the word. According to Samaritan myth, major deities brought the objects of creation into being by speaking the command that they be created then pronouncing the objects' names (Wooley).

The importance of knowing the right words is anchored in the oldest of the world's existing religious texts, the Old Indic *Vedas*. These are collections, compiled between 2000 and 1700 BCE (Dandekar, 215) or between 1200 and 1000 BCE, others say, of lyric hymns addressed to or speaking about deities in the particular intimacy of religious communication and communion (Davis, 8). *Veda* literally means *knowledge*, but it is etymologically cognate with *wisdom*. The earliest of the *Vedas* and one of the world's oldest intact religious texts is the *RgVeda*, which identifies the holiest of humans as the priestly class, the *brahmins* — more powerful even than kings and warriors (Puhvel, 45-47). *Brahmin*, in Sanskrit, means *he who knows the formulas* or *he who knows the words* (Polomé).

This power of words is present in the Hebrew *Torah*, which became the first five chapters of the *Bible's* Old Testament. Hebrew tradition says that Genesis, the official story of creation today for Jews and Christians both, was spoken by God through Moses, and Moses most likely led the Hebrew exodus from Egypt sometime in the 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Thus the story of creation found in Genesis is at least that old. In Genesis, God doesn't actually *do* anything but talk. Yet God's words are synonymous with Creation. "Then God said, Let there be light.... And God said, Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters.... And God said.... and God said.... and God said."... When God finishes creating a chunk of empirical reality with words, he names his creations. "God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.... God called the dome Sky.... God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas."... When God finishes naming a creation, he sometimes looks at it and expresses his opinion of its

value. “And God saw that the light was good”... (New Revised Standard Version, Genesis 1.1-2.4).

The *RgVeda*, in addition to defining the ultimate social class of humans as those who ‘know the words,’ identifies a goddess named *Vāc* (rhymes with *watch*), associated with speech and wisdom. Words in this early context, in addition to routinely symbolizing the absent and abstract, were believed to have the power to actually create. When a Vedic god named Prajāpati in the *Brāhmanas* (about 800 BCE) speaks the primal syllables *bhūr*, *bhuvah*, and *sva*, he creates earth, the atmosphere, and heaven, giving order to the world through name and form. *Vāc* now is an independent deity who is also Prajāpati’s wife. As such she sometimes is the true active agent in “creating or, more accurately, becoming the universe” (Wheelock, 440, my emphasis). The word *Vāc* appears in later texts to describe divine energy *embodied* in the use of language (Eliade, 277).

This idea of the use of words being synonymous with creating, with Creation, with God, and with life appears in a most lyrical and literal form in the New Testament Book of John (1.1-1.5), written between 90 and 100 CE. It is a powerful text regardless of one’s theological leanings:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

As if to bring this whole Christian progression back to include humans, the New Revised Standard Version subhead which precedes the text above reads, “The Word Becomes Flesh.”

The concept of *Vāc* is comparable to the idea in Western religious traditions of *logos*, the rational principle that pervades and orders nature. In the writings of Philo Judaeus (30 CE to 50 CE), *logos* is identified with the biblical “word of God.” By 150 CE, Christians had begun to refer to Jesus as *Logos*. The Christian view of *logos* seems to stress its quality as language, word, and message rather than thought. There is, simultaneous in this early Christian usage, the complimentary idea that *logos* is a principle of salvation as well, delivering the message that shows the way to return to a condition of original cosmic purity (Wheelock, 440).

This double duty of language (both as world-ordering and as salvation providing) is found well articulated in Hindu Tantric philosophy circa 1000 CE. Though the supreme god of Hindu Tantrism (*Śiva*) is pure consciousness and necessarily silent, in this god’s first solid form he unites with his consort, *Vāc*. In addition to the earlier *Vedic* translation as “speech,” *Vāc* in this later literature is also defined as *śakti* — “power” — the female agency of creation. Creation itself begins with a slight vibration that develops into the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, then into spoken words, then into the words’ referents — that is, the actual concrete objects of reality. Syllables, words, or sentences that serve both liturgy and meditation are called *mantras*. A Tantric follower who had mastered *mantras* was believed to be able to control and reverse cosmic evolution, returning

himself to a primordial state of unity and silence — the goal of Tantric practice (Wheelock, 440).

Much the same thing happened in Qabbalah, the medieval tradition of Jewish mysticism. Practitioners believed that God is knowable through a series of ten emanations of light that flow from him. They also believed that from God emanates a succession of divine names and letters: the 22 consonants of the Hebrew alphabet. By combining these letters in correct combinations, it was said that a Qabbalah initiate could repeat acts of cosmic creation (Wheelock, 440).

Any liturgy (any *text*, for that matter) repeated often enough long enough can lose its power to invoke the sacred, the authentic, can lose its power to inspire and teach. Reaction to such empty formalism has launched many religious movements, driven by people who seek vernacular expression of their religious feelings. So began Martin Luther's emphasis (about 1520) of liturgical practices such as sermons and his stress on not scripture but its interpretation. So too much earlier began Buddhism (Wheelock, 441), circa 420 BCE.

The man who would come to be known as *the Buddha* was born Gautama Siddhartha about 480 BCE in a village that today straddles the border of Nepal and India. He died at age 80. For purposes of talking about language, Buddhism can be divided into two periods — pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism, which ranged from the Buddha's enlightenment until 100 BCE to 100 CE, and Mahāyāna Buddhism, which began with the fading of early Buddhism. The first period of Buddhism concentrated on ending suffering through the enlightenment of individual followers. The second period saw that strategy as selfish



and inadequate, and focused instead on total altruism and social awakening to alleviate the suffering of *all* beings.

Early Buddhism identifies language with discursive or conceptual thought and links conceptual thought with erroneous knowledge (Gomez, 446). The Nikāyas and Āgamas attest to the ineffable nature of Buddhism's goal.

The pre-Mahāyāna Buddhist idea of *dharma* (the basic principles of cosmic or individual existence) defines two kinds of language. One is *prajñapti*, which is conventional language. The other is *parāmartha*, which is language that someone who is enlightened would use to describe reality. Mahāyāna Buddhism acknowledged only the first — conventional language — and saw the realm of enlightenment instead as a “nonlinguistic sphere.” Adherents of this second position were fond of charging their Hindu counterparts with reification of language. The Mahāyāna *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* describes the world of speech as a world of delusion, synonymous with the disturbed and illusory mind. As a result, it is said that the Buddha abided in “the silence of the sage.”

The *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* asserts that *everything* is language and that only silence expresses ultimate reality. Yet it is difficult to imagine a practical religion based completely on literal silence, and the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* and the *Tathāgataguhyā Sūtra* provide a way out. Mahāyāna Buddhism's practical turn consisted of acknowledging that language is not misleading when it is used *skillfully* as a *means* to achieve the goals of Buddhism (Gomez, 447) — that is, when you know the right words.

Words remain a problem today, even for the best. Ernest Hemingway told an interviewer for *Paris Review* that he rewrote the last page of *A Farewell to Arms* 39 times.

“Was there some technical problem there?” the interviewer asked. “What was it that had stumped you?”

“Getting the words right,” Hemingway said.

\* \* \*

Finding exactly the right words becomes doubly difficult when the subject under exploration lies on the margins of human experience. And yet we as humans are constantly drawn there, toward that utopia which Christians call *grace*, Plato called *Truth*, and Buddha called *nirvana*.

This line of thought started with teaching, equated it with performance, then selected surrender as a teaching strategy. It enlarged the idea of surrender to include love and humility, and found those components acknowledged as fundamental to successful pedagogy by three educators whose radical credentials are rock solid.

I confess to having been introduced to these three ideas – surrender, love, humility – in another discipline many years ago, which I explore in the next chapter. And though I have practiced them only occasionally and with little success, I have found them extremely useful. When I began performing as a graduate student in 1994 – again, having absolutely no idea what I was doing -- I applied them to the best of my ability and credit them for my successes. I began then to search for these ideas in performance literature. If

I were to say that the ideas appear nowhere in that literature, I would of course be proved wrong. But I can say that in almost eight years of academic reading and 21 courses dealing either directly or indirectly with performance, I have never encountered the ideas of *surrender*, *humility*, and *love* in any substantive way. Further, I've talked with several practicing performance scholars in search of these ideas. They too report that they do not appear in performance literature.

So I find it remarkable that surrender, humility, and love appear so readily in the foundational literature of radical pedagogy.

### **Performance as transcendence**

The essence of performance is a temporary, equivocal, and delightful freedom from the struggle of being human. From a rational standpoint, this experience could be considered a freedom from the material, a step into the mystical or supernatural. From a psychoanalytic standpoint, this experience could be considered a step into the unconscious. Either way, it is a step into a realm that is in some way, to some extent, knowable. Such a step is also pleasurable. Such a step is transcendent.

Not all performance is transcendent. Some is acting, some is presenting, some is mere recitation. Transcendence results from performance of acts that distinguish humans from animals, and that distinguish a Christian god from humans: the act of creation and the act of love.

At the beginning of this paper I said that the culture of our performance class might have a bearing on the transcendent performances, and I think it does. It requires a

relationship between the performer and audience members; and actor/spectatorship relationship will not do. The acts and attitudes embodied in performance are the means to create this relationship, and the creation of this relationship is performance on a transcendent level.

### **Transcendent acts**

Assuming an audience, a text, and the opportunity to perform, how does one achieve transcendence through performance? The answer is absurd, in the abstract ridiculous, and in reality quite practical and achievable: Be godlike. Love your audience actively and without qualification or judgment. Create something new for them. Ask and expect nothing in return. Profit beyond imagination. (which in its totality is a good definition of parenthood, too.)

Love, in a performance sense: Love here is the fabric that unites the performer and the audience. It is a relationship that on its most fundamental level is devoid of desire, emotion, or expectation; it is devoid of the subject/object relationship. There is no romance in a transcendent performer's love for the audience. It is not a feeling. Rather, love as used here is strategic. It is infinitely neutral, calm, and even. It is ultimately tolerant and accepting, a context in which risks can be taken and successes can occur, both for the performer and for the audience. Within this thought of love in a performance sense is a definition of love by M. Scott Peck, author of *A Road Less Traveled*: "Love is the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual

growth” (81). Introduction of the spiritual is introduction of the transcendental. Here’s how that works.

The process of performing on a level that is transcendent is evolutionary. To extend and succeed is to grow. The act of loving is an act of self-evolution even when the purpose of the act is someone else’s growth. It is through reaching toward evolution that we evolve. “If an act is not one of work or courage, then it is not an act of love. There are no exceptions. (Peck, 120)

The desire to love is not love itself. Love is an act of will – namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies action. We do not have to love. We choose to love (Peck 83).

### **Faith, in a performance sense**

Faith allows a performer to take chances, to be vulnerable, to overcome fear. Faith allows the audience to participate when it might be safer to observe. Faith is what makes bravado into courage.

“Courage is not the absence of fear, it is the making of action in spite of fear, the moving out against the resistance engendered by fear into the unknown and into the future. On some level spiritual growth, and therefore love, always requires courage and involves risk.” (Peck 131)

Faith guarantees that whatever the outcome of the performance, it will be both appropriate and, ultimately, okay. There is no anticipation bound up in this form of love,

no hope for pleasure or expectation that desire will be fulfilled. This love is giving, not a transaction. And because it is not a transaction, it cannot fail. It cannot disappoint.

### **Humility, in a performance sense**

Love of others is a love of humanity and includes love of self. Not only do love of others and self-love go hand in hand but ultimately they are indistinguishable. (Peck, 82).

Humility is nothing more than proper self-love.

Humility is typically misunderstood. To have humility is not to be meek, to grovel, to be subjugated, to be humiliated. Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less. Humility is not downsizing of the ego but rightsizing. Humility is self-love and, like love itself, has great strategic value.

Humility makes the performer bullet proof. This rightsizing, this balance is critical to the faith and trust that make love of the audience possible. A person without the capacity for self importance or self-pity is, in the words of Carlos Castaneda, invulnerable.

### **Madness, in a performance sense**

In the course of day-to-day human affairs, this sort of behavior – loving in this way – might seem a form of madness. But madness, love, and transcendence go hand in hand. Socrates said:

We said that love is a kind of madness, did we not?... And that there are two kinds of madness, one arising from human diseases, and the other from a divine release from customary habits?... (Aristotle, 134).

So love is madness, and madness is a release from customary habits. A release from customary habits is transcendence. Moving over to performance and working backward, performance is a release from customary habits. And that release can be seen as a product of benign madness. Benign madness is a product of love, therefore love is a factor in performance.

### **Creation, in a performance sense**

Creation is a transcendent act. Something new is created each time someone performs. While it is a stretch to suggest that each and every human effort at creativity is transcendent, it is not a stretch to suggest that creativity in its pure form transcends the human condition. “We stand here at a moment of great indeterminacy, the watershed moment that slopes down to ‘being’ on one side and ‘becoming’ on the other,” wrote Kenneth Burke. (Grammar, 63). Love, surrender, and humility will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Another place the ideas of love, surrender and humility appear is in contemporary literature on leadership.

### **Spirituality defined through leadership**

Fear, need, hope, and intrigue about a better way of doing things have prompted interest in the spiritual aspects of leadership starting with Robert Greenleaf's *Servant Leadership* (1977) and continuing through the 1980s and early 1990s, when spirituality was a hot topic in the journals. In 1993, Jack Hawley wrote *Reawakening the Spirit in Work: The Power of Dharmic Management*. Genuine transformation is a spiritual expedition, he says, and this book tells the stories of that trip. In 1995, Terrence E. Deal and Lee G. Bolman wrote *Leading with Soul*, the story of a manager overwhelmed by his inability to lead effectively. He sought a guru, abandoned rational and technical solutions (he surrendered, in terms used above), and took instead the less traveled path of spirituality. In 1996, Gay Hendricks wrote *The Corporate Mystic: A Guidebook for Visionaries With Their Feet on the Ground*. It suggests that it is entirely possible to be spiritual and still lead an effective, profitable organization.

Spirituality is not religion. Religion is a distaste for the current state of affairs, a vision of a better deal, and a plan for getting there (Hutchinson). It is essentially a survival plan with an escape route. Spirituality, on the other hand, focuses on how one can live in peace and harmony *within* the current state of affairs. A religious person looks to a god for salvation. A spiritual person struggles to accept a world beyond



understanding, and to live in concert with it. All sincere religion is spiritual, but not all spirituality is religion. Spirituality stretches beyond religion into the secular world. Religion is a plan. Spirituality is an attitude. Three definitions of spirituality help explain.

The first definition comes from a 1994 issue of the *Journal of Managerial Psychology*. Neck and Milliman define spirituality as a transcendent personal state which is difficult to describe and must be experienced [hence the earlier reference to John Dewey on experience]. It is beyond one's physical senses, mind, and feelings. In this state, individuals are able to transcend their normal limitations to see fresh new possibilities and realities, perceive reality as holistic, and perceive the underlying oneness of life. Spiritual individuals see themselves connected with each other and sometimes with nature as well. They believe that a person's purpose is larger than self and immediate family, and that one should contribute to society as a whole to help create a more meaningful world. Common spiritual values and attitudes include living with integrity, developing a sacredness in one's relationships, and focusing on health, happiness, empowerment, inner peace, truth, right-conduct, well-being, and love.

The second definition, from David Benner's *Psychotherapy and the Spiritual Quest*, reinforces the subtlety of the idea. "Spirituality is the response to a deep and mysterious human yearning for self-transcendence and surrender. This yearning results from having been created in such a fashion that we are incomplete when we are self-encapsulated.... When we experience this self-transcendence surrender we suddenly realize that we have found our place.... We may never have realized that our restlessness was a search for place, but when we find it, we know this is the place we belong" (cited

in Nevard, 191). In management practice, spirituality can be characterized in terms of behavior as (1) awareness of people, their needs and potential — the spiritual executive is calm, confident, honest, trusting, approachable; (2) empathy and concern for truth — the spiritual executive is gentle, generous, humorous, caring, creating, refreshing, open; and (3) love — the spiritual executive is concerned for and interested in people, creating a deep sense of justice (191). [These are all on point with previous references to Montessori, Freire, and Horton.]

The third definition of spirituality focuses on ultimate purpose and loss of ego. An organization becomes spiritual when it incorporates Gregory Bateson's idea of *service* to its primary level of learning, efficient operations, and its secondary level of learning, strategic learning. Service to a higher good, Bateson writes, "involves a transcendence of the ego-world, where experience is oriented to and made sense of through some rational self... Thus it is the realm which... can be talked about only in symbolic, mandalic, and paradoxical language." To the degree that one achieves this higher level of learning, Bateson writes, the "self will take on a sort of irrelevance. The concept of self will no longer function as a nodal argument in the punctuation of experience" (cited in Hawkins, 176). (For a detailed discussion and application of Bateson's levels of learning, see the last chapter.)

But spirituality as a leadership model has its real-world problems, though they are not insurmountable or fatal. Earlier, I identified five ideas common to the major spiritual traditions — compassion, right livelihood, selfless service, work as meditation, and

pluralism — that can create tension in the traditionally unspiritual corporate world.

Before we move on, I want to acknowledge some concerns.

- **Compassion:** A spiritual executive feels deep sympathy and understanding for others, but it is unrealistic to ignore the dark side of the human spirit.  
Compassion, caring and trust must be reciprocated for there to be a workable relationship.
- **Selfless service:** A spiritual worker or executive believes along with Hindus that selfless service through work leads to union with God. But making one's work a form of selfless service is not always easy or possible. Sustained and undistorted spiritual growth of any consequence requires an enormous personal commitment.
- **Work as meditation:** A spiritual executive becomes absorbed in work, losing sense of self and becoming one with activity. Work becomes meditation. Besides the fact that not all work is adsorbing, there is a second consideration: *Mere survival within an organization's power relationships requires the primary attention of all but the highest ranking workers, leaving a low priority for spirituality.*
- **Pluralism:** Spirituality would ideally function in a tolerant community of spiritually like-minded individuals. In one extreme, this could infringe on the freedom of others to believe as they choose. In the other extreme, corporate culture itself is seldom a model of tolerance. Spirituality may not survive institutionalization. Instead it is absorbed into “an essentially rule-bound and hierarchically based system where much of the original meaning and quality of

experience was very fundamentally distorted through oppressive and limiting social processes”(Adlam, 214).

Beyond agreement that spirituality is sufficiently mystical that it’s hard to talk about, these three definitions of spirituality have two elements in common. One is the dissolution to some extent of ego or sense of self, which makes possible deep, caring, trusting relationships. The other is a focus on some higher purpose or service to a greater good. *Leadership and spirituality together are not a tactic or a strategy. They are a paradigm* (Hawley, 166).

### **Practical aspects of leadership**

The practical aspects of leadership emerge from different places. A chart created by Hawley in his book *Reawakening the Spirit in Work* (167) demonstrates. Though the first two columns in Hawley’s chart were headed “Manager” and “Leader,” I have renamed them “Traditional teacher” and “Performer teacher” to illustrate how well the idea translates:

<b>Teacher as boss is concerned with..</b>	<b>Teacher as performer is concerned with.</b>	<b>Spiritual basis</b>	<b>Making the performer teacher a...</b>
Goals and objectives	Vision	Covenant	Sense-maker
Honesty	Integrity	Dharma (truth)	Moral architect
Priorities	Values	Virtue	Steward
Operations and strategies	State of mind	Inner peace or equanimity	Yogi
Getting	Giving	Service	Servant
Productivity of people	Well-being of people	Spiritual awareness	Guide
Sense of teamwork	Sense of community	Unity and wholeness	Whole-maker
Error correction	Acknowledgment	Gratitude	Optimist
Problem solving and decision making	Presence	Higher power	Warrior

We could just as well have headed the “teacher as boss” column with “transactional leader” and the “teacher as performer” column with Bass’s “transformational leader,” O’Toole’s “value-based leader,” or Greenleaf’s “servant leader.”

All the ideas of spiritual leadership overlay elegantly with the benefits of abandoning traditional pedagogy – where the teacher is the boss – and replacing it with a new idea of teacher as performer. If you look down the column, the entries beneath these different titles would not change. Look across the rows and you’ll see much the same relationships and progression. A “teacher as boss” is concerned with goals and objectives, a “teacher as performer” is concerned with vision. A “teacher as boss” is concerned with

keeping people honest, a “teacher as performer” is concerned with integrity. A “teacher as boss” sets priorities, a “teacher as performer” is the steward of fundamental values. “Teachers as bosses” focus on operations and their tactics and strategies, “teachers as performers” engage in the “service” level of learning that Gregory Bateson wrote about, which I’ve cited above. “Teachers as bosses” control things, “teachers as performers” provide things. Essentially, “teachers as bosses” are in the gritty business of problem solving. “Teachers as performers” are in the loftier business of creating. “Management,” says Hawley, “is control and coordination. Leadership (read: “teaching as performing”) is profound caring and respect — you might say love and spirit” (168).

### Sites of struggle

Methods and techniques, substance and curriculum, are all ultimately represented in the four elements of performance: teacher-performer, student-audience, classroom-stage, curriculum-script. And all are the sites of postmodern struggle in a nation routinely disappointed with traditional education yet not quite marshalling the resolve to do anything much differently.

Teacher = Performer
Student = Audience member
Curriculum = Script
University = Stage

These four education-performance relationships can be further reduced and simplified – in light of Miles Horton’s assertion that a good radical education is first about loving people. In college, the teacher is captain of the classroom and so controls the space. The teacher is creator of the day’s activities, and so controls the script. The teacher

is hired by the university and so represents the theater, over which the student is all but powerless. And the teacher grades the student.

It has all the attributes of a stage play where audience members pay an at-best mediocre actor in return for doing exactly as he says and telling him how wonderful he is when it's all

Teacher = Performer, director,  
producer, playwright,  
theater owner,  
& ultimate critic

Student = (there's nothing left  
but subservience)

over. But the metaphor gets worse. The audience member in our traditional teaching metaphor most likely has only marginal say in what theater he goes to, and he'll probably only get one other such decision in his life. He doesn't get to decide what plays he sees – at least not for the first two years or so, and then he still sees much of what he's told. The final insult is that society has been busy convincing this unfortunate theatergoer all his life that what he amounts to for ever and ever will most likely depend on how good he is at... at what? At being completely disenfranchised. The teacher has all the wealth; the student is a beggar. Carried to its extreme – which it certainly is through middle school and high school – this metaphor would be laughably archaic were it not so pathetically true.

Even then, it might be excused as an embarrassing matter of antiquated politics rather than abuse of power. But the case can be made that it is in its own way traditional pedagogy is ultimately an act of violence -- as much an act of violence toward those we teach as it is toward ourselves, the teacher. Psychotherapist R.D. Laing wrote in *The Politics of Experience*:

Love and violence, properly speaking, are polar opposites. Love lets the other be, but with affection and concern. Violence attempts to constrain the other's freedom, to force him to act in the way we desire, but with ultimate lack of concern, with indifference to the other's own existence or destiny. We are effectively destroying ourselves by violence masquerading as love (58).

I cannot read Laing with my traditional pedagogy metaphor in mind without seeing violence written all over it.

And yet, if I had been the kind of teacher I had wanted to be when I took over my first class, that's exactly the kind of classroom I would have had: one with everything (and everyone) resolutely under my control so that I would not be afraid or look stupid. I would have represented exactly what produces unsatisfactory experiences for students. But because I didn't know what I was doing and decided to admit it, I happened upon a metaphor that I was familiar with. And it turns out that performance is a much better metaphor for teaching and learning because it apportions power more fairly. It is based on love rather than violence; on honesty rather than control, on trust rather than fear, on confidence rather than arrogance.

### **Conclusion**

In the end, teaching is not about methodology, nor is it about subject matter. Teaching is about a world view, about values, and about introducing those values to others. In this chapter I've suggested that performing is a good metaphor for teaching – better than what is conventional – and I've suggested that a series of spiritual values best promotes the postmodern potentialities of intersubjectivity, inclusiveness, wholeness,



integrity, and respect. I do not find these values in much postmodern performance. From Artaud to Brecht (pillars of the avant-garde) to many popular present-day postmodern performance artists, I find the audience under attack. Artaud is willing – and quite eager – to resort to violence upon the audience, if need be. Brecht may be better medicated but nonetheless is quite clear that traditional theater has got to go. In its place is an epic theater that turns audience members into individual critics of society... never mind their needs or desires. Contemporary performance artists strive to show us the seams, the disjunction, the arcane.

Whether I knew something about teaching or not, my students seemed to think I did, and so I could say that my performance of teaching has been my most successful performance yet. And yet the question continues to daunt me: Why? What is the nature of my performance that it is perceived as teaching? More succinctly, what is the nature of my relationship between my audience and me? Where does this feeling of completeness and peace come from?

A hint came when I introduced performance as shamanism and suggested that it serve as the context for performance of self and performance as narrative. I see now that this context itself has a context, and exploring this context of contexts leads to the work of Gregory Bateson, explored more fully in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX: BATESON, THE 12 STEPS, AND LEVELS OF LEARNING

*There is nothing more lonely than eternity. And nothing is more cozy for us than to be a human being. This indeed is another contradiction -- how can man keep the bonds of his humanness and still venture gladly and purposefully into the absolute loneliness of eternity? Whenever you resolve this riddle, you'll be ready for the definitive journey.*

-- Don Juan, quoted by Carlos Castañeda

In research for this paper, I've found but one explanation in the communication literature for phenomena variously defined in the previous chapter as ecstasy, flow, *jouissance*, Zen, Tao, grace, or simply the ineffable. The framework for an explanation lies in the work of Gregory Bateson and particularly in his essay "Logical Categories of Learning and Communication."

Though he acknowledges that "Zen Buddhists, Occidental mystics, and some psychiatrists assert that these matters are totally beyond the reach of language" (301-302), it does not hinder him. In the essay Bateson lays out four levels of learning:

1. Learning Zero is simple receipt of information, as in learning what time it is (287).
2. Learning I is what most people traditionally consider learning. I awaken early on Thursdays because that's when I have to take the trash out (288).

3. Learning II at its simplest is learning to learn -- the student who finds that memorizing multiplication tables gets easier over time. At its most complex, Learning II is *self*; it is the roles people play that create identity; it is the punctuation of human interaction through tacit negotiation of mutual meaning (294-300).
4. Learning III is a “profound reorganization of the character” that throws open to question and change the abstract, philosophical, aesthetic, and ethical aspects of many sequences of life (301, 303).

Three things are implicit in the progression of the levels of learning: they become more abstract; they become exponentially more complex; and they become less and less subject to conscious inspection. As a framework they provide a logical way to further explore Goffman’s “getting on with the affairs at hand” in the performing of teaching.

There’s nothing tricky about Learning Zero; it is the receipt of information. *When I hear the Tower chime, I know it is noon.*

Learning I is “learning” as most people use the word. *My dog learns to come in out of the rain to stay dry.* But the possibilities beneath the elementary idea of Learning I begin to open up exponentially.

Learning I contains the idea of *context*, “a metamessage which classifies the elementary signal” (289). Without context, all learning would be Learning Zero. Said another way, without context, no signal – no message, no communication – can have meaning (Watzlawick, 64). Context tends to be analogic, and the analogic itself offers a richness – even a validity -- not found in the discrete, the digital, the symbolic, in what

we think of in a literal sense as *information*. Analogic communication, Watzlawick wrote,

Has its roots in far more archaic periods of evolution and is, therefore, of much more general validity than the relatively recent, and far more abstract, digital mode of verbal communication (62).

A second interesting aspect of *context* is that it typically operates in the realm of the human subconscious. Vocal inflection, word choice, body language – most of the contextual cues we use to interpret messages (and to tell others how our own messages should be interpreted) operate at a level of which we are unaware. Once they are brought to our attention, it is no great feat to cultivate a sensitivity to contexts and even to learn to manipulate them to achieve our purposes. But here in Learning I we find a primary instance of a critical aspect of meaning being not immediately available for conscious inspection, and a primary case that it can be manipulated. If in the higher levels of learning we find (as we will) that context becomes less and less subject to conscious inspection (Bateson 1961, 116), we can hold onto the possibility that even those more abstract contexts might nonetheless be manipulable.

A final interesting aspect of context is that it is synonymous, in Watzlawick's terminology, with relationship (52). In *relationship* we have the inescapable ideas of difference, separation, and ultimately the first hint of *self*.

Learning II can be most easily understood as “learning to learn” (Bateson 293). An example is the student who finds that memorizing gets easier with experience; the

student is learning to learn. But note that even in this most elegantly simple example, the actual mechanism for Learning II is completely beyond conscious inspection.

More broadly, Learning II is how people adapt to context (295). The *self* peeked out in Learning I, and here it blooms in a process we each unconsciously engage in to define who we think we are. When we say that someone is bold, honest, courageous, or ethical, we are naming traits we think of as essential to that person's character. But Bateson says that we are instead identifying that person's contextual contingencies: patterns of behavior acquired by prolonged or repeated experience. Whatever these patterns are (courageous or cowardly, generous or miserly), they are the *learned contextual contingencies* that punctuate human interaction (298), the *roles* people play in relationships (304).

Several aspects of Learning II are particularly interesting. One is that Learning II dates from infancy and never stops. A second is that Learning II is entirely unconscious.

A third interesting (and ultimately disturbing) aspect of Learning II is that it produces in each of us a *way* of punctuating life. Because it is a *way* of punctuating and not the punctuating itself, it can necessarily be neither true nor false; there is no reality to test it against (300). Because behavior is molded by Learning II, Bateson says,

It will be of such a kind as to mold the total context to fit the expected punctuation. In sum, this self-validating characteristic of the content of Learning II has the effect that such learning is almost ineradicable. Learning II acquired in infancy is likely to persist through life (301).

So for most people Bateson's levels of learning stop there. The thief knows that he steals, may wish he wouldn't, and when he gets caught wishes he hadn't. He will promise in good conscience never to do it again. But his act of promising is not of the same logical type as the events in life to which he has adapted, and as a result his promise – no matter how well meaning – cannot easily contradict those events.

Learning III is nothing less than “a profound reorganization of character,” a process that Bateson says “is likely to be difficult and rare.” Buddhists, mystics, and some psychiatrists, he notes, say that the matters of Learning III are “totally beyond the reach of language” (302). Yet there are some things that can be said.

For one thing, because each level of learning has amounted to a context for the previous level, it is clear that Learning III represents a context for Learning II. Because a context can be defined as a set of options from which to choose, we can see that if Learning III (call it “ineffable”) is a context for Learning II (character, self), then the singularity of self that makes self so validating and ineradicable has within *this higher logical type* of Learning III the opportunity to make choices. Bateson explains:

The premises of what is called “character” – the definitions of the “self” – save the individual from having to examine the abstract, philosophical, aesthetic, and ethical aspects of many sequences of life.... Learning III will throw these unexamined premises open to question and change (303).

Some changes in self that Bateson says amount to Learning III: (303-304)

1. Learning more readily from the forming of habits that amount to Learning II.
2. Learning to change the habits acquired in Learning II.

3. Learning the unconscious nature of Learning II.
4. Learning to limit or direct Learning II.
5. Learning the contexts of Learning II's contexts.
6. Learning to close loopholes which allow one to avoid Learning III.

The problem here is that this is an intellectual list and not much use in the ether of Learning III. It is my thesis that what I accomplished in *performing teaching* I did because I was working in Learning III. In other words, *performing teaching* is living Learning III with students. The strategies I employed – love, humility, surrender – are Learning III strategies or more accurately Learning III *contexts*. All three are a negation of *self*, something I readily admit does not come naturally. But I am most certainly on the right track. Bateson writes:

To the degree that a man achieves Learning III, and learns to perceive and act in terms of the contexts of contexts, his “self” will take on a sort of irrelevance. The concept of “self” will no longer function as a nodal argument in the punctuation of experience (304).

### **The 12 Steps**

It is a common misconception that 12 Step meetings are where a bunch of losers who've got nowhere else to go sit around drinking bad coffee whining about how horrible their lives are (Learning II at its worst). At the meetings I went to, I saw people who had the same problems I did laughing and talking how wonderful their lives had become since they'd done something *different* about their problems (Learning III at its best). No one

preached at me, no one lectured to me, no one asked me for money, no one said I had to believe in God, no one even told me I should come to their meetings – none of which would have worked, because (a) I would have been put off immediately, and (b) because – like the thief in my example – it would all have been Learning I communication, the wrong logical type.

Instead what they said was, if you see anything here you'd like, anyone here you'd like to *be* like, keep coming back and we'll show you how we've done it. That was such a pleasant refrain from the shame and guilt. Eventually when I asked someone who impressed me how he had changed his whole life, he said that he'd worked the Steps. He said I didn't have to but that if I decided I wanted to, he'd show me how. Eventually I agreed and followed through.

### **Learning III and the 12 Steps**

Though there are 12 Steps, the essence of the steps and their relevance to Learning III is in the first three steps. Different 12 Step programs use slightly different language, but the substance is the same. These are Alcoholics Anonymous' first three steps:

Step One: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable.

Step Two: Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.



Step Three: Made a decision to turn out lives and our wills over to the care of God  
*as we understood Him.*

The first part of Step One says “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol...” In Narcotics Anonymous, it says “powerless over drugs.” In Debtors Anonymous it says “powerless over money.” You get the idea. Many practitioners of 12 Step programs freely admit, after they’ve become convinced of powerlessness over their own chosen vice, that what they’re equally powerless over is *life*.

It is not a stretch to say that *life* and *self* are interchangeable. You could argue that *life* is out there and *self* is in here, but unless there is an *out there* there can’t be an *in here* – a *me*, a *self*. We can take it a step further and say in our emerging, fanciful Learning III 12 Step program, that Step One begins “We admitted we are powerless over Learning II....” And quite correctly: Bateson established above that (1) Learning II is eternal – it dates from infancy and never stops; (2) Learning II is imperceptible – we are entirely unconscious of it; and (3) Learning II is resilient -- even if we become aware of its shortcomings, it is so characteristically self-validating as to be virtually ineradicable (1972, 300-301).

Many a newcomer in 12 Step programs takes serious umbrage not with his or her own particular vice but with the idea of powerlessness itself. And yet this variation begs the previous question. To concede powerlessness over Learning II is to admit its substantive inappropriateness as a plan of living – an admission not within Learning II’s vocabulary.

The second part of Step One says “We admitted that we were powerless over (your vice goes here), *that our lives had become unmanageable.*” It sometimes takes a novice some time to come to grips with the word *unmanageable*, not so much because it is objectionable as because it’s just not exactly a household word. Those who have abiding difficulty with the concept of unmanageability are grappling, as those in the previous paragraph, with Learning II’s own resiliency. Here’s an actual conversation I once overheard after a meeting involving a friend (A, below) and a man who had insisted during the meeting that his life was not unmanageable (B, below):

A: “You want to go to dinner next week?”

B: “I’d like to, but I got to start jail next weekend.”

A: “Why do you have to go to jail?”

B: “They revoked my goddamn probation.”

A: “How come?”

B: “They said they found THC in my urine. But that’s just bullshit – marijuana shouldn’t be against the law anyway.”

A: “Why were you on probation in the first place?”

B: “DWI.”

A: “*Were* you?”

B: “Nah, man. I’m just a shitty driver.”

If ever there was a good example of Learning II’s own effective self-advocacy in the face of overwhelming evidence, this is it.

Step Two says “Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” Because it lacks the specificity of Step One, Step Two is uniform across 12 Step programs. Like Step One, this one has two parts. The first is the acknowledgment of a “Power greater than ourselves.” The second is the idea of restoration of sanity.

Many people who wander into their first 12 Step meeting have a problem with the idea of a divine power. A few are atheists. Many are agnostics. Some are terrified of a vengeful God keeping track of their every sin for judgment day. Many believe in God but see in a lack of response to their prayers a God that can’t help, won’t, or doesn’t care. (Had their prayers been answered, no doubt, they wouldn’t be sitting in a damn AA meeting.) Religion in general alienates man. No doubt there are countless other positions.

All these have in common an insistence that a higher power be both accessible from and responsive to quotidian life, that is, Learning II, and that such an expectation of performance is an appropriate test of a higher power. How can God refuse to heal my little sister, the boy asks, after I prayed I’d do anything that he wanted? If God is truly good, the missionary wonders, how can 100,000 Biafrans die in a typhoon? When I prayed for help with my addiction, the junkie complains, why am I still locked up in jail? In all these cases we see a failure of No. 5 in Bateson’s *Changes in Self that Amount to Learning III: Learning of the contexts of Learning II’s contexts*. Though this one is a bit tautological, it nonetheless seems valid. And its application seems equally valid: If there is anywhere a retail, walk-ins-welcome portal to Learning III, it seems to me it should be the world’s religions and spiritual practices.

Not surprising then is that those locked up in Learning II – which according to Bateson is almost everybody -- should find Learning III opportunities, no matter how blatantly presented, to be inadequate. On the other hand we have here the possibility of a self-validation of higher order of logical type: Those who have glimpsed even the possibilities of Learning III through acquaintance with God, Jehova, L. Ron Hubbard, or Buddha are *not* (most likely) going to put on the brakes when they encounter the idea of a higher power.

Between Learning II and Learning III is an interesting strategic move I've seen by more than one desperate alcoholic or addict, best expressed in the line "I don't know if there is a god, but I'm sure it's not me." At first this seems glib, but it is clever and resourceful. Earlier we said that *self, life*, and Learning II are synonymous. If so, then even curiosity that there might be something *not self, not life, not me* is a suspicion of Learning III's possibilities.

Now to the second half of Step Two: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves *could restore us to sanity*. At first glance many a newcomer bristles at the idea this his or her life is "insane." Twelve Step veterans handle this one simply. They define "insanity" as simply "doing the same thing over and over and expecting the outcome to be different." To the alcoholic, the junkie, the thief this definition makes perfect sense, if they will admit it. The alcoholic swears that this time he'll just have two drinks then go home to his wife and kids, only to find himself glued to the barstool at closing time. This insanity – doing the same thing over and over again and expecting the outcome to be different – is the prison of Learning II. As we noted earlier, Bateson says that the act of

promising not to do something already a habit or character trait of Learning II is not of the same logical type as the events in life, and as a result his promise – no matter how well meaning – cannot easily contradict those events (1972, 301-302).

Step Three says “Made a decision to turn our lives and our wills over to the care of God *as we understood him.*” The italics are in the step as published, indicating their importance. At this step many balk, for two general reasons. One is the aforementioned problems with believing in a God. The second reason is fear.

The “as we understood him” idea of God allows members to revise their concept of God to something more workable for themselves as individuals. Certainly the incumbent concepts of God need revision – if they *were* workable no one would need the 12 Steps at all. The problem being solved here is one frequently referred to in meetings as “raging self-sufficiency” brought on by individuals who believe they can rely on no one but themselves. The AA book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* describes it this way (37):

This brave philosophy, wherein each man plays God, sounds good in the speaking, but it still has to meet the acid test: how well does it actually work? One good look in the mirror ought to be answer enough for any alcoholic.

It is at this point that that the individual is called upon to admit that the mechanics of Learning II are not and will never be adequate for solving the problem at hand. And yet the idea of turning one’s life and will over to a God even of one’s own understanding is terrifying. The typical alcoholic says “Nothing is going to turn me into a nonentity. If I keep on turning my life and will over to the care of Something or Somebody else, what

will become of me?” (36) What is at stake here is nothing less than abandoning Learning II’s *self*, and in so doing placing faith in the ineffable contexts of Learning III.

I approached Step Three in tiny increments, turning problems over to a Higher Power (which I defined in only the vaguest terms) and then watching to see what happened. There were no miracles; the problems didn’t go away or become immediately soluble. But they did become manageable, and how I felt about them changed radically. I felt a growing peace – not an absence of storm, but a calm within the storm. The more things I turned over the better my life became. I began to enjoy the delightful paradox of Step Three expressed in *Twelve Steps*: “The more we became willing to depend upon a Higher Power, the more independent we actually are. Therefore dependence, as A.A. practices it, is really a means of gaining true independence of the spirit” (36).

The act of Step Three is acknowledging Learning III’s ineffables and then, by “making a decision,” as the step says, actually climbing a rung of life to a new level. This level is completely invisible and beyond understanding, and yet by trying it out, countless people have found that it is as real as Learning II itself. And the outcome can be extremely rewarding. True independence of the spirit is indeed possible. This is entirely in line with Learning III. Bateson writes that Learning III is nothing short of “a freedom from bondage....

But any freedom from the bondage of habit must also denote a profound redefinition of the self. If I stop at the level of Learning II, “I” am the aggregate of those characteristics which I call my “character.” “I” am my habits of acting in context and shaping and perceiving the contexts in which I act. Selfhood is a

product or aggregate of Learning II. *To the degree that a man achieves Learning III, and learns to perceive and act in terms of the contexts of contexts, his “self” will take on a sort of irrelevance.* (1972, 304, my emphasis).

Recall Bateson’s observation that Learning II is resilient because it is not testable. Learning II is a *way* of punctuating life. Because it is a *way* of punctuating and not the punctuating itself, it can necessarily be neither true nor false; there is no reality to test it against (300). What is wonderful about taking Step Three and moving into the mystical and magical world of Learning III is that it is testable. I tried it, a little at a time because I was frightened, and the results were pleasurable. So I tried it a little more. After 18 months of escalating experiments, I did the whole thing. As best I could I turned my life and will over to the invisible, ineffable contexts of Learning III. Again and again I was rewarded. But I must keep constantly working at it – no one turns it all over once and for good. Step Three to Learning III is a continuous process, the surrender of self, the abandoning of Learning II. It never ends; I’ll never be done. I frequently – contrary to experience of Learning III – reassert self. And when I do things get messed up. So once again I surrender to reassert and regain my spirit’s independence. Surrender, it is said in the program, is not the act of a loser. Instead surrender is the process of joining the winners.

### **Surrender, humility, acceptance, and love**

Now the reader can see the experience that introduced me to the efficacy and delight of *surrender*. Bateson’s levels of learning explain what surrender is and why it works: it opens the door to Learning III. Earlier I asked Goffman’s question What’s

going on here? and answered it with Goffman's "getting on with the affairs at hand." I have now explained one aspect of what it means to me to get on with the affairs at hand: through the ongoing process of surrender in *performing teaching* I operate to some extent in the libratory world of Learning III and simultaneously introduce my students to Learning III. It's no wonder they are enchanted. In many cases it's their first glimpse of life's infinite possibilities.

In previous chapters I've alluded to two other aspects of my own getting on with the affairs at hand. They are *love* and *humility*. *Humility* is easy to see now. It is produced, as Bateson said, when self takes on "a sort of irrelevance" (1972, 304). Humility is not being humiliated; it is not degrading, it not down-sizing but rather *right-sizing*. Humility operates at a higher logical type, in Learning III's context of contexts. "Humility," says *Twelve Steps*, "means the nourishing ingredient which can give us serenity" (74).

Surrender creates humility. When the self is surrendered, humility remains (and humility is really nothing at all). Yet humility offers great power to the spirit. Carlos Castaneda said that a person who has neither the capacity for self-importance nor the capacity for self-pity is *invulnerable* (cite??). Who wouldn't enjoy being invulnerable?

To recap, *humility* is a name for a state of affairs in Learning III – an ineffable context – which comes about when I surrender what I can of *self*. *Humility* and *surrender* both deal with self. Now let's turn away from *self* and look the only other direction there is: toward *others*.

The final aspect of my own "getting on with the affairs at hand" in *performing teaching* is *love*. This too I learned about, and learned how to do, from the 12 Steps. Love



is something I do as much as I can when I am *performing teaching*. I use the word *love* in a specific sense here, quite different from many of its commonly accepted synonyms. Love is not kindness or romance or parenthood or even liking. It is not a feeling at all. The opposite of love is not *hate*; its opposite is *control*.

Instead, *love* is a name for another ineffable context in Learning III, which comes about when I can accept exactly as they are the selves *of others*. *Acceptance* achieves *love* of others just as *surrender* achieves *humility* of self.

When I love someone in the sense I am using it here, that person no longer has control over me. He can't hurt me, disappoint me, can't make me jealous or sad. He can't help me, make me happy or complete or proud, because these are all aspects of the self operating down in Learning II. In loving I make no demands because the liberated self of Learning III neither needs nor wants any of these things – the self is just fine however it is. Because the opposite of love is *control*, when I love people I set them free. I accept their *selves* exactly as they are. However they are is just fine.

*Love* and *acceptance* automatically establish a baseline of equality in a classroom of *performing teaching*. Students are not the empty vessels of oppressive pedagogy who know nothing, have nothing to say, are worth nothing, and must be punished to get them to do what I decide they must. It is easy not to objectify them, not because I work at it, but because the subject/object distinction is irrelevant. In its place is respect among contemporaries. I *trust* my students implicitly because they cannot betray me. I *like* my students because they cannot anger me, hurt me, or disappoint me. I am confident and

comfortable with my students, and they tend to respond in kind with their own respect, trust, and liking.

Because I'm not engaged in a Learning II struggle with who they are, I often pleasantly surprise myself by seeing who they can become, accompanied with an intuitive sense of how to help get them there.

Love and acceptance don't mean anarchy. As humans we are equal. As co-conspirators in the process of pedagogy we are not. We are not pals. I am the teacher. They are the students. I am 30 years older than most of them and have two more degrees. I have a vision of where we are and where we need to end up, and I am charged by one of the finest universities in the nation with the thousand and one details of successfully getting us there. I write the syllabus, make the assignments, set the grading criteria, decide whether to curve. I grade papers and issue final grades.

### **A universal opportunity**

I am fortunate to have learned some powerful and useful things from the 12 Steps, but I am equally confident that these same things are available through the Koran, Judaism's Torah, Christianity's New Testament, Buddhism's Four Noble Truths, and other spiritual paths. I have read extensively in each, and I suspect that the whole of it could be boiled down to a single page of things that are true. That is far beyond my capabilities, however.

This study has examined a particular aspect of performance – the way it sometimes feels – in the context of the classroom. This performing teaching is

performance of self; it is performance as narrative; it is performance as shamanism. It is ultimately spiritual. I believe, in the end, that its pursuit ultimately good, both for the teacher and for the students.

I am intrigued by the application of values in the classroom, and by the kind of environment that a willful attack on the objectification of students can create. I believe there is much to be learned here.

I have shown, as have others, that language has the unique capability to explore its own mysteries, mysteries which language itself creates. I am not interested in talking about God, or Buddha, or Jehovah. But there is a realm which exists at the edges of language that is as real as language itself, that I believe may be understood with language, and that does indeed beg the supernatural.

“There is a sense,” Kenneth Burke wrote in *The Rhetoric of Religion*, “in which language is *not* just ‘natural,’ but really *does* add a ‘new dimension’ to the things of nature.... What we say about *words*, in the empirical realm, will bear a notable likeness to what is said about *God*, in theology (8-14, italics original).

The survey responses cited in Chapter Six demonstrate quite clearly, I believe, that performing teaching as an experiment (and for me an ongoing exercise) leads to satisfaction of students. What it does not address is what and how much they learned.

When I began practicing the 12 Steps 17 years ago, I became acquainted with what it feels like to be complete, to be present, to be content, to be useful, to be at peace. But it is an elusive feeling, as easy to grasp as a drip or mercury rolling about in the palm of a hand. When I began studying performance as a graduate student I found a way to

create and enjoy that feeling on specific occasions when I performed for audiences. As a teacher I have learned to create that feeling, to go to that place, to be that kind of person much of the time when I am in the classroom. As a teacher I have come to enjoy life in a way I have never enjoyed it before.

Bateson's work offers the best way to understand what is going on here, but in the end the entire matter resides almost completely in the ineffable, and yet it resides in such a manner that, through action, it can be experienced and enjoyed. Teaching, I believe, is one such form of action. When I am completely lost in teaching, I am no longer plagued by doubt, self criticism, by the nagging sense of life's frustrations and meaninglessness. When I am lost in teaching I do not know the answers to these questions any more than when I am playing my analytical, academic self. What I do know is that when I am lost in teaching, which is something I am fortunate to do much of my waking time, I am no longer plagued by the questions. I am at peace. And there is no more that I could ask of life.

## APPENDIX

### Appendix One: Performing Teaching

*However thoughtful our educational plans have become, they must include a crucial place for teachers. For ultimately, that is where the action is.*

– Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education*, 35

In prior chapters we laid the theoretical groundwork to permit us to examine the actions of a teacher as if they are performance. We discussed performance as self, performance as narrative, and performance as shamanism. In this chapter, I offer my experience in teaching as primary data. For rigorously academic standards addressed in the introduction, my experience is entirely acceptable as data for this study. It is also acceptable in the unique sense that we have access to the first-hand experience of the performer (me) and to the responses of audience members to the performance (course evaluation surveys). Later in this chapter we examine the teaching theories and observations of three notable teachers – Paulo Freire, Miles Horton, Maria Montessori, and Thomas Dewey – and find that they can be seen as spiritual in nature and not terribly different from mine. We examine the power of language, then define spirituality in terms of leadership. This last move is necessitated because I can find no substantial reference in performance studies literature to the key concepts developed in this chapter.

What I actually *did* as a teacher – moment-to-moment, day-to-day – is built upon a strategy of my experience of great teaching (my performance of narrative), upon the tactics of performance as they had evolved for me (my performance of self), and upon a

desire to achieve, explore, and explain the wonderfully blissful faces sometimes available in performance.

I did this by adhering to several basic principles. All my life I've been polishing the idea that it is infinitely better to be guided by a few simple principles you know intuitively than by a thousand little rules you never can quite keep straight. The idea is analogous to the draftsman's secret for drawing straight lines freehand or the secret to carrying a full cup of hot coffee without spilling it. In either case, if you focus intently on the literal task, you will fail. But if you focus on an invisible destination somewhere on the horizon, both the line and the coffee take care of themselves far better than your own concentrated efforts ever could.

When I perform it seems that I have much the same goal as when I teach — I hope to and work to dissolve the distance, the differences between me and my audience or my students. I am working at creating intersubjectivity. In the classroom, creation of intersubjectivity is much like building scaffolding.

Scaffolding begins with the ideas of social constructivism, outlined by Debra Meyer. The first is that knowledge is a constructive process where we give personal meaning to experience. The second is that how we construct knowledge is influenced by our interactions within a particular context. The third is that neither knowledge nor context remain stable, but both evolve as a natural part of human interaction and development.

Scaffolding is an idea introduced by Wood, Bruner and Ross as a metaphor to describe a tutor's role in providing only that support her young students needed. Jerome

Bruner then expanded the metaphor to describe a mother's role in helping with her child's acquisition of language. Vygotsky further extended the metaphor to include the role of an adult gaining new competencies. The risky nature of participating in a task where external supports are essential to success means that social, motivational, and emotional competencies will be challenged. Instructional scaffolding therefore involves an ever-changing set of supports.

But this is a reciprocal process. It presumes that when the teacher provides, for example, simplified instruction and encouragement, the student desires this support and takes advantage of it. Meyer writes: "The negotiation of when assistance is needed and what type of support should be provided, as well as when support should be withdrawn are central processes of scaffolding" (19). In this scaffolding relationship, both teacher and student can act as subject, and to the extent they do, they are engaged in the process of intersubjectivity.

The fundamental idea of scaffolding is that the teacher or parent initially assumes full responsibility for learning. As time passes and the goal of the particular project is accomplished, more and more responsibility for learning is shared by the student or child. This transfer is accommodated through feedback from the student or child. Meyer expands:

Without active support and feedback from the adult, the child would not be able to take the necessary steps to gain new competencies. On the other hand, without active participation and feedback from the child, the adult would not be able to provide appropriate forms of support. Furthermore, scaffolding is not only

achieved through provision of additional support, but can be attained if the situation is constrained by the teacher so the learner does not have to devote attention or effort to less essential aspects of the tasks (22).

I've quoted Meyer at length explaining the process because, with a few changes, it feels *exactly* like what happens when I walk into an auditorium and stand for those few beautiful moments of expectation until the audience hushes and the lights come up. At that moment, I have full responsibility for what is about to occur. True, the presence of the audience indicates a willingness (sometimes begrudging, sometimes immense) to help me in my work, but at the beginning it is all me. If this is going to float, I think to myself, it will be because we do it together. What I as a performer must do is engineer that cooperation. I hadn't thought about it until now, but like a good salesman I always try to build a laugh or some other form of explicit agreement into the first lines of any script I do. It's a way to generate response from the audience, which is a gross way of saying it's a way to begin generating increasing responsibility on their behalf for the success of the performance. I've read — I don't now remember where — that an audience *wants* a performer to succeed, and I believe that to be true, particularly of university audiences. But what I as a performer feed on is the audience feedback. In performing I am engaged in a process of co-construction, in the process of intersubjectivity, where I am a subject and the audience is every bit co-equal as a subject.

This too is true for me in the classroom. I am trained neither as a teacher nor as a performer, and so I use pretty much the same mixed bag of tricks I've developed over my life for teaching and performing. I express to them the several ways it is in their best



interests to complete the course, because we all think in terms of our own self-interests. On my first day of teaching a new class, I begin — and I tell my students this straight-out — that they already know how to do what they’ll need to do to succeed in the class. They know how to deal with people, and they know how to communicate. “The only thing you can do to do poorly in this course,” I tell them, “is to not try.” This is simply saying, in terms of scaffolding, you must work to increase your share of the burden of learning. In terms of performance intersubjectivity, this is saying, you must be a good audience. Both in the classroom and in performance, my goal is to transform my opposites (audience or students, as the case may be) from objects to subjects. In the classroom I do this by creating a context as safe as I can, where risk-taking is least frightening, and then getting out of my students’ way. This helps them to become subjects. In performance, I place the greatest possible limits on the rhetorical aspects of my scripts. This is probably why I’m such a Hemingway fan — he taught me how to do it. The result of limiting literary rhetoric is that the literature I perform does not objectify my audience by telling them what to think or how to understand. Like my speech students, audience members are left the greatest possible leeway to be their own subjects.

\* \* \*

I went into my first class on my first day with the simple principles that I would treat each student with dignity and respect, that I would endeavor to see the potential in each of them that they could not see, and that I would make my class the kind of

environment where students could feel the courage to take chances. I told them that each of them already knew everything they needed to know to excel.

I took a deep breath, said more than a couple prayers, plunged in, took chances, treated students like partners in a joint enterprise, made mistakes, asked forgiveness, made changes, tried things, and suddenly I was grading finals. As I turned in my grades at the department mailboxes, a professor asked me how I thought my first semester as a teacher had gone. “I guess it went okay,” I told her. In truth I had no idea how it had gone and was so exhausted I didn't much care. It was over.

Midway into the next semester I was knee deep writing a paper when my advisor phoned me at home to ask me if I was going to attend a department awards ceremony. I explained with irritation that I really didn't have time. He explained with more than a hint of irritation that I had damn well better make time. I put on a fresh shirt and caught the bus to campus.

I was only paying half attention in the middle of the awards ceremony when a professor I did not know announced that the department's award for outstanding graduate-student teacher would go to someone who before that semester had never set foot as a teacher in a college classroom. And then the speaker announced the name of the teacher to receive the honor, and it was – me.

I assumed it was a mistake. Finally, when I saw that the certificate really *did* have my name all spelled out on it. I don't know what I had done, *but it had worked*. I had set out to perform great teaching, and my students reported in anonymous surveys that they

experienced something akin to what I had hoped to create through performance

(Complete text of surveys is in the Appendix.):

“I don’t think anyone could have done a better job.”

“Larry is a great teacher. He is always willing to help us and to be available when we needed him. Very understanding.”

“I think Larry is one of the best TA’s I’ve ever had.”

“Larry is an outstanding teacher! This class has been my favorite class thus far at UT. I have never had a teacher who has seemed to care so much for his students. He was always ready to help his students. I think Larry will go far in his career because of his personable abilities! This class was great and wouldn’t have been the same without such an amazing teacher!”

“Larry Wright is a great teacher. He is always available if you need extra help. Fair.”

“Larry Wright has been an amazing teacher. He really cares and is concerned about the students. He is very nonjudgmental and open-minded towards subjects concerning students and subjects covered in class. He was very prepared and eager to teach everyday. All in all, you can see he was a great teacher.”

“Larry Wright has been far more than an outstanding teacher in every aspect. He is always available and willing and wanting to help. He is a very fair teacher also. This has been probably my favorite class here at UT and it is due to Larry Wright. I recommend this class to anyone.”

“Larry was a great professor and helpful to everyone.”

“Good teacher. He was in it for the best interest of the students.”

“The instructor is enthusiastic and willing to help at all times. He is interested in what he teaches and tries to reach out to the students in any manner that he can. He is never condescending. He is always encouraging the students and showing a positive side of things, which I believe greatly helps speech students, or public speaking courses. Great Job!”

“Larry is a very sincere teacher! He talks to us like people, and he is personally engaging.”

“Larry is an excellent teacher. He is always willing to assist students in whatever they needed, answering questions or concerns. He cares very much about teaching & shows this in his instruction & lecture. I enjoyed this class.”

“Larry always seemed genuine and caring when he taught our class. He was able to convey the information to us in a way that was easy to understand. This course made me get over my fear of public speaking, and that was possible by the relaxed atmosphere Larry established in the beginning of the semester. His grading style was fair and accurate. I would love to have Larry in another communications class. I enjoyed this semester. Thank you.”

“Simply an excellent instructor.”

Whether this constitutes *great* teaching or not is a matter of interpretation and unimportant. For my part, I could not have been more pleased. To this day I read these observations and wonder who their writers were talking about. But these observations are invaluable to me as a performer, because they are an enduring report of audience satisfaction, and they are representative. To begin assessing them, I categorized each comment numerically, with 5 being what I considered “superlative,” 4 as “positive,” 3 “neutral,” 2 “negative,” and 1 “hostile.” The comments and their values are found in the appendix.

Almost half rated the course superlative, and almost 90% rated the course positively. So I think it is fair to say that my experiment in performing teaching was successful. We know something already about the performance’s strategy, tactics, and

	Students	% of total
Superlative	17	48%
Positive	13	37%
Neutral	2	6%
Negative	2	6%
Hostile	1	3%

**How students rated course**

principles. I am interested in what more we can learn from the students' experience as they reported it. To that end, I have put the comments in a chart, numbered each for reference, then assigned adjectives to each that seem to capture the spirit of the comment. These adjectives provide a common denominator for discussion, summary, and conclusion. The chart itself is reproduced in its entirety in the appendix.. Here is the quantitative portion of the survey:

<b>Quantitative results</b> Section 06405: 27 enrolled, 24 surveys Section 06410: 27 enrolled, 25 surveys	UT averages	My averages	
		06405	06410
1. Course well organized	4.0	4.3	4.3
2. Communicated information effectively	4.1	4.6	4.5
3. Helped to think for myself	4.0	4.6	4.6
4. Overall instructor rating	4.1	4.6	4.6
5. Overall course rating	4.0	4.4	4.4
6. Instructor well prepared	4.3	4.3	4.5
7. Lectures, discussions appropriate	4.4	4.5	4.6
8. Instructor explained material clearly	4.1	4.3	4.6
9. Freedom to comment and ask questions	4.3	4.7	4.8
10. Genuinely interested in teaching course	4.4	4.8	4.8
11. Availability outside class	4.2	4.6	4.9
12. Adequate instructions for assignments	4.0	4.3	4.7
13. Satisfactory student evaluation	4.0	4.6	4.7
14. Course was educationally valuable	4.3	4.7	4.8

15. Instructor increased student knowledge	4.3	4.5	4.7
Averages	4.2	4.5	4.6

**A semester's student evaluations:  
SPE 305 – Introduction to Public Speaking – Fall 1996**

From the survey we can glean characteristics of what the University of Texas considers good teaching. A good teacher is organized and prepared (questions 1 and 6), communicates effectively (2, 8, 12), encourages risk-taking or intellectual self-reliance (3), is relevant (7 and 14), open (9), enthusiastic (10), accessible (11), fair (13), and informative (15). The ratings in the chart above are based on a maximum of five possible points, with five being "excellent" and four being "very satisfactory." UT's teachers averaged lowest (ratings of 4.0 and 4.1) in being organized, fair, encouraging intellectual self-reliance and communicating effectively. UT's teachers averaged in the middle ground (ratings of 4.2) for accessibility. And UT's teachers averaged highest (ratings of 4.3 and 4.4) for preparation, relevance, openness and enthusiasm.

\*                      \*                      \*

I set out in my classroom to perform teaching.

I set out here to explore and explain certain liminal aspects of performance that I experienced.

I observed earlier in this study that audience members seemed to compliment me most on those performances in which I was the most completely lost in the rapture of

performing. This lead me to suspect that pursuit of this performance experience might be desirable not only to me ( I like the way it feels) but to my audience as well.

I can state with confidence that in my first semesters (and even now, six years later) I was quite often completely and delightfully consumed in the performance of teaching. I have not sought to measure what my students learned. But these surveys do measure (at one level) the efficacy of performing teaching in terms of student satisfaction and through students' comments the relevance and usefulness of their experience.

Only in the category of preparation did *performing teaching* rank with the norm of all UT professors (4.3). *Performing teaching* ranked lowest (4.3 and 4.4) in being organized and prepared. *Performing teaching* ranked in the middle ground (4.5 and 4.6) in effective communication, encouraging intellectual self-reliance, relevance, fairness, and informativeness. It ranked highest (4.7 and 4.8) in openness, enthusiasm, accessibility, and in a second category of relevance.

In relation to UT norms, students ranked *performing teaching* from 2 percent better than average (in preparation) to 12 and 13 percent better than average for accessibility, fairness, encouraging intellectual self-reliance and another category of effective communication. So we can say here that *performing teaching* produced a measurably superior experience for students.

### **Appendix Two: Quantifying the characteristics of ‘performing teaching’**

*If agency and esteem are central to the construction of a concept of self, then the ordinary practices of school need to be examined with a view to what contribution they make to these two crucial ingredients of personhood.*

– Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education*, 38

What are the characteristics of *performing teaching*? What aspects of the performance stood out sufficiently for students to mention? The answers are suggested in the qualitative portion of the course evaluations, a large blank where students can write about whatever they want. In an attempt to unify and characterize student responses, I have grouped their observations under several broader terms which seem to serve as common denominators – accessibility, safety, respect, fairness, openness, and relevance.

### **Accessibility**

The idea that I should be available to students whenever I thought they should be doing coursework (thinking about the course, reading, researching or working on speeches) is based on the management principle that you shouldn't ask someone to do anything you wouldn't do. So I gave my students my home phone number and encouraged them to phone me and talk over their concerns, doubts, and questions – particularly as they related to impending speeches and speech anxiety. This last aspect is additionally important because students who gain the instructor's approval of, say, the precise wording of a thesis statement or a way of handling some sticky point in a speech, will be much more confident when they finally take the podium. This idea also created lots of opportunities to work with students one-on-one in a relaxed and intimate format – something that has never happened for me during office hours, which are convenient for me but seldom for students. Students appreciated the confidence-building aspect of this principle, as the first several comments show. Thirteen of the 33 students who made



comments – more than half – mentioned accessibility. Here's how they responded to that principle:

“He was very easy to talk to and help out those who were having difficulty in standing up in front of people.”

“He was always available for guidance and advice which helped ease a bit of the pressure.”

“He was available for questions and assistance.”...

“He is always willing to help us and to be available when we need him.”

“He was very accessible to us -- he even gave us his home phone #!”

“Very understanding & accessible.”

“Thank you for being accessible on your private time.”

“He is always available if you need extra help.”

“He is always available and willing and wanting to help.”

“Larry showed great concern and interest in his students.”

“The instructor is very enthusiastic and winning to help at all times.”

“Always willing to help us.”

“He is always willing to assist students in whatever they needed.”...

## **Safety**

Public speaking is a risky proposition for most people, and this risk – primarily to self-esteem – manifests itself as fear or anxiety. I can't make either one of them go away, but as a teacher I have it in my power to remove the thing people seem to be most afraid of – criticism. When students are giving speeches in my class, I never let anyone sit down without complimenting him or her (from the back of the room, so everyone could hear)

on some aspect of the speech. When it is time to talk about the speeches as a group, the speaker him- or herself always gets the first chance to speak and will invariably take responsibly for whatever went wrong, without anyone having to point it out. When something must be publicly corrected to prevent students thinking it is permissible (such as reading a speech or presenting an overhead slide with type too small to be read at the back of the room), I never say “you read your speech, and I promised an F to anyone who reads” or “I told you in the assignment, no overheads with type smaller than 24 point.” Instead I say, “you’d get a lot better feedback from the audience and a better grade if it didn’t look quite so much like you read your speech” or “Your overhead was interesting, but it would be more effective if I could read it at the back of the room.” Students sense quickly that I’m not gunning for them, that I want to help them succeed. Here are their observations that dealt with safety:

“He was always available for guidance and advice which helped ease a bit of the pressure.”...

“He was very reassuring to students' efforts.”

“Larry created a very relaxed environment within the classroom. He made it easy for us to get up in front of the room because he was always completely supportive of everyone's speeches.”

“This course made me get over my fear of public speaking, and that was possible by the relaxed atmosphere Larry established in the beginning of the semester.”

“He was very reassuring to the students' efforts.”

## **Respect**

When I was first an undergraduate long long ago, students generally were treated disrespectfully. In many ways they still are. For example, one of the finest, most compassionate teachers I know does not think twice when administering a test about talking to his students as if they are all convicted cheats just waiting for the another chance. I personally believe that 99.9 percent of all students are honest and that the other 0.01 percent are sufficiently crafty that I'm unlikely to catch them. So I treat my students as I wish I had been treated. I often walk out of the room to get a drink of water when I'm administering a test. If I'm on the phone when someone comes in during office hours, I say to my caller that I've got a customer and hang up. I do not allow professors, staff, or graduate students to interrupt when I am talking to a student, whether or not it is office hours. I tell my students on opening day of class that it is not my job to judge them but to help them succeed. When they apologize for phoning at night, I remind them that this is my job and I like it. As a result – with the exception of one or two students who insist on trying to beat the system on their own terms – I have had no problem students. Instead, they seem to rise to the occasion. A number of characteristics emerge from this broad principle of respect, among them being fairness, responsiveness, openness, understanding, caring and, simply, respect.

“He was in it for the best interest of the students.”

“He talks to us like people and he is personally engaging.”

“He is never condescending.”

## **Fairness**

Four students saw room for improvement:

“I enjoyed this class as a whole but thought the grading was often a bit unfair. There were clear 'favorites' and average presentations received very high grades.”

“The grading policy is way too harsh. He is taking 2 points off the final grade for each absence.”

“More specific feedback is needed as to why you got the grade you did. Exactly where did you lose the points. This should be crystal clear.”

“The grading criteria of the first speech was a little unclear.”

Others reacted differently:

“He is extremely fair in this grading process.”

“Larry was very helpful in giving us constructive criticism.”

“Fair.”

“He is very non-judgmental.”...

“He is a very fair teacher also.”

“Very understanding and fair person/teacher.”

“[I] thought he graded very fairly.”

“The instructor was very fair.”

“He gave really supportive feedback at the end of every round of speeches.”

“His grading style was fair and accurate.”

Responsiveness: “He was very prompt when it came to grading our speeches and getting the grades to us.”

“Mr. Wright was willing to make changes in the course to ensure the class accomplished the tasks on the syllabus.”

## **Openness**

“He is very ... open-minded towards subjects concerning students and subjects covered in class.”

## **Understanding**

“Very understanding.”

“Very understanding... to his students.”

## **Caring**

“I have never had a teacher who seemed to care so much for his students.”

“He really cares and is concerned about the students.”

“Larry showed great concern and interest to his students.”

“He was very reassuring to the students' efforts.”

“He ... tries to reach out to the students in any manner that he can.”

“He was always completely supportive.”...

“He cares very much about teaching & shows this in his instruction & lecture.”

“Larry always seemed genuine and caring when he taught our class.”

## **Relevance**

“The tests don't seem to go hand in hand with the stuff we do in class.”

“I did not like the portion of the class on ethics. I think it is not needed but if it is taught it should be done better.”

“Larry Wright did a superb job in interesting me in this class.”

“This class was helpful in that it helped me become more comfortable speaking in front of an audience.”

### **Appendix Three: My story**

I learned about Learning III the hard way. I did not learn about it because I wanted to be a good teacher, a good husband, a good father, or a good son though, like the example of the thief I suggested above, I would have liked to be even marginally good at any of these things, because I certainly was *not*. Like the thief, I wished I were, but wishing (not being of the appropriate logical type) just didn't make it so.

I began to learn about Learning III one day many years ago. I found myself walking through downtown Tampa late on a Sunday afternoon with nothing but blisters on my feet and an AWOL bag full of dirty clothes. I had no job, no car, no money, no friends who would any longer acknowledge me, no family who would speak to me or let me in, and no place to sleep. My wife had changed the locks. I literally had no where to go. I hated myself so badly that I would gladly have killed myself, but I didn't have any way to do it and even if I had, I was too afraid to go through with it. Worse, I could no longer dull the anguish with alcohol, or drugs, or sex, or money. Nothing worked anymore. I was totally and completely at the end of an electrified rope. I could no longer hold on, and I could not let go.

Bateson says that a creature may be driven to Level III by the "contraries" at Level II (305). I hadn't read Bateson back then, and I would have looked askance at anyone who described my life as being beset by "contraries." But I was for sure at some sort of critical point. I could no longer live within Learning II – no longer live within my *self* – and I lacked the resolution to check out entirely.

Half way across Tampa and four hours later that Sunday evening, I walked into a room so thick with cigarette smoke I could barely see and so packed with people in folding chairs that I could hardly enter. I asked a man (who I'd later know as Buddy the Cabdriver) what kind of meeting it was.

“Are you a beginner?” Buddy asked.

“What’s a beginner?” I asked.

“Sit down,” he said, and offered me his chair.

As I considered the offer, I was terrified. My chest was locked with the weight of infinity choking down on me, and my vision began to go black. This was no panic attack. I was about to sign my own death warrant, to not only die but to implode. I would recognize months later that the fear was quite genuine. The self who I was would be irretrievably gone the instant my butt hit the chair, and the self was fighting valiantly for its life, just as Bateson suggests it would. For reasons I still do not understand, I sat down.

“This course helped me a lot with public speaking. I have a better understanding of speeches and public speaking. I also feel more confident at speaking.”

“My fear of speaking in front of a group of people has greatly diminished.”

“He definitely helped me a lot in my public speaking skills.”

“This is the most beneficial course I have taken this semester.”

“The instructor and his course helped me speak well in front of groups.”...

“After finishing this course and receiving an A on the final speech, I really felt like an accomplished speaker and I know I owe most of it to this course.”

“Helped us improve our speeches in a very constructive way.”

“This course made me get over my fear of public speaking.”...

“This public speaking course has been highly beneficial for me. It has greatly increased my confidence in taking up the podium and making a speech in front of an audience.”

Observations	Principles	Score Superlative=5 Positive=4 Neutral=3 Negative=2 Hostile=1
1. "Larry Wright did a superb job in interesting me in this class. He was very easy to talk to and help out those who were having difficulty in standing up in front of people. He is extremely fair in this grading process. I don't think anyone could have done a better job."	accessible built confidence fair interesting	5
2. "This class was helpful in that it helped me become more comfortable speaking in front of an audience. Larry was also a big help. He was always available for guidance and advice which helped ease a bit of the pressure of having to organize and research your speech. Overall, I felt this class and its instructor were great."	accessible built confidence helpful safe	4
3. "The grading policy is way too harsh. He is taking 2 points off the final grade for each absence. Attendance should not be a factor in this source but how students do overall. Grades should be on how students have done the work in class. We are no longer in high school to be taking attendance."	unfair attendance policy	1
4. "Larry was very helpful. He was available for questions and assistance with topics (speeches). Larry, you should become a teacher. This course helped me a lot with public speaking. I have a better understanding of speeches and public speaking. I also feel that I am more confident at speaking."	accessible helpful instructive built confidence	4
5. Larry is a great teacher. He is always willing to help us and to be available when we needed him. Very understanding."	accessible helpful understanding	5
6. "I really enjoyed this course – it would have been helpful if we had the opportunity to do at least one speech that was longer – it was hard to communicate effectively (w/o taking really fast) in 5 minutes. Also, the grading criteria of the first speech was a little unclear. Overall, a very good class."	different assignment grading criteria unclear	3
7. "I think Larry is one of the best TA's I've ever had. He	accessible	5



<p>was very accessible to us – he gave us his home phone #! He was very prompt when it came to grading our speeches and getting the grades to us. Larry was very helpful in giving us constructive criticism. My ‘fear’ of speaking in front of a group of people has greatly diminished – I feel that was due to Larry’s class. He organized the course very well and we were never in a rush to finish the semester out. His grading was very fair! Thanks!”</p>	<p>built confidence constructive criticism fair helpful organized responsive grading</p>	
<p>8. “Larry is an outstanding teacher! This class has been my favorite class thus far at UT. I have never had a teacher who has seemed to care so much for his students. He was always ready to help his students. I think Larry will go far in his career because of his personable abilities! This class was great and wouldn’t have been the same without such an amazing teacher!”</p>	<p>caring helpful</p>	5
<p>9. “Very understanding &amp; accessible to his students.”</p>	<p>accessible understanding</p>	5
<p>10. “Larry was a very good instructor but the speeches in the course started to become more stressful than educations. I recommend that Larry do less speeches and allow more time for each speech. That way the speaker can receive more input from the audience.”</p>	<p>assignments stressful</p>	3
<p>11. “Good instructor. Thank you for being accessible on your private time. I appreciated it. I have no bad comments.”</p>	<p>accessible</p>	4
<p>12. “Mr. Wright was willing to make changes in the course to ensure the class accomplished the tasks on the syllabus.”</p>	<p>responsive</p>	4
<p>13. “Larry Wright is a great teacher. He is always available if you need extra help. <u>Fair</u>. The tests don’t seem to go hand in hand with the stuff we do in class with TA. Overall, I have really enjoyed this class.”</p>	<p>accessible fair  tests not relevant</p>	5
<p>14. “Larry Wright has been an <u>amazing</u> teacher. He <u>really</u> cares and is concerned about the students. He is <u>very</u> nonjudgmental and open-minded towards subjects concerning students and subjects covered in class. He was very prepared and eager to teach everyday. All in all, you can see he was a <u>great</u> teacher.”</p>	<p>caring enthusiastic fair open-minded prepared</p>	5

15. "He definitely helped me a lot in my public speaking skills."	instructive	4
16. "It may look like I didn't read the survey, cause all the answers are the same, but I did. Larry Wright has been far more than an outstanding teacher in every aspect. He is always available and willing and wanting to help. He is a very fair teacher also. This has been probably my favorite class here at UT and it is due to Larry Wright. I recommend this class to anyone."	accessible fair helpful	5
17. "Very understanding and fair person/teacher."	fair understanding	4
18. "This is the most beneficial course I have taken this semester. I wonder why all students are not required to take at least one speech – The college of Natural Sciences, my college, does not. I still feel that I would have benefitted from seeing my speech on video. I think it could be the most effective tool in adjusting my speaking to suit the audience. I did not like the portion of the class on ethics. I think it is not needed, but if it is taught it should be done better."	beneficial course should use video ethics material badly handled	5
19. "All the questions I have just answered pertain to Larry Wright. I was very fortunate to have him as a T.A. Now Jeffrey on the other hand would not fulfill these excellent evaluations. I learned more with Larry and by reading on my own."	instructive  Jeffrey lectures useless	4
20. "The instructor and this course helped me speak well in front of groups and allowed me to decide my major!"	built confidence	4
21. "I think the reason this course was not as good as it could have been was due to Dr. Jeffrey, not Larry Wright. It is much easier to build off of enthusiasm than boredom and apathy."	enthusiastic  Jeffrey lectures apathetic	4
22. "I enjoyed this class as a whole but thought the grading was often a bit unfair. There were clear "favorites" and average presentations received very high grades. Some emphasis should be put on speaking ability besides the mere content of the speech."	speech grading unfair played favorites	2
23. "Although I have given a few speeches in Toastmasters	concerned for	

before, this class helped me to excel in leaps and bounds. After finishing this course and receiving an A on my final speech, I really felt like an accomplished speaker and I know I owe most of it to this course. Larry showed great concern and interest to his students.”	students interested in students	4
24. “Larry was a great professor and helpful to everyone. I really enjoyed going to class and thought he graded very fairly.”	fair helpful	5
25. “The instructor was very fair. Good teacher. He was in it for the best interest of the students.”	fair interested in students	5
26. “The instructor of this course was very helpful at building self confidence. He was very reassuring to the students’ efforts.”	built confidence reassuring	4
27. “The instructor is enthusiastic and willing to help at all times. He is interested in what he teaches and tries to reach out to the students in any manner that he can. He is never condescending. He is always encouraging the students and showing a positive side of things, which I believe greatly helps speech students, or public speaking courses. Great Job!”	enthusiastic helpful reaches out	4
28. “Larry created a very relaxed environment within the classroom. He made it very easy for us to get up in front of the room because he was always completely supportive of everyone’s speeches. He gave really supportive feedback at the end of every round of speeches. The course was interesting – lectures sucked!”	built confidence constructive feedback interesting relaxed atmosphere Jeffrey lectures sucked	5
29. “Larry is a very sincere teacher! He talks to us like people, and he is personally engaging. This is also partly due, I believe, to the small class size.”	engaging sincere	5
30. “Very good course. Larry did a very good job and I learned a lot. – Always willing to help us. – Very interested in the course material. – Helped us improve our speeches in a very	constructive helpful instructive	5

constructive way.”		
31. “Larry is an excellent teacher. He is always willing to assist students in whatever they needed, answering questions or concerns. He cares very much about teaching & shows this in his instruction & lecture. I enjoyed this class.”	allayed concerns caring helpful	5
32. “Larry always seemed genuine and caring when he taught our class. He was able to convey the information to us in a way that was easy to understand. This course made me get over my fear of public speaking, and that was possible by the relaxed atmosphere Larry established in the beginning of the semester. His grading style was fair and accurate. I would love to have Larry in another communications class. I enjoyed this semester. Thank you.”	built confidence caring fair genuine instructive relaxed atmosphere	5
33. “Simply an excellent instructor.”	excellent instructor	5
34. This public speaking course has been highly beneficial for me. It has greatly increased my confidence in taking up the podium and making a speech in front of an audience. The course was very well organized however the lectures (Monday – Jeffrey) seemed to be very boring and the material taught was directly from the book. It was no value to attend the lecture because it didn’t seem to make me more knowledgeable. The labs were great though. I think the course organization can be changed in this respect by making the course a “lab” and dropping the lectures.”	built confidence organized  Jeffrey lecture useless	4
35. “More discussion throughout the semester is needed regarding the how two of speeches. This was done only at the beginning of the semester. The weekly lecture is useless. it is too slow, mainly definitions. Boring. Grading seems too subjective. More specific feedback is needed as to why you got the grade you did. Exactly where did you lost the points. This should be crystal clear. Maybe each part of the speech could be assigned points and graded separately.”	more discussion needed  Jeffrey lecture useless	2

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