

Performance Studies is not one-size fits all, but all sizes try to fit in. That is, if you can handle conflict, cope with ambiguity, navigate the incomprehensible, relish the rivalry.

—Lois Weaver

A STUDENT'S GUIDE TO

Performance Studies



Performance Studies: A Moving Target

Ask any two Performance Studies (PS) scholars to describe their field—and you might get three different answers. Some respondents will turn your question into another question. Or they'll offer an answer as elusive as a Zen-koan. No matter the form, these attempts to describe the emerging field of Performance Studies are provocative, colorful and full of boundless energy. Like the field itself, they resist easy formulation.

I think of Performance Studies...as a hide-out, an after school program for bad boys and girls, a safe house for those who can't go by the rules. Performance Studies is not one-size fits all, but all sizes try to fit in. That is, if you can handle conflict, cope with ambiguity, navigate the incomprehensible, relish the rivalry. For both artists and academics it can be a place to see yourself reflected, challenged, codified, cracked up, over baked and served up...Isn't that the point? To question. Is it fun? Is it fashion? Or is it food? Or just further education?

—Lois Weaver, *School of English and Drama at Queen Mary*

Some respondents will even employ animal metaphors to try to clarify the situation.

Is performance studies a 'field,' an 'area,' a 'discipline'? The sidewinder snake moves across the desert floor by contracting and extending itself in a sideways motion. Wherever this beautiful rattlesnake points, it is not going there. Such (in)direction is characteristic of performance studies. This area/field/discipline often plays at what it is not, tricking those who want to fix it, alarming some, amusing others, astounding a few as it side-winds its way across the deserts of academia.

—Richard Schechner, *New York University*

Perhaps it's tough to pin PS down precisely because of the ephemeral nature of its subject: performance. If you have ever performed in a school play, an All-State track-race, Easter Mass or your sister's wedding, you know that the work involved is multi-layered, and—despite all your planning—the result always unpredictable. You also know that the performance does not just consist of 'The Big Day' itself, but is comprised of many processes along the way—training, worrying, practicing your instrument, building the set, sending out invitations, and the like. And then there's the post-production wrap-up, such as attending the trophy ceremony, reading critics' reviews, heading home for

INSIDE

- Key Developments in the Field
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It is a special kind of rush to set out in pursuit of an object-of-study that is as elusive, temporal, and contingent as performance.

—Henry Bial

Aunt Sally’s Easter Ham dinner, or—if you’re dutiful!—sending out thank-you notes. To study a performance, then, is to set out to understand a complex event that is in-process, that moves and grows over time. Since the performance itself won’t stand still, trying to capture its essence can likewise be an adventure.

It is a special kind of rush to set out in pursuit of an object-of-study that is as elusive, temporal, and contingent as performance. To be a performance studies reader is to work without a net, to walk on hot coals, to search in a dark alley at midnight for a black cat that isn’t there... We are the lovers on Keats’ Grecian urn, eternally in pursuit... For the most part, those of us who consider ourselves ‘performance studies people’ like it that way.

—Henry Bial, *University of New Mexico*

Why the Buzz?

If scholars admit they can’t, or won’t, give a clear answer to describe their field, why then such a buzz of excitement about Performance Studies?

Precisely because it prefers questions to answers, flux to order, expanding boundaries to fixed limits. Unlike another academic field that might exclude certain questions from its range of purview, Performance Studies is a method of inquiry that posits an underlying dimension of ‘performance’ to all human behavior—from Native American peyote rituals to high-speed NASCAR races to getting dressed in the morning. Because it’s willing to house a vast array of material under one roof, then, PS openly defies the traditional separations that commonly exist between university departments. It celebrates projects that fall between the lines. It puts previously alienated scholars and artists into conversation. It would sooner put up a fight than submit to ready-made categories.

Sometimes uncoordinated, often playful, always

ambitious, PS is an emerging field that is still in the making. Given its responsiveness to ever-new areas of inquiry, you could say it’s a field that *wants always* to be in the making. Precisely suited to a dynamic world, PS won’t offer Fixed Truths because none of the phenomena it studies appear in black and white either.

For many PS scholars, that’s its greatest strength: as Diane Taylor says: ‘I find PS’s very undefinability and complexity reassuring.’

If you’re finding yourself nodding with enthusiasm, if PS’s celebration of intellectual discomfort comforts you, then you may have found an area of like-minded colleagues. You too may be a ‘performance studies person.’

While this brochure won’t try to provide a comprehensive definition of the field, it will update you on basic concepts and vocabulary so that you can join the lively PS conversations unfolding in lecture halls, rehearsal rooms and conference panels throughout the US and world. ‘The one overriding and underlying assumption of performance studies,’ Richard Schechner states, ‘is that the field is wide open.’ Because of its democratic spirit, its invitation to hear many voices—you should feel free to dive right in.

The Subject: Performance

One thing can be said for sure: Performance Studies takes *performance* itself as the object of inquiry. That is, PS scholars do not begin by asking questions of ‘**Being**.’ They do not inquire into ‘essences,’ as if beliefs and social values are natural or God-given.

Instead, Performance Studies scholars see all of social reality as constructed by ‘**Doings**’—actions, behaviors and events. No aspect of human expression—religious, artistic, political, physical, sexual—descends from On High, fixed for eternity. Instead, the various features of a culture’s life are contingent—they are shaped and reshaped in particular

KINDS OF PERFORMANCES

(A mere sampling, in no particular order)

- Live theater: Broadway, Off-Broadway, London's Globe
- Avant-garde performance: 1960s 'Happenings'; Off-off Broadway; street performances; Edinburgh fringe festival
- Modern dance, ballet, tap, hip-hop, free style
- Opera, orchestra music, musical theater
- Film, U.S. Hollywood culture
- Religious ritual, rite ceremonies
- Sermons/preaching; Gospel music
- Sexuality: private sex, drag, pornography, voyeurism
- Politics: campaign speeches, State of the Union address, voting
- Gang activity and culture
- 'Secular' ceremonies: sweet 16s, weddings, job promotions, college graduations
- The theatricality of everyday life: dress, posture, job uniform, wearing make-up
- Radio talk shows, nightly news report
- Fairs, Carnivals, *Mardi Gras*
- Magic Shows, Puppet Theater
- Popular entertainment: Stand-up comedy, *Saturday Night Live*; nightclubs
- Blue-grass, country music
- Dog shows, Bull Fights
- Rap music, Spoken word poetry
- Graffiti, Bumper-stickers
- Internet chat-rooms, blogs, dating websites
- Sports/Games, Superbowl Sunday
- Pantomime
- Civil Rights Marches, Labor strikes
- College lecturing, student life on campus
- Psychotherapy: psycho-analysis, face-to-face talk therapy, role-playing
- Military culture, boot camp
- Colonialism; fascism (just think of the rallies!); apartheid; democracy; terrorism
- Ways of speaking: promising, betting
- Ways of writing: autobiography, 'performative writing'
- Trials and executions, public beheadings, taking hostages on TV
- Money markets (Nasdaq, Dow Jones), Wall Street culture
- The 'performance' of cars: Top 25 Best Buys of 2006; mph and 0-60 times
- Parenting
- Computers, digital animation
- Animal Rights' Protests
- Portrait Photography

Can you think of others?

...to name only a few.

Performance Studies has a huge appetite for encountering, even inventing, new kinds of performing...

—Henry Bial



Key Turning Points in the Development of the Field

1965:

Richard Schechner publishes his article 'Approaches,' in the *Tulane Drama Review*. This was his first written articulation that 'performance is an inclusive category that includes play, games, sports, performance in everyday life, and ritual.' Many subsequent works developing his 'Broad Spectrum Approach' were to come.

1967:

Schechner is invited to head the Drama Department at NYU Tisch School of the Arts.

1970:

In Paris, Peter Brook, a British director, founded the International Center for Theater Research.

1979:

Schechner offered the first course at NYU entitled 'Performance Theory.' The original advertisement read: 'Leading American and world figures in the performance arts and the social sciences will discuss the relationship between social anthropology, psychology, semiotics, and the performing arts. The course examines theater and dance in Western and non-Western cultures, ranging from the avant-garde to tradition, ritual and popular forms.'

1980:

The Drama Department at NYU, realizing that it was no longer teaching only 'drama' or 'theater,' changed its name to Performance



social and historical circumstances, in complex and lengthy processes. By way of analogy, then, a group's alleged 'nature' is actually a series of performances: behaviors which are learned, rehearsed and presented over time.

Because these performances are the building blocks that structure our reality, PS scholars work to understand and comment upon how they function—to explain what any given performance does, and how it is doing it. Among other questions, they ask: What circumstances helped create this performance? How is it structured? What relationships does it enable? What effect does it have in a society, and has that function changed over time?

The only common denominator of the field, then, is this: **Performance Studies scholars study performances.**

For most of us, the term 'performance' brings to mind the performing arts, exceptional affairs that typically unfold under bright lights before a packed house. Just think: 'The Alvin Ailey performance will be playing at the Kennedy Center for another week.' Or, 'Bryn Terfel gave the performance of his career in The Met's *Don Giovanni!*

And indeed, some PS projects do focus on great theater, dance, or music performances.

But PS's decisive initiative, however, was to disentangle the terms 'play,' 'act,' 'acting' and 'performance' from an exclusive association with the performing arts. While everyone agrees that the 2005 Broadway staging of *The Glass Menagerie* is a performance, PS asserts that a theatrical dimension underlines all human activity. Therefore, *any* event, action, or behavior can be studied *as* a performance, and a scholar can investigate the various processes that go into making it up. For instance, PS regards U.S. Senate confirmation hearings, Japanese Zen rock gardening, and Bantu burial rites *as* performances, each of which is structured by actions and processes that can be analyzed and compared. Sky-diving and Evangelical prayer are

also kinds of performances, as are public executions in North Korea and telling Yiddish jokes. Ditto for the pre-Oscar Awards Red Carpet fashion interviews and Louisiana shrimp-catching. Ultimately, PS asserts that all aspects of everyday life, even the seemingly spontaneous or mundane, reveal a 'performative' component—a component that makes them *like a performance*.*

Like good theater scholars, PS scholars investigate *any* performance's 'dramaturgy'—the processes by which it was composed, prepared and presented.

And why study Performance?

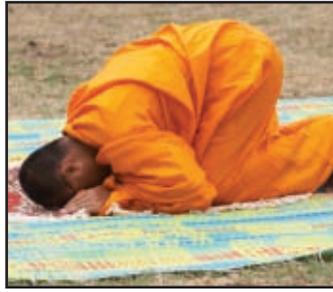
Cultures are often most fully expressive in their performances. PS scholars hope to comprehend and explain what such behaviors might indicate about the individual, group or culture that enacts them.

Richard Schechner has outlined seven functions of performance:

- To entertain
- To make something that is beautiful
- To mark or change identity
- To make or foster community
- To heal
- To teach, persuade or convince
- To deal with the sacred and/or the demonic

In his book *The Future of Ritual*, he writes that, in any of these varieties, 'Performance's subject [is] transformation: the startling ability of human beings to create themselves, to change, to become—for worse or better—what they ordinarily are not.' By means of performance, then, something is created, born, changed, celebrated, or ended. It is this transformative site that PS scholars study.

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The sidewinder snake moves across the desert floor by contracting and extending itself in a sideways motion. Wherever this beautiful rattlesnake points, it is not going there. Such (in)direction is characteristic of Performance Studies.

—Richard Schechner

The Story Unfolds: Developments in the Field

From Ritual to Theater

Two American anthropologists, Victor Turner and Richard Schechner, may be considered the ‘fathers’ of the field of Performance Studies (though there are also many important uncles and aunts, and especially children, in the family tree). In his research in the late 1960s, Turner began to see a universal theatrical language at play in the various cultural rituals he studied. He determined that all groups—be it the Ndembu people of north-western Zambia or tree-painters in Medieval China—perform rituals that dramatize and communicate stories about themselves. They all, for example, engage in some form of coming-of-age ceremonies, exorcism rites, or warfare, behaviors which contain a theatrical component and which enable the actor(s) to achieve a change in stature, manage crisis or give birth to a new state of affairs. Turner noted that such rites tend to occur in a ‘liminal’* space of heightened intensity separate from routine life, much like a dramatic theater performance. Given that these ritual acts exhibit many of the same means of expression employed on a theater stage, Turner termed them ‘social *dramas*.’

Each culture, each person within it, uses the entire sensory repertoire to convey messages: manual gesticulations, facial expressions, bodily postures, rapid, heavy or light breathing, tears, at the individual level...stylized gestures, dance patterns, prescribed silences, synchronized movements such as marching, the moves and ‘plays’ of games, sports and rituals, at the cultural level.

Victor Turner, From Ritual to Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play

Compelled to further explore the ‘theatrical potential of social life,’ Turner invited NYU professor Richard Schechner to join him in organizing the 1981 ‘World Conference on Ritual and Performance.’ In his own work, Schechner had similarly begun to argue that there are ‘**points of contact**’ between anthropological and theatrical thought. In his book *Between Theater and Anthropology*, he noted that ritual and theater performances share many common features: they both enact a transformation in being or consciousness, occur in a state of intensity, enable interactions between audience and performer, and consist of a whole sequence of behaviors prior to and after the main event on display.

Schechner and Turner collaborated in a series of 3 conferences to investigate further whether

PS’s Roots in the Theatrical Avant-Garde

It is important to note that both Turner and Schechner were highly involved in the avant garde art scene that developed in the U.S. in the 1960s. Turner became an avid viewer of such theater, and Schechner himself is a theater director and participant. Their insights about the fluid spectrum of theatrical activity reflected the tendency of these art movements to blur or breach the boundaries separating ‘art’ from ‘life,’ as well as art genres from each other. The famous ‘Happenings’ and other experimental performance acts of the 1960s rejected the rigid artifices of modern theater, where (for instance) an audience sat at a distance from the scripted actions ‘up there’ on stage. Instead, many of these experimental artists proclaimed, theater—one person doing something while another one watches—is unfolding everywhere around us.

I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theater to be engaged.

—Peter Brook, *The Deadly Theater*, 1968

This rejection of stark genre boundaries shaped the intellectual backdrop against which Turner and Schechner argued that a vast array of human activity—*theater, dance, music, games, sports, rituals, and more*—is composed of theatrical elements.

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Studies. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, with her PhD in Folklore and wide-ranging interests in Jewish studies, museum displays, tourist performances and the aesthetics of everyday life, becomes its chair. She would serve from 1980-1992, and is credited with transforming it into a fully-fledged B.A. granting department with 8 full-time PS faculty members.

1980:

The **Drama Review** adds the subtitle 'Journal of Performance Studies' to signal its more inclusive approach to performative behavior.

1981-82:

Victor Turner, an anthropologist who had articulated a continuum of 'theatrical' behavior in his book *From Ritual to Theater*, invites Richard Schechner to help plan a 'World Conference on Ritual and Performance.' Three related conferences are held during this year, the first on the Yaqui Deer Dancers of the U.S. Southwest and the second on the work of Suzuki Tadashi. *By Means of Performance* was written in response to these fruitful collaborations.

1984:

Northwestern University begins the second major Performance Studies department in the US. Their approach differs from NYU's in its exploration of the performative nature of speech and communication.

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there was a common theatrical basis to a **Broad Spectrum** of human activity, from rituals to games to sports.

Our intellectual goal in the conferences... was to approach the genres of theater, dance, music, sports and ritual as a single, coherent group, as *performance*. The underlying question became whether or not the same methodological tools and approaches could be used to understand a noh drama, a football game, a Yaqui deer dance, a Yoruba masked dance, and a postmodern experimental performance...?

Richard Schechner, By Means of Performance

At these early conferences, Turner and Schechner wondered aloud whether this theatrical behavior that everywhere displayed itself was a kind of language—structured by 'letters' in the form of physical movements, sounds, and other bodily expressions.

The first theater-person to formulate a notion of a new physical language was Antonin Artaud, the French actor and theater theorist. Let's listen to the thoughts he offered after watching a troupe of Balinese dancers in Paris:

Through the labyrinth of their gestures, attitudes, and sudden cries, through the gyrations and turns which leave no portion of the stage space unutilized, the sense of a new physical language, based upon signs and no longer upon words, is liberated. These actors... seem to be animated hieroglyphs.

For Artaud, Turner and Schechner, the 'text' under analysis ceased to be a static written record, but became the animated languages of human expression—movement, body posture, sound, voice, pace, activity. In these early years after the first conferences, PS scholars set out to investigate embodied, live events as they are performed. Scholars tried to 'read' the structure of a performance, how it behaved vis-à-vis its environment, and

what insight about its practitioners these first two findings might make possible. (See "PS's Roots in the Theatrical Avant-Garde" on page 5.)

But if PS was born in anthropology and theater, it moved in its teenage and early adult years into vastly broader terrain. As you can see in the **Timeline of Events** (See page 4), since these early days PS has undergone many changes—not just in expanding the number of activities it's willing to consider, but also in revising the very definition of the concept of 'performance' itself. As Peggy Phelan wrote after NYU's 1995 conference called 'The Future of the Field,'

While theater and anthropology certainly played a role in the generative disciplines of performance studies, other 'points of contact' have also had exceptional force in the field. Moreover, many of these points of contact are instrumental to the future of the field, not because theater and anthropology have 'ended' but because the function and force of those disciplines have been so thoroughly revised in the past two decades.

—Peggy Phelan, *The Ends of Performance*

The next pages of this brochure document some of the stops and turns PS has taken in the last two decades. While the road has been winding, one thing has remained certain: PS asserts that performance is the central constituent of the fabric of social reality. It takes for granted that *appearances are actualities*: it doesn't look for 'hidden depth' beneath the 'surface' actions of an individual or group, but instead sees those very behaviors as intelligible constructs that, when analyzed, can shed light on their makers. Thus performances—be they of an individual, group, or society, or of language or technology—are what is under the microscope in any PS investigation. They are the data, evidence, records and text of its inquiry.



But *what is a Performance?*

How can PS say that a French theater production of *La Cage aux Folles* and a WWF wrestling match are structured similarly? How can it see three different students—one who studies Muslim prayer services, another Miss America pageants, and a third the Jamaica *Carnival*—as engaged in a similar intellectual projects?

When Richard Schechner first coined the term ‘Performance Studies,’ he postulated that a performance is any behavior that is ‘twice-behaved’ or ‘restored.’ For him, performances are human actions or events that have been constructed through a multi-stage process: they have been rehearsed and prepared, and are then ‘framed, presented, highlighted or displayed’ in a heightened fashion. Any given performance has a history—it is the result of processes of learning and transmission that have preceded (and may succeed) it. A performance is the second (or third or fourth...) presentation of a practiced act.

Certainly, this seems true enough for a dance performance, for instance, in which dancers train for years, constantly revising and then re-presenting their craft. It is easy to see the complex dynamics that help structure such a highly staged event.

But performers in religious rituals, sports or games—such as the wrestler, Imam, Miss Texas or *Carnival* acrobat we just introduced—have also learned the behaviors specific to their event. Genuflecting, the run-way ‘stroll,’ and traditional face-painting are behaviors that have likewise been practiced and rehearsed—and are now being presented. In fact, *all* behaviors, as we will see, have been subjected to such a rehearsal process, having been learned, revised and presented in a particular milieu over time.

Therefore, in a PS project, behaviors are not studied as mere objects in the abstract, but instead in relation to the individual or group that exhibits them. PS scholars are interested in the ‘interactions

Questions to Get You Started:

When trying to understand a given performance, begin by asking some of the following questions:

- Who are the actors: elders, children, men only, animals, high-speed automobiles?...
- Where is the performance performed: on the street, in the National Theater, a forest?...
- Is it performed for someone: a parent, a crowded auditorium, God?...
- What were the various processes that went into rehearsing and presenting the ‘show?’
- Is a change of state celebrated: from pre-pubescent girl to woman? From ordinary man to religious elite? From guilty to innocent? Novice to aficionado?
- Who does the performance benefit, and whom does it exclude or oppress? How?
- What seems to be the function or consequence of this performance within the society, and have these changed over time?

and relationships’ that performances create.

As Schechner writes

To treat any object, work or product ‘as’ performance—a painting, a novel, a shoe, or anything at all—means to investigate what the object does, how it interacts with other objects or beings, and how it relates to other objects or beings. Performances exist only as actions, interactions and relationships.

—Richard Schechner,
Performance Studies: An Introduction

For example, a PS scholar is not interested in the performance ‘object’ of Chinese acupuncture treatment per se, but would study this action as it is practiced in a certain environment, such as in ancient China, contemporary China, or by Western alternative-medicine practitioners at the New-Age Amethyst Center in Davis Square, MA! In each context, the PS scholar would investigate the behavior of acupuncture practice: how it behaves

Performances exist only as actions, interactions and relationships.

—Richard Schechner



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1990:

NYU celebrates the 10th anniversary of its PS department by holding the first U.S. Performance Studies conference.

1993:

A 'performance studies' focus group within The Association for Theater in Higher Education (ATHE) forms.

1995:

As a follow-up to NYU's 1990 gathering, Peggy Phelan chairs 'Performance Studies: The Future of the Field,' a conference attended by upwards of 500 people. Her *The Ends of Performance* is a collection of articles and papers from the event. In the introduction she reflects on the conference's origins: "We hoped that the 1995 conference, billed as the 'first annual event,' would celebrate and critique the rapid institutionalization of the field. Northwestern...agreed to host 'the second annual,' and we were willing to wager that a two-year commitment would produce a third."

1996:

The second PS conference is held at Northwestern University.

1997:

The third PS conference is held at Georgia Tech.

1997:

The first worldwide association devoted solely to Performance Studies is founded: Performance Studies international. PSI is a professional association that promotes communication

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vis-à-vis its particular milieu, how it was first learned, and with whom it enacts relationships.

Let's take an example. A PS scholar would not analyze 'the death penalty' in the abstract. Instead, the executions of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg are a specific application of the procedure: there is nothing neutral about those executions—they were shaped and performed within the thick of a particular culture. A PS scholar might ask how anti-Communist Cold War rhetoric and the 'hysteria' of McCarthyism affected the investigation; how media coverage shaped public opinion and the speed of the executions; and how these particular trials differed from the Salem witch hunts and Medieval European scourges (to which they are often compared).

But the PS study *won't* provide theoretical or historical answers to those questions. It won't regard McCarthyism and the executions as abstract ideologies or objects that can be analyzed as such. Instead, they are the composite of a series of *behaviors* that were given shape, valued, and presented by a particular culture at a specific moment in time. Similarly, analysis of the trial is not that of a static object. Rather, like most plays, it contains *many* acts, material that led up to it and whose resonance is felt long after any one curtain may fall. A PS scholar cares about this entire performance series. In the case of the Rosenbergs, he would analyze each aspect of this cultural performance to see what it illuminates about the mid 20th century American 'stage' on which it unfolded.

Likewise, a PS scholar is not interested in ballet performance in the abstract, but in how a given performance was shaped, presented, and valued by a particular climate. One might analyze *Swan Lake* within its Imperial Russian environment, or in Soviet revisions, or as it was imported to the U.S. for the 1940 performance at the San Francisco Ballet. Or one might examine the processes that

shaped *that whole trajectory* of performance.

Thus, the object may be the same, but each cultural environment in which that object participates is unique. It is the *interactivity* of the event that PS scholars study.

Let's take another example. 'A 6 year old girl puts a crown on her head' as an abstract action tells us very little. But when we witness a 6 year old girl putting on a crown in a particular environment, it can now be analyzed as a performance, a behavior that was learned, practiced and given meaning by a certain group over time. When a Hasidic girl in Jerusalem puts on the crown, she may be participating in her community's religious ritual; she is dressing up as 'Queen Esther' for a Jewish celebration of Purim. When a kindergarten in suburban Chicago does it she may be trying to adorably woo her parents to let her stay up past her bedtime. And when done by a village girl in China's southwest Gansu Province, she may be imitating her older sister as she prepares to don the traditional headdress of womanhood. When each little girl puts on the hat, then, she is performing a behavior that is not-for-the-first-time: this ritual has already been structured and given meaning by her society; she herself may even have performed it before. That is what Schechner means by 'twice-behaved.' This action has been learned and repeated either by her, or by her society, prior to this given event. We look at it 'after the fact'—in its second presentation—to learn what this performance reveals about the cultural processes and belief structures that first gave rise to it.

Victor Turner offered the statement 'By their performances ye shall know them,' at the opening of the 1981 World Conference, and Schechner's book that emerged from that conference is entitled *By Means of Performance*. Both these phrases conclude that only by studying performances in their various contexts, expressions and historical



**Academic disciplines
are most active at their
ever-changing interfaces.**

—Richard Schechner

SAMPLE PERFORMANCE STUDIES PROJECTS

Here are some examples of PS interdisciplinary research projects. Each of these papers investigates ‘points of contact,’ to use Schechner’s phrase, between PS and (at least) one other Harvard department.

Performance and...

1. **The Study of Religion:**
Trembling, Trance, Shaking and Shuckling: A Comparative Look at the Physicality of Ecstatic Prayer
2. **Women, Gender and Sexuality:**
Staged Starvations: A Cultural Evaluation of Anorexia Nervosa as Teen-Age Performance in the U.S.
3. **Comparative Literature:**
King Lear in New Delhi, Hamlet in El Salvador. 20th Century World Translations of Shakespearean Drama.
4. **African Studies:**
Performing Colonialism: Belgian Conquest Propaganda and Narrative Strategies in the Congo, 1860-1960.
5. **Psychology:**
Stages of Mourning, Staging Mourning: Dances of Healing by U.S. Artist-Bereavement Groups in the 1960s.
6. **History:**
Marionette Theater in Prague, 1930 to 1975: The Rise and Fall of a Civic Tradition.
7. **Visual and Environmental Studies:**
The Performance of Space: Acoustic Design at the Ancient Theater of Epidaurus.
8. **Government:**
All Eyes on Tiananmen: Student Protest in Beijing and its International Media Audience, April 15-June 4, 1989.
9. **Computer Science:**
‘I’d Like to Present...Myself’: Fashioning Personal Identity on Internet Dating Sites.
10. **Dramatic Arts:**
The Sound of the Silence: The Role of the Pause in Pinter’s Dialogue.
11. **Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations:**
Acts of Holy War: The Changing Face of Jihad Practice, 1948-2006.
12. **East Asian Languages and Civilizations:**
Kabuki Costume Design and the Performance of Masculinity in Ginza, Tokyo.
13. **Social Studies:**
Brecht’s Theory of Observation: The V-Effekt as Tool of Social Critique.
14. **Jewish Studies:**
Speaking through the Page: Scholem Aleichem’s Tevye and Reader Response Theory.
15. **History of Science:**
Dr. Robot: Laparoscopic Cancer Treatment and the Robots Who Perform It. The History of a Procedure.

...To name the first 15 that come to mind.
What will your paper be?



...One of the key features of twenty-first century performance is its boundlessness and its capacity to cross borders.

—Henry Bial

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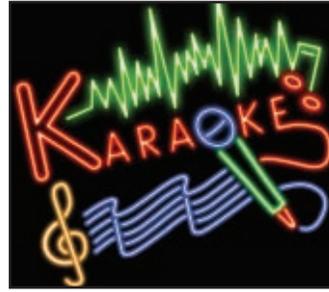
and exchange between scholars and practitioners working in the field of performance. It has staged numerous international conference and festival gatherings.

2001:

Membership in ATHE's Performance Studies focus group reaches 450.

2005:

PSi #12 is held at Brown University, March 30-April 1. Its name, 'Becoming Uncomfortable,' was taken from Brown President Ruth Simmons' university lecture, in which she stated that students must 'become uncomfortable in order to grow, in order to build an education, a life, a world.' The conference advertisement reads: 'It seemed an appropriate title for a PSi conference—an open invitation for engagement with all those issues that most challenge our sense of boundaries, our categorical constructions, our strategies for order. Our conference title understates, closets, titillates, misarticulates, sneaks-up upon, middle-classifies, play-acts, and jumps track.' Presented papers included: 'Don't Dat Coon Tink He Very Hot?: Embodied Deviance and the Construction of Black Cosmopolitanism in the Ragtime Era;' 'Toy Theater in an Age of Terror;' 'What Kind of Cunt Do You Really Want To Be? Gender, Performance, and Queer World-Making in Contemporary New York City Black and Latina Ballroom Culture;' 'Performing Muslim in the American Melting Pot;' and 'I Blog Therefore I Am: Chatrooms, Blogs and Identity Formation.'



processes can we inquire into an individual or group. In a world that is everywhere structured by human activity, behaviors, actions and events are now the keys to understanding. 'What the book was,' Schechner states, 'the performance has become.'

Other Performances: 'All the World's a Stage...'

Other theorists go a step further in opening up the term 'performance.' Like Turner and Schechner, they are not merely concerned with formal stage theater, but neither do they stop only at other social dramas like religious rituals and games. These thinkers take Shakespeare's *'theatrum mundi'* idea quite seriously. Perhaps 'all the world's a stage,' they muse. Perhaps *all* events, even the mundane and seemingly natural grit of everyday life, are kinds of performances.

In 1959, Erving Goffman wrote an influential piece called *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, in which he argued that daily life bears a dramatic structure: each of us is an 'actor' who plays certain 'parts' in front of a believing 'audience' of colleagues, acquaintances, family and friends. Goffman called this disposition a 'front'—the posture one employs to convince someone else of something, or to earn a certain social standing. He pointed out that an individual may not consciously be aware of his 'performance.' But this fact does not mean that his behavior is any less performed than that of a stage actor who is well aware he is playing a role.

**'All the world's a stage /
And all the men and women merely
players; / They have their exits and
their entrances; / And one man in his
time plays many parts.' /**

—William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 2, 7: 139-42

It does take deep skill, long training and psychological capacity to become a stage actor. But this fact should not blind us to another one: that almost anyone can quickly learn a script well enough to give a charitable audience some sense of realness in what is being contrived before them... The legitimate performances of everyday life are not 'acted' or 'put on' in the sense that the performer knows in advance just what he is going to do ...But [this] does not mean that [the person] will not express himself...in a way that is dramatized and preformed.... In short, we act better than we know how.

—Erving Goffman,
Presentation of Self in Everyday Life

In fact, Goffman wrote, most of us act so well that we fully *believe in* the part we are playing, the self we have presented. We bolster our front with the use of supporting 'props' in appropriate 'settings:' we wear a white coat to assure our patient he is in good hands, we hold up our badge to demonstrate that we have a right to search a house, we cross our arms, speak in a stern voice and wag a finger to warn a child against crossing us. Often, when we behave these actions repeatedly over time, we *ourselves* come to believe the impression of reality we sought to engender. We step so fully into our roles that the processes that went into structuring them are long forgotten. We too are taken in by the show.

Performance is always performance *for* someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, that audience is the self.

—Marvin Carlson, *‘What is Performance?’*

When we play this same part to the same audience on many different occasions, the ‘realness’ of our role is cemented, and a social relationship—doctor to patient, police to criminal, parent to child—arises. Goffman helped demonstrate that the rehearsal process of learning and repetition so familiar to us in theater and ritual likewise structures each of our every-day actions and behaviors. Daily life, too, is choreographed.

Goffman’s insights expanded PS’s lens of focus to allow every facet of social reality to be seen as a performance, constructed through behaviors, actions and events. Nothing about the personae we saw above is natural, inherent, or necessary. Behaviors and selves have been constructed through acts which are learned, valued, revised and repeated over time.

Speech acts

So far we have seen that ritual, sports, games, and everyday behavior can all be regarded as performances. Other thinkers did not just stop there.

J.L. Austin, a U.S. philosopher and linguist, gave a series of lectures at Harvard in 1962 which later became known as the book *How to Do Things with Words*. He argued that certain kinds of speech, too, are like performances. Austin demonstrated that there are certain kinds of speech that don’t simply express or convey information—they are not simply signs that convey the words’ inner meaning. These speech utterances actually *do* something; they create or usher in a new state of affairs. Take for example the phrases, ‘I bet you \$10 that...’ or ‘I promise you I’ll be home by 8,’ or ‘I do take thee as my lawful husband...’ In each of these statements, the speaker is not just expressing herself; her words actually constitute an event. Spoken in the right context, these words function as actions: in saying them, she puts her money on the line; commits to coming home; or binds herself to another person in a publicly-sanctioned relationship. Even if she is internally ambivalent, the force of her words is such that, once uttered, a new reality is created. Thus, certain kinds of speech—promises, bets, namings—are akin to actions. They too are kinds

MAJOR BOOKS IN THE FIELD

(There are countless others!)

The Twentieth Century Performance Reader,
Michael Huxley and Noel Witts, eds.

The Performance Studies Reader,
Henry Bial, ed.

From Ritual to Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play,
Victor Turner

Performance Studies: An Introduction,
Richard Schechner

The Future of Ritual,
Richard Schechner

Between Theater and Anthropology,
Richard Schechner

By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theater and Ritual,
Richard Schechner and Willa Appel, eds.

Performance: A Critical Introduction,
Marvin Carlson

Theories of the Theater,
Marvin Carlson

Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance,
Jane C. Desmond, ed.

The Explicit Body in Performance,
Rebecca Schneider

Professing Performance: Theater in the Academy from Philology to Performativity,
Shannon Jackson

Teaching Performance Studies,
Nathan Stucky and Cynthia Wimmer, eds.

Theatricality,
Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, eds.

Opera, or, the Undoing of Women,
Catherine Clement

Gender Trouble,
Judith Butler

Unmarked: The Politics of Performance,
Peggy Phelan

The Ends of Performance,
Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane, eds.

The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance,
Lizbeth Goodman, ed.

Critical Theory and Performance,
Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach, eds.

For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression,
Adriana Cavarero

Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance,
Susan Kattwinkel, ed.

Reading the Material Theater,
Ric Knowles

Perform, or Else: From Discipline to Performance,
Jon McKenzie

The Intercultural Performance Reader,
Patrice Pavis, ed.

Performing the Unnameable: An Anthology of Australian Performance Texts,
Richard James Allen and Karen Pearlman, eds.

A Sourcebook of African-American Performance: Plays, Peoples, Movements,
Annemarie Bean, ed.

The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality

Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory,
Andre Lepecki, ed.

And, to give you a sense of the explosion of related literature in recent years, note that there are two different Performance Studies texts with the same title...!

Performance Anxieties: Re-producing Masculinity,
David Buchbinder

Performance Anxieties: Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race,
Ann Pellegrini

WRITING ABOUT PERFORMANCE: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

Many of us, after seeing a beautiful or moving performance event, try to understand and communicate its power through writing: perhaps we reflect privately in a journal about our experience, send an email to friends encouraging them also to go, or jot down notes about what we felt as thoughts for a paper we are working on. Electrified, saddened, or made contemplative by a performance, often we turn to written language to make sense of the affecting power of what we have seen and heard.

Yet in our admiration of a performance's energy, we run the risk making it ours rather than letting it stay itself.

For writing about performance presents a peculiar problem: can we capture the intensity of the 3-dimensional spectacle in 2-dimensional language? In putting what was a non-verbal, electric, live event down on our paper, do we not trap it in the very fixedness—the basis in written text—it so gracefully eludes? Can we preserve the vivid and tactile language(s) of the event itself—body, color, sound, voice, space... ?

One might ask, then: why write about performance events that themselves may wish to be only of *the moment*? Does writing about a performance afterwards alter or mar its spontaneity? Do we flatten its power, literally, by transferring it to a computer screen or 9 X 11 yellow legal pad?

Many PS people will answer 'No.' The opportunity to linger over what a performance has to say is the work and gift of this field. Writing about performance enables us to keep wrestling with the event, to keep learning what it has to teach us. It lives on, albeit in altered form, in our memory and mind's eye. Sometimes we even broaden its audience, extending its power and challenge to those who read our written work about it.

Yet many PS scholars also know that it is essential to preserve some of the 'feel' of a performance in our writing. They encourage the use of evocative, full-bodied imagery to convey the affective quality of the spectacle—its colors, smell, rhythm, the palpable anxiety of a theater house, the pounding of feet on wet grass in a rain dance...

A post-modernist movement known as '**Performative Writing**' goes a step further. Performative Writing is not just writing *about* a performance, it is a form that itself strives to *be* a performance.

It wonders whether J.L. Austin's insights about spoken speech also hold for written. In *How To Do Things With Words*, Austin wrote that words do not just convey fixed meanings, but actually *do* something—they enact a new reality. Those who practice Performative Writing try to blur the boundaries between speech and written language so that writing itself may become like a performance, a sensory event.

Leading Performance Studies scholar Peggy Phelan, among others, practices Performative Writing. Here is an excerpt from her essay 'To Suffer a Sea Change,' a piece she wrote during her debilitating eye surgery. You will notice in it that, à la Austin, her language is not merely a communicator of fixed meaning—her words are not statements that simply report information. Rather, she strives to have her language *recreate* the pain and anesthesia-induced disorientation which she bodily experienced during the travail.

...My eye, which is frozen, can still see things as they pass over it... colors I have never seen before... I am seeing the roof of my own eye from the interior side. It is utterly breath stopping. I cannot speak... Words walk to the threshold but will not enter the rooms of the body where pain runs wild. Deserted by words, pain lacks temporal sequence or spatial order: it makes a sound that syntax cannot carry.

Phelan finds her doctor's too-easy medical narrative inadequate to address the reality of what has seized her body. No words can sensibly explain her agony, for 'pain makes a sound that syntax cannot carry.' Instead, Phelan uses language to recreate her sensory state. She employs all her faculties in the attempt to represent, not explain her experience: "I crane to hear my blankness, stutter toward seeing my blindness."

Phelan's words do not simply contain facts or pass ready-made content from her to the reader. Instead, they 'do' something. They create a vivid reality in which we too are pained and slip with her into a state of blurry confusion. They help her navigate her way to a changed identity. They enact perception. As such, her essay was seen as a tour de force, a literary application of Austin's speech-acts, which inaugurated Performative Writing as an emerging genre.

Performative Writing is often loosely autobiographical, or it may even be seen as constitutive of the writer's identity, helping him find his way *by means of* the writing. It is thus an application of the PS notion that no author, or field, 'knows it all'; it does not ask that the writer have only conclusive information to share, clear messages to impart. Also known as 'poetic scholarship' or 'auto-ethnography,' Performative Writing knows that the author too is on a journey.

For more information on Performative Writing, see Phelan's introduction to *The Ends of Performance* and Debra Pollock's chapter 'Performative Writing' in the same book.



of performances. As Austin said it, they have ‘performative’ effects.

Austin’s work gave us new ways of thinking about what speech and language can achieve. His insights were later extended by Peggy Phelan and others who endowed *written* language with a similar capacity to perform, to actually *do* something. (See “Writing About Performance” on page 12.)

Gender

Some combination of Goffman’s and Austin’s insights led Judith Butler, now professor of Comparative Literature and Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley, to articulate in the late 1980s and ‘90s another kind of performance: the making of gender.

For Butler, one’s gender—‘being a man or a woman’—is not an expression of some natural or ‘real’ essence, but instead is a constructed process. Butler took seriously Simone de Beauvoir’s original insight that ‘One is not born a woman; one *becomes* woman.’ A woman’s behaviors—how she dresses, has sex, expresses her emotions, whom she marries—have been learned, practiced and passed on according to convention. There are already fixed notions of how to do these things, which a woman inherits from her cultural environment. She ‘plays the part,’ then, of scripted roles already operative in her society.

Thus gender is another performative act which—like a Broadway musical, prayer gathering, or police-officer making an arrest—is choreographed, rehearsed, and presented. Gender is ‘real’ only insofar as, and in the specific ways that, it is performed.

Gender reality is performative...The [gender] act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again.

—Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution’

Race

Like gender, race too can be seen as a performative. It is not descriptive of some prior essence; instead, it is a constructed narrative whose meaning has been structured, repeated *and revised*, over time. Just think: What does it mean to be a ‘black’ person? Negro? Colored? Afro-American? African American? Race is a performative act whereby cultural narratives are branded, removed, and re-imposed on bodies that do not of themselves possess specific meaning. The body is a stage on which socially-determined meanings are formed, practiced, repeated, changed and passed on. PS scholars work to explain the mechanics of the performance.

Butler’s thought is deeply political. If gender and race are performances, one can openly flaunt their constructed nature. She calls on scholar-activists to re-obtain the critical distance that has been lost through hyper-repetition, and to dismantle the artifices that have reified these performances. Many PS people produce work and build lives that reveal and resist the performance processes by which imprisoning social roles have been learned, practiced and passed on.

***Gender reality is performative...
The [gender] act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again.***

—Judith Butler

'To perform' and 'performance' have become like a Pac-Man, swallowing everything they encounter.

—Freddie Rokem

Yet Still Other Forms

Yet other scholars are quick to point out that there are other performances that may not follow a ritualized paradigm or take place in heightened states of intensity or separation from mundane activity. Indeed, there are performances of highly 'normative' systems—such as the 'performances' of cars, machines, digital media, Wall Street markets, Internet search engines, text-messaging and the like. More than 20 years since its infancy in anthropological research, PS research now extends to performances that are not physical, embodied, or even human! As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes,

Performance as an organizing idea has been responsive not only to new modes of live action, but also new technologies...[We need to] take issue with the assumption of human agents, live bodies, and presence as organizing concepts for Performance Studies...If boundaries are to be blurred, why not also the line between live and mediated performance?

—Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett,
'Performance Studies'

Critics: A Slippery Slope to Nowhere?

As we noted at the beginning of this discussion, one fact about PS is uncontested: its borders are porous and ever-expanding. It desires to bring ever new forms of performance into the conversation. It is an inter-disciplinary and de-centered field, crossing boundaries, always in pursuit.

Performance studies is 'inter'—in between. It is intergeneric, interdisciplinary, intercultural—and therefore inherently unstable. Performance studies resists or rejects definition. As a discipline, PS cannot be mapped effectively because it transgresses boundaries, it goes where it is not expected to be. It is inherently 'in between' and therefore cannot be pinned down or located exactly. This indecision (if that's what it is) or multidirectionality drives some people crazy. For others, it's the pungent and defining flavor of the meat.

Richard Schechner,
'What is Performance Studies Anyway?'

But there *are* people whom PS 'drives crazy.' Some critics reject its behavioralist approach to all human phenomena, wondering why What is Real has been reduced to an outcome of scripted actions and social repetition. Others will quip that when any action can be regarded as performance, there is nothing that *won't* be cast into PS's net! With such expansive wings and hungry appetite, Performance Studies will then not only be difficult to describe, but also difficult to contain.

It has gradually become more and more difficult to say exactly what counts as Performance Studies. The field covered by PS has become much more than what it is not, engaging in issues from almost all spheres involving human agency and even beyond... 'To perform' and 'performance' have become like a Pac-Man, swallowing everything they encounter.

Freddie Rokem, Tel Aviv University



SOME PERFORMANCE STUDIES JOURNALS:

TDR/The Drama Review was first established in 1956 as Tulane Drama Review. In 1980 TDR added the subtitle *Journal of Performance Studies*. With an emphasis on experimental, avant-garde, intercultural, and interdisciplinary performance, TDR covers dance, theatre, performance art, visual art, popular entertainment, media, sports, rituals, and performance in politics and everyday life. Published by MIT Press, it is well-known as a basic resource for keeping up with contemporary performing arts and performance theory.

Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory is a bi-annual publication that features essays, scripts, interviews and articles on performance from interdisciplinary feminist perspectives. Women & Performance was launched in 1983 by a group of graduate students in the Department of Performance Studies at NYU as a forum for discussion of gender and representation. It is committed to feminist writing and activism, and works to reformulate notions of performance and performativity so as to 'advance, challenge or reinvent issues critical to ongoing discussions surrounding gender and sexuality.'

PAJ: Journal of Performance and Art. Since its founding in 1976, PAJ has been an influential voice in the arts, offering extended coverage of the visual arts (such as video, installations, photography, and multimedia performance), in addition to reviews of new works in theatre, dance, film, and opera. PAJ brings together theatre and the visual arts in a challenging cross-media perspective. A special section entitled 'Art & Performance Notes' offers reviews of current productions and gallery exhibits, as well as international festival reports. Published by Johns Hopkins.

The Journal of Ritual Studies. Founded in 1987, the Journal of Ritual Studies deals exclusively with ritual in all its aspects. Its interdisciplinary audience includes scholars from anthropology, religious studies, sociology, psychology, performance studies, ancient, medieval, early modern and contemporary history, area studies, philosophy, art, literature, dance, and music. The Journal provides a forum for debate about ritual's role and meaning, and seeks better definition for this rapidly growing field.

Theater Magazine. Yale University School of Drama's publication, focuses primarily, but not exclusively, on experimental theater—American and international—and theater that touches on political and cultural debates.

Asian Theater Journal is dedicated to the performing arts of Asia, focusing upon both traditional and modern theatrical forms. It offers descriptive and analytical articles, original plays and play translations, book and audio-visual reviews, and reports of current theatrical activities in Asia.

Dance Magazine provides the 'most entertaining, most beautiful, up-to-date, in-the-know information for serious and aspiring dancers, dance teachers and professionals.' It is a well-known resource for reviews of American and international dance performances, as well as for feature articles on dancers, choreographers, dance companies and productions.

Text and Performance Quarterly publishes scholarship that explores and advances the study of performance as a social, communicative practice; as a technology of representation and expression; and as a hermeneutic. Articles address performance and the performative from a wide range of perspectives and methodologies, and they investigate all sites of performance from the classical stage to popular culture to the practices of everyday life. Published by Routledge.

Performance Research, a Britain-based journal published by Routledge, promotes a dynamic interchange between scholarship and practice in the field of performance. Interdisciplinary in vision and international in scope, its emphasis is on research in contemporary performance arts within changing cultures. It encourages work that challenges boundaries between disciplines and media. Each issue contains articles, documents, interviews, reviews as well as illustrations and original artworks.



PERFORMANCE STUDIES PROGRAMS IN THE U.S. AND THE WORLD

New York University: The first PS program in the U.S. Its historical basis is in theater and dramatic arts, but in 1980 the department adopted Richard Schechner's *Broad Spectrum Approach*, expanding its focus to include a range of performance events, such as rituals, games, sports, popular entertainment, healing practices and ultimately 'the performance of self' in everyday life.

Northwestern University: The second PS program founded in the U.S., in 1984. Formerly known as the Department of Oral Interpretation, NU's program differs from NYU's in its focus on the performative nature of language. If NYU enlarged the concept of theater to include other theatrical behaviors, Northwestern expanded the notion of literature to include other forms of 'aesthetic communication,' such as storytelling, movement pieces, social greetings, displays of emotion, even jokes and everyday conversations.

Other PS programs in the States are located at **University of California, Berkeley** (Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies) and **Brown University** (Theater and Performance Studies), among others.

Countless other departments in colleges and universities in the U.S.—such as English, Anthropology, Theater Studies and Cultural Studies programs—offer coursework in, and devote research to, PS related topics.

Internationally-based Performance Studies programs include those at the **University of Warwick**, **University of Sydney**, and **The Centre for Performance Research at the University of Wales**.

In the Drama and Performance Studies program at the **University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa**, one can participate in the 'Prison Theater initiative,' which stages post-apartheid testimonies of South Africa's black population as a means to engage national questions of race, oppression and identity.

International institutes such as **The Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics**—an innovative consortium of artists, scholars, and institutions in the Americas—likewise exist. Its founding members are from Brazil, Peru, and the U.S.



For some, then, PS is too a voracious field: the broader its reach becomes, the more it loses critical punch. Others say that PS's politics are slack, that it focuses only on surfaces behaviors and, in doing so, demonstrates its superficiality and relativism. If a scholar studies suicide bombings as 'only' a kind of performance, has the field no moral compass?

With this question we return to our initial conundrum: PS can frustrate. It is a hungry, unpredictable concept and field. It side-winds, sometimes evading our grasp. As Marvin Carlson writes, 'it is futile to seek some overarching semantic field to cover such seemingly disparate usages as the performance of an actor, of a school child, of an automobile.'

And it's true. Just one look at the sample projects enumerated in this essay, and you realize how many disciplinary boundaries have been crossed. Stage theater, dance, religious ritual, everyday behavior, language, gender and race and technology are all treated alongside one another. The only feature they share in common is that they are behaviors that are constructed through **performance processes**.

For PS people, that's no small thing. Learning to think in terms of behaviors, actions, events, performances, performatives—well, PS people hope, that way of looking at the world can bring about great changes. One often even detects a kind of utopianism that permeates the literature.



Performance Studies: Consequences and Advantages

PS is intercultural

Turner and Schechner pioneered the field with the insight that there is a persistent theatricality to all cultures' behavior. The assertion of this universal language, this notion that the fabric of human life is everywhere structured by behavioral processes, dismantles the we/they ethnocentrism of much Western scholarship. We all have more in common than not.

A performance is declarative of our shared humanity, yet it utters the uniqueness of particular cultures. We will know one another better by entering one another's performances and learning their grammars and vocabularies.

—Victor Turner, *World Conference on Ritual and Performance*

Furthermore, formerly in anthropological research, one would set out to study 'The Other'—a culture different than one's own. In a PS project, though, I can turn that critical lens onto myself, scrutinizing my own or my society's actions in order to understand the structure, history and rationale of *these* performances.

PS is intergeneric

PS projects tend to bring together (at least) two departments or disciplines that would otherwise be kept apart. This feature is a legacy of Schechner's insight that theatrical and anthropological thought share 'points of contact;' PS is interested in research that illuminates other areas of convergence. (See "Sample PS Projects" on page 9 for examples of work that is situated between any two established disciplines).

The ongoing challenge of our collaborative agenda is to refuse and supercede the deeply entrenched division of labor, apartheid of knowledges, that plays out inside the academy... The division between theory and practice, abstraction and embodiment, is an arbitrary and rigged choice, and like all binarisms it is booby-trapped... Our radical move is to turn, and return, insistently, to the crossroads.

—Dwight Conquerwood, *Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research*

PS challenges dependence upon written text

PS offers a corrective to the preponderance, if not dominance, of literary, text-based criticism, favoring instead a new mode of performance-based analysis. As Henry Bial writes, "'Textualism'—the emphasis on what can be written down—unfairly devalues the knowledge and experience of many subjugated peoples." Much of the world expresses itself in many other 'literatures' that are not exclusively text-based, whose language(s) PS hopes to bring back into the conversation.

By theorizing embodiment, event and agency in relation to live (and mediated) performance, Performance Studies can potentially offer something of a counterweight to the emphasis in Cultural Studies on literature, media and text as an extended metaphor for culture.

—Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Performance Studies*

A performance is declarative of our shared humanity, yet it utters the uniqueness of particular cultures. We will know one another better by entering one another's performances and learning their grammars and vocabularies.

—Victor Turner

See "Sample PS Projects" on page 9 for examples of work that is situated between any two established disciplines.



***My intention is,
in due time,
to found a school,
to build a theater
where a hundred
little girls shall be
trained in my art,
which they,
in their turn,
will better.
In this school,
I shall not teach
the children to imi-
tate my movements,
but to make
their own.***

—Isadora Duncan

PS challenges Rationalism, Linearity, 'Knowledge is Power'

PS sees phenomena as provisional and in process—it resists notions of fixed Truths and devalues final products. It shares the characteristics of its subject, performance—and performance shares the characteristics of life: unpredictable, dynamic, here today gone tomorrow. PS does not wish to whitewash the world's ambiguity, or unify its inconsistencies. It's well-suited to its subject, then, and it won't try to rigidify and make permanent what wants to stay live and 'of the moment.' Peggy Phelan writes that PS can embolden us against the dangers of excessive literalism and linearism. PS is alert to each rich, messy, present moment. It distrusts Grand Narratives.

The agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the one who knows and answers, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know.

Peggy Phelan, Unmarked

In another place, Phelan writes that this mode of thinking is a 'statement of allegiance to the radicality of unknowing who we are becoming.' Unlike the thrust of so much academic scholarship, PS admits—even somewhat proudly—what it doesn't know. In that, perhaps, it keeps us honest.

Passing the Torch

If what you have read here excites you, if you want to ask a question, if some of it seems just plain wrong, and/or if you are burning to try your own hand in the PS deck...you are most definitely welcome. Performance Studies researchers don't want simply to bring new kinds of performances into the mix. They also see 'Performance' itself as a category under construction, an organizing concept that will be revised in light of the many activities to which it is addressed. As Jon McKenzie writes, 'Our rehearsal of a general theory must thus seek out other sites, other premises, other performances.' The concept of performance—and the field dedicated to its study—will readjust its very meaning as further insight demands.

More than just celebrating intellectual curiosity, then, PS is a challenge and a plea for 'the next generation'—i.e., you!—to articulate new definitions of performance that will push the field forward, deepening our understanding of ourselves along the way.

As Schechner writes at the end of his 2002 book, 'as a method of studying performances, this new discipline is still in its formative stage.'

GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

Performance:

Any action that is ‘not-for-the-first time’—that has been learned, rehearsed, and is then ‘twice-behaved,’ or performed. PS scholars claim that any action follows this ‘performative’ paradigm, even those we typically assume are natural or spontaneous (like getting dressed in the morning, or ‘being’ a man). PS scholars study how the behavior is prepared and presented as a means to understand an individual’s or group’s values and organization.

Performative/Theatrical:

Although these words obviously derive their meaning from the worlds of performance and theater, they can also be abstracted from the performing arts and then applied to any and all aspects of human life. In PS, ‘performative’ acts, like gender and language, have features that are structured like a performance.

Play:

Play is often thought of as the spontaneous or unplanned aspect of a given performance, an element of surprise or freedom that can’t be prescribed. As Henry Bial writes, ‘Where ritual depends on repetition, play stresses innovation and creativity.’ Some scholars formulate performance as the product of structured ritual, plus its unbounded counterpart, play.

Interdisciplinary:

A mode of inquiry that is ‘genre-blurring,’ that tends to cross conventionally-divided academic disciplines or departments. PS is highly interdisciplinary; it openly challenges rigid binaries, instead seeing an underlying ‘performativity’ to all actions, whether verbal, written or physical. It can thus study literature, technology, dance, everyday life, religion, sports, gender identity—all examples of performative behavior—alongside one another.

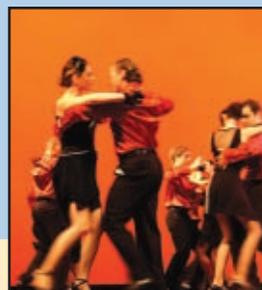
Liminal:

The ‘in-between’ state of heightened intensity in which a ritual or performance is enacted. The liminal space is the one that occupies the PS scholar’s attention, because it is there that the potential of the behavior, action, or event is achieved. PS understands *itself* as liminal—always between two other fields, a site where new and transformative insight can be found.

As a method of studying performances, this new discipline is still in its formative stage.

—Richard Schechner





*Looking at performance and writing about those visions
are the means by which I approach my truest ends—to love what rationalism
says is phantasmatic, to imagine and realize, however tentatively
and momentarily, a world elsewhere.*

—Peggy Phelan



Acknowledgments:

*This guide was written by Shana Komitee, PhD candidate in GSAS, for Professor Julie Buckler
as a teaching resource for Literature 128: Performing Texts.*

It was made possible by a Gordon Gray Faculty Grant for Writing Pedagogy.