

Performance and Storytelling

Performance and **storytelling** are key processes in communication. These processes are understood in a variety of ways within the field of communication. Indeed, scholars regularly refer to performance as “an essentially contested concept” (e.g., Carlson, 1996; Strine, Long, & HopKins, 1990), in recognition of the different meanings, discourses, and traditions that accompany the term. This variety is evident in the many ways performance enters into daily conversation. Speakers talk of going to see a theatrical performance, of the recent performance of a popular singer, of performing a favor for a friend, and of enduring a performance review at work. In a similar way, **storytelling** is understood to draw on and encompass a variety of theories, approaches, and disciplinary orientations (e.g., Bamberg, 2007a). Speakers tell about what happened on the way to the store and about the life history of a politician; and they retell an urban legend posted on a weblog and recount atrocity stories from the newspaper. Both performance and **storytelling** are celebrated as generative concepts that revitalized research and academic disciplines at the end of the 20th century, to the point where scholars talk about “the performance turn” and “the narrative turn” in the human sciences. Performance and **storytelling** are described as interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and even antidisciplinary concepts.

Given the contested terrain within which performance and **storytelling** operate, any description of them as communication processes risks oversimplification and reduction. With this caution in mind, however, the approaches to understanding these processes can be organized into two predominate views. One view positions performance and **storytelling** as processes set apart from the ordinary or everyday communication that surrounds them. Performance and **storytelling** *make* something of communication; they make it into play, verbal art, jokes, stories, drama, aesthetic expression, ritual, and poetic communication. A second view positions performance and **storytelling** as processes that are intrinsic to any communicative act. Performance and **storytelling** name the actual *doing* of communication; they refer to the exercise of linguistic and communicative competence, the practice of behavior and speech acts, the work of habit and discipline. Any particular approach, therefore, selects and combines aspects of these two views—making and doing—to theorize performance and **storytelling**.

Theorizing Performance and Storytelling

The theoretical description of performance and **storytelling** as making and doing has its clearest formulation in the classical Greek concepts of poiesis and praxis. Poiesis refers to the productive sciences of making things, such as making a good speech or a good poem. Praxis, on the other hand, refers to the practical sciences of doing things, such as the conduct of a good person or a good society. As Richard L. Lanigan (1992) summarizes, poiesis “brings into existence something distinct from the activity itself,” whereas praxis is “an activity that has a goal within itself” (pp. 211–212). The ambiguous combination of these views can be seen in early references to mimesis. These references involve a family of related terms that describe the expression, representation, or imitation of actions through speech, dance, or song. These terms are used to describe the person who performs, the context of action, the act of doing a performance, and the result of the performed action. In the work of Plato and Aristotle, this ambiguity is reduced by emphasizing mimesis as a making, in particular as the capacity for making images, for making copies of concrete action, for representing ideas, and for imitating worthy models. Let us examine the work of two contemporary scholars who emphasize poiesis, or

making, with regard to performance and **storytelling** before turning to theories that emphasize praxis, or doing performance and **storytelling**.

Making Performance

The view of performance as the making of art, epitomized by Aristotle's discussion of tragedy in his *Poetics*, is not restricted to ancient Greece or even Western cultures. In his overview of performance studies, Marvin Carlson (1996) writes, "There has been general agreement that within every culture there can be discovered a certain kind of activity, set apart from other activities by space, time, attitude, or all three, that can be spoken of and analyzed as 'performance'" (p. 15). The communication process of making performance, across these various cultures, is not restricted to aesthetic venues such as theaters, concert halls, and festival tents. The anthropologist Victor Turner (1988) argues that "the basic stuff of social life is performance" (p. 81) and that humans are "self-performing animals," or *Homo performans*. Cultural performances, such as those found in theater and films, arise from and respond to performance in society, or what Turner calls social drama.

Social drama erupts from the fabric of ongoing social life and its normative customs and practices. Like Aristotle, Turner conceptualizes performance as a process bounded by a diachronic structure; that is, social dramas have a beginning, a middle or a sequence of distinct phases, and an end. In his book *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, Turner (1974) identifies four phases of public action that constitute the diachronic structure of social drama. First, regular social relations and ongoing normative interactions are interrupted by a *breach*, which makes social conflict and antagonism visible. Second, this breach widens and extends into a mounting *crisis*, which cannot be ignored or re-absorbed into the existing social order. The crisis is liminal in the sense that it symbolizes a threshold or boundary that opens up a transgressive space within and against public life. Third, representatives of the social system respond through informal and formal means with *redressive action* to mediate, arbitrate, or ameliorate the crisis. In the final phase, the contesting parties move to closure through the *reintegration* of the disturbed social group or through the recognition of the legitimacy of the breach and the schism between the contesting parties. The symbolic transgression of social drama constitutes a reflexive process whereby society can communicate about the communication system—a process that both makes and remakes the fabric of ordinary, customary, and norm-bound social life.

Making Storytelling

"Making **storytelling**" is an awkward expression; but it has the advantage of emphasizing the twofold sense of making that occurs in **storytelling**. **Storytelling** involves both the making of a story and the making of an event of telling. A person becomes a storyteller by making a story or a narrative out of the events of experience, both real and imaginary. And the storyteller makes that story into a communication event by telling it to and for an audience. Scholars from a variety of fields—such as folklore, anthropology, literature, linguistics, history, education, psychology, sociology—join communication scholars in exploring both these senses of "making **storytelling**" under the rubric of speech play, verbal art, narrative performance, folktales, and oral literature and traditions (for an overview, see Finnegan, 1992).

One example of this perspective on **storytelling** comes in Richard Bauman's study of **storytelling** as a way of speaking. For Bauman (1986), the essence of **storytelling** "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" (p. 3). This display of skill in expression calls on the audience to go beyond appreciating the story to evaluating the ways in which the storyteller enhances experience. "Performance thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of both the act of expression and the performer" (p. 3). Bauman follows Roman Jakobson (1960) here in his emphasis on the way **storytelling** enacts the poetic function of communication (see Peterson & Langellier, 2006, for further discussion of communication as **storytelling**). A storyteller is not valued by an audience simply for the information or message that the performance conveys. On the contrary, it is the storyteller's ability to make a report of events into something remarkable, memorable, and worthy of appreciation and response that draws the audience's interest. In

storytelling, communication is productive; that is, **storytelling** makes something special, something poetic, out of what might otherwise be a prosaic or mundane message. As Bauman (1986) suggests, "Every performance will have a unique and emergent aspect" (p. 4) that sets it apart from the conventions and structures that make it possible. The audience and storyteller take up these existing resources to turn back and communicate about them.

Doing Performance

As the preceding description suggests, a view of performance and **storytelling** as making, or poiesis, requires the repetition or mobilizing of meanings that are already socially established. The making of performance and **storytelling** does not take place *ex nihilo*, outside of any social and cultural context and history. In social drama, performance draws on the reenactment of social relations that are easily recognized and commonly held by the participants. It is only possible to challenge the legitimacy of these socially established forms and conventions because they are so familiar. And these social forms and conventions must be deployed and enacted to be challenged. In brief, performance does them; performance is doing something, or praxis.

The view of performance as praxis draws on work by scholars on the philosophy of language and communication, especially as they incorporate the work of phenomenologists, semioticians, feminists, poststructuralists, and queer theorists. For these scholars, performance is an extension of bodily capability. Acting, like other operations of the body such as imitation and habit, is an existential operation, an embodied project of perception and expression. When one person imitates another by repeating something the other has just said in a mocking tone of voice, something regularly witnessed among children, that person is not putting together knowledge of what is seen (the visible muscular contractions the other uses to speak) with knowledge of what is felt (the bodily ability to produce similar sounds). Rather, one person mocks the other by responding to the particular situation with a conventional form of solution—the person gets into the form of, or performs, the other's action. Communication, from this perspective, is intersubjectively developed as a form or structure in time. One person can mock another, and vice versa, because together they constitute a system in which perception can become expression and expression can become perception. Just as a person can perform with the left hand a gesture just performed with the right, so too can one person perform what is performed by the other.

Judith Butler, in a 1988 essay that would prove to be highly influential among communication and performance studies scholars, develops this view of performance as doing in her exploration of how gender is constituted in performative acts. For Butler, gender identity is not something that is "given" but something that is done through what she describes as "a stylized repetition of acts." Gender identity is a set of historical possibilities that must be continually realized in corporeal acts. These repetitive acts are both habitual and habituating. A person does not choose or select a particular identity so much as reproduce it by taking up and performing existing and conventional manners or styles of bodily acts. Such acts are regulatory and disciplinary practices in the sense that conventional performances are rewarded and unconventional performances punished. As a result, gender identity is a site of both pleasure and anxiety. The identity performed by these acts must be continually reinforced and stabilized. Because they are highly conventionalized, gender identities are open to modification just as other sedimented structures or habits of the body can be destabilized and changed.

Doing Storytelling

The performative aspects of doing **storytelling** are readily apparent in events where a skillful performer tells a highly polished narrative for a clearly demarcated audience. In this case, theorists highlight the communication practices employed by good performers, the elements that make up satisfying narratives, and the behaviors and responses of conventional audiences. The performative aspects of doing **storytelling** are less obvious, but no less important, in the mundane experiences of **storytelling** that emerge fleetingly in fragments, across diverse settings and in ambiguous circumstances, as told by multiple participants with varying interests and abilities.

For example, think of how families tell stories around the dinner table. A story may be told by one person, as when a child tells a story of what happened in school. Or a story about something that happened last summer may be developed by multiple family members, where they compete, collaborate, cooperate, and contest with each other. The story may be more or less clearly identified as a story, it may be diligently developed through interruptions about the meal and comments on other matters, or it may be a fragment that someone only briefly mentions and then drops. Some family members may be willing and enthusiastic listeners and tellers, others may be reluctant and unwilling.

The focus on doing **storytelling** shifts the emphasis from the making of a good storyteller, or a good story or performance, to the pragmatics of communication and the strategic functions of those practices for embodied participants. Della Pollock's (1999) study of telling birth stories illustrates this theoretical shift to what she calls "talking understood as performance" (p. 8). The birth stories she describes function as discursive strategies, or "mobile cultural fragments" (p. 22), that circulate among a variety of listeners and tellers, who use these stories to make tentative and temporary connections with changing social conventions and meanings in unstable and transitory circumstances. The practice of telling birth stories undercuts and resists narrative norms that would prescribe a naturalized comic-heroic narrative where difficulties in pregnancy and delivery are resolved in the happy ending of a healthy birth. Pollock listens for the absences and silences, the constitutive differences and multiple performativities, that mark how the telling of birth stories transforms women into maternal subjects.

As communication processes, performance and **storytelling** function as both a making and a doing, as both poesis and praxis. The complexity of this combinatory relationship is revealed in their reflexivity and reversibility. Poesis and praxis are *reflexive* terms in their circular and overlapping reference: Theorists talk about performance and **storytelling** as "doing what is done" and as "making the best of what is made." Poesis and praxis are *reversible* terms in how they refer to each other: Theorists talk about performance and **storytelling** as "a making do," "making a to do," as well as "a do about making." Theorizing performance and **storytelling** as communication processes provides a basis for their systematic study in applications of methodology.

Methodology

The turn to methodology poses the question of how we know what we know about, in, and through performance and **storytelling**. Methodology makes explicit the importance of the context in which performance and **storytelling** are located as objects of study. One way to approach the question of methodology is to assume that there is a stable and predictable relationship between an object, such as a performance or a story, and the research context. This approach draws on research traditions in the natural sciences and posits performance and **storytelling** as objects that are already constituted for researchers to find. Such methodologies emphasize the invention of "that which is *given* as evidence," or *data* (Lanigan, 1992, p. 215). If researchers *know* what performance and **storytelling** is (invention), then they can find occurrences of it in a particular situation (according to the given evidence).

The experience of studying different cultures and subcultures, however, suggests that **storytelling** and performance are neither stable nor predictable objects of study. Researchers may "miss" hearing a story as a story because what constitutes a story in one culture or subculture may not in another. Or they may not "see" a performance as performance because the elements that constitute performance may not be the same in a different setting or at a different time. The potential to overlook performance and **storytelling** as objects of research is particularly evident when performance and **storytelling** are understood as praxis rather than poesis. Research methodologies for performance and **storytelling**, therefore, rely on alternative approaches that emphasize the participation of the researcher in locating what is to be known. These approaches draw on qualitative methodologies in the human sciences and emphasize the discovery of "that which is *taken* as evidence," or *capta* (Lanigan, 1992, p. 215). As researchers participate in a particular context, they *come to know* (discovery) those features by which they locate (taken as evidence) performance and **storytelling** as

objects of research.

There are several ways to organize or categorize the qualitative methodologies used in the study of performance and **storytelling**. Following Lanigan's (1992) analysis, four types of qualitative methodologies used in existing research can be distinguished according to their object of analysis (how they answer the question "What is performance and **storytelling**?") and the type of evidence they feature (how they answer the question "How do I know performance and **storytelling**?"). These four methodologies are semiology, ethnography, historiography, and phenomenology. The following descriptions emphasize research exemplars and are meant to be suggestive rather than comprehensive accounts.

Semiology

The term *semiology* covers a wide range of applications in structuralism, poststructuralism, and textual and discourse analysis. As a methodology, semiology takes what is capable of occurring as its object of analysis. The researcher looks to substantial evidence to intuit or construct a narrative of what is problematic in performance and **storytelling**. The most common form of substantial evidence used in such research are signs (the material expressions of meanings) and their combination in texts: Everything from utterances, conversations, literature, meaningful action, and cultural practices to institutions can be taken as texts. The researcher then analyzes these texts to identify the codes that make them capable of occurring. Or, to use a distinction taken from linguistics, researchers specify the underlying competence that makes any particular performance possible.

Robert Scholes (1985) illustrates this type of methodology in his book on *Textual Power*. Scholes identifies three communication practices or skills that constitute textual competence: reading, interpretation, and criticism. To read and understand a story, we must deploy the basic elements of cultural and narrative coding gradually acquired from parents, teachers, and peers. Interpretation comes into play when a reader encounters unknown words, incomplete or excessive references, and ambiguous meanings. In this case, the reader looks to codes or "the rules of the game" of reading by locating repetitions, oppositions, regularities, and patterns to make sense of the text. In criticism, the reader examines how codes shape the text, how they normalize and naturalize it, and how they enact power and ideology. Methodologically, these three practices (praxis) of textualization are productive (poiesis): "In *reading* we produce *text within text*; in *interpretation* we produce *text upon text*; and in *criticizing* we produce *text against text* [italics in the original]" (p. 24). Textualization produces substantial evidence for what is capable of occurring through the operation of codes.

Ethnography

Where semiology emphasizes the ideal operation of codes to specify what is capable of occurring, ethnography investigates what really occurred as its object of analysis. The researcher takes symbolic evidence to construct a narrative that thematizes performance and **storytelling**. Symbolic evidence can include the realities of human conduct, everyday activities, rituals, ceremonies, feasts, cultural events, as well as the realities of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching in daily life. Ethnography uses participant observation and other forms of fieldwork to immerse the researcher in cultural experiences. This methodology "privileges the body as a site of knowing," as Dwight Conquergood (1991) summarizes in a key essay on performance ethnography.

Conquergood emphasizes boundaries and border crossings as the location for research—sites where difference makes a difference. The traditional boundary enacted in ethnography was one that defined the culture of the other as different from the culture of the researcher; one that distinguished the subject who writes from the subject who was written about. Postmodern and critical versions of ethnography challenge this thematization of unified cultures and detached observation. Rather than mark out a discrete and stable essence or possession, cultural identity is thematized as fluid and fragmentary, as a process or performance. Contemporary ethnographers focus on locating the diversity, displacement, and discontinuities in cultures rather than the continuity, coherence, and unity presupposed in more traditional ethnographies. Similarly, the process of writing ethnographic research is reconceptualized as a shift from monologue to dialogue, from objective description to

intersubjective co-constitution. Conquergood discusses how boundaries of the self—and not just boundaries between cultures—bleed, leak, and wobble. His rethinking of ethnography highlights the importance of studying the borderlands of refugees, migrants, and exiles, where people “make do” within the changing contexts of postcolonial societies and global capitalism. But his work also paves the way for reconsideration of the boundaries of the self and the self as other, as taken up by work in autoethnography. Such research in ethnography constructs a narrative that thematizes the symbolic evidence of bodily knowledge to locate what occurred.

Historiography

In historiography, the researcher takes artifactual evidence to assert a narrative that observes performance and **storytelling**. In this case, what is actual or occurring constitutes the object of analysis. Traditionally, the artifacts taken as evidence include historical records and documents such as letters, diaries, oral interviews, newspapers, magazines, government records, maps, paintings, photographs, and all manner of texts. Such artifacts also may include material culture, such as clothing, household goods, furniture, artworks, machinery, and the built environment. Historians of performance and **storytelling** also look beyond the archive and the museum to document the bodily practices that are sedimented in gestures, habits, manners, and customs (for examples of this type of work, see the essays in Pollock, 1998).

The variety of artifacts considered by historians of performance and **storytelling** raises questions about the practices of observation, sometimes referred to as crises of representation and objectivity. For the meaning and significance of these artifacts, much less their actual existence, is not given or self-evident but must be constructed or reconstructed and made visible or narrated. Rather than somehow remain separate and distinct from the artifacts they observe, historiographers participate in them by narrating and performing them. In this way, the work of “new historicists” echoes the concerns raised by the poststructuralists in semiology and critical ethnography. As Della Pollock (1998) observes,

The writing of history becomes the ultimate historical performance, making events meaningful by talking about them, by investing them with the cultural and political assumptions carried in language itself. What we can or want to call the truth thus becomes problematic. (p. 13)

Research in historiography “makes history go,” as Pollock suggests, by discomposing even as it composes a narrative that traverses the terrain of artifactual evidence.

Phenomenology

Where the emphasis in historiography is on observation, phenomenology focuses on understanding by interrogating formal evidence for what is factual or must occur. Edmund Husserl's injunction “to the things themselves” underscores phenomenology's methodological interest in constructing a narrative that locates the variant and invariant structures—the empirical and eidetic “forms” of performance, so to speak—of conscious experience. Phenomenological research progresses through a series of reductions or reflections. The first reduction is one that attends to the phenomenon as it is constituted in conscious experience. The researcher brackets common sense and scientific explanations, as well as taken-for-granted knowledge, to understand performance and **storytelling**. For example, many types of discourse are not recognized as stories because they do not employ the conventions that dominant ideologies would position as common sense. Stories that women or members of minority ethnic groups tell may be dismissed by researchers as poorly formed or poorly performed stories.

In the second reduction, the researcher takes up the description of the phenomenon to discover its typicality or structure. The researcher specifies the logic of similarities and differences in the experiences of performance and **storytelling**. **Storytelling** by women and minority ethnic group members, to continue with the previous example, are marked by regularities and patterns that can be located when normative conventions are

bracketed. Not all **storytelling** variations function in a meaningful way for all participants. And the same storyteller may tell stories in different ways and use different conventions when the context changes. Phenomenology looks to articulate the logics that inform these variations, that make some possibilities occur rather than others.

In the final reduction, the researcher turns to a hermeneutic or interpretive analysis of the description and structural reductions. Analysis here does not create a replica or representation of the phenomenon but an understanding that takes it up. The interpretive reduction specifies the possibilities for agency and effectivity in performance and **storytelling** that are inscribed by historical conditions and discourse conventions as well as those that are erased or marked over. For phenomenology, the doing and making of performance and **storytelling** are contextual facts of a particular situation: embodied by participants, situated in specific material conditions, ordered by discourse, and open to legitimation and critique (e.g., see Langellier & Peterson, 2004).

Applications

Performance and **storytelling** appear in a variety of contexts, including aesthetic, political, cultural, pedagogic, and therapeutic applications. Undoubtedly the most familiar application of performance and **storytelling** comes in the aesthetic realm. Whether in the form of traditional staged productions or **storytelling** festivals, performance and **storytelling** have a long history of varied application as works of art. What works are considered worthy of appreciation, however, shifts and transforms. At the end of the 20th century, for example, performers such as Laurie Anderson were incorporating **storytelling**, music, song, and images into multimedia stage performances; others, such as Spalding Gray, Tim Miller, Holly Hughes, and Karen Finley, were incorporating and reworking autobiographical material into monologues and solo performances; Anna Deveare Smith was going into local communities to conduct interviews, rework them into performances, and then return them to the community in staged productions.

The rise of solo performance, monologues, and autoethnography (such as Gingrich-Philbrook, 2000) demonstrates both the remaking of texts for aesthetic applications and the connections of **storytelling** and performance with political applications. Not surprisingly, many solo performance pieces arose out of social movements and identity politics organized around issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and ability. In these cases, personal narratives and public demonstrations—performances designed to catch the attention of television and newspapers—were used to make identities visible and to persuade the public to remedy social inequities and injustices. The use of performance and **storytelling** to raise public awareness and mobilize action on HIV/AIDS illustrates one such political application (Kistenberg, 1995).

The rise of **storytelling** and performance also can be witnessed in the realm of popular culture. These cultural applications range from memoirs and celebrity biographies, talk shows and reality television programming, to homepages and weblogs. These popular applications highlight **storytelling** based on the presumed authority and authenticity of personal experience; and they emphasize performance grounded in the apparent spontaneous and unadulterated action of personal presence and immediacy. Critics question the romantic individualism of these applications and how they naturalize specific **storytelling** and performance conventions. Other critics examine how stories and performances are rendered normal or normalized, such as in Jay Baglia's (2005) analysis of popular media accounts of Viagra and its relationship to the performance of masculinity.

Performance and **storytelling** have a range of applications in pedagogy. Histories of the teaching of expression and oral interpretation illustrate how performance and **storytelling** have been applied in classroom practices as a way to understand literature. More recently, these classroom practices have been expanded to include a focus on cultural performance and the practices of daily life. In this case, performance and **storytelling** serve to illuminate and enter into dialogue with "the other"—other persons, communities, and cultures. Such practices offer the possibility of opening up spaces where other stories can be heard and cultural performances reflected on (Stucky & Wimmer, 2002). As such, they can be applied in communities and not just classrooms, as

witnessed by work in critical pedagogy. Drawing on the work of Paulo Friere and Augusto Boal, critical pedagogy emphasizes the performative character of **storytelling** and performance; that is, the embodiment of specific performances and stories is a way to enact, know, reflect, and potentially remake them in collaboration with other participants (for examples, see the essays on pedagogy in Madison & Hamera, 2006).

Therapeutic applications also emphasize the performative aspects of **storytelling** and performance. The very act of telling a story or performing is seen as a way to understand, come to terms with, or reframe that experience. Survivor stories, illness narratives, witness accounts, and personal testimonies are examples where performing or telling about lived experience constitutes the storyteller or performer as agents, as subjects of their own experience and not just as subjected to it. In some cases, these stories and performances recover and testify to cultural frames and forms that are excluded by dominant institutions and practices. For example, Rita Charon's (2006) advocacy of narrative medicine, juxtaposes the official medical chart with stories, drawings, and photographs that write into the record the embodied struggles with illness performed by patients and doctors. These varied applications make the case that performance and **storytelling** are as much about agency and efficacy as they are about appreciation, entertainment, and pleasure.

Comparison

The extent and variety of applications in performance and **storytelling** suggest that there is an inherently comparative aspect to them as communication processes. For some, this comparative aspect is based in the nature of the poetic and the variability of aesthetic experience. Even in classical discussions of beauty, there is a concern to reconcile individual taste with the supposed universality of aesthetic judgment. How can individual speakers say that something is beautiful and be certain that their judgment is not idiosyncratic? What grounds do speakers have for going beyond the presumption that "there is no disputing about taste" (*de gustibus non est disputandum*)? Other thinkers locate the comparative aspect of performance and **storytelling** as a function of the variability of the practices that constitute them as communication processes. In this case, comparisons are made on the basis of locating what Jakobson calls "distinctive features," or the differences that make a difference in language and communication.

To borrow a question posed by critical ethnographers, What are the differences that make a difference in performance and **storytelling**? As the work of Jakobson and the previous sections on theory and methodology suggest, differences can be located in the different contexts for performance and **storytelling**, the different forms that the poetic object or text can take, the different conventions and codes it puts into play, the different kinds of contact it enables among participants, the different expressive capabilities of performers and storytellers, and the different interpretive responses and responsibilities of audiences. In the past few decades, the importance of locating and understanding the operation of these differences has been greatly influenced by work in cultural studies, postcolonial studies, disability studies, critical race theory, feminist theory, and queer theory.

The simple sense of difference as a distinction between already constituted entities crops up in comparisons of this performance with that performance, of traditional **storytelling** with contemporary **storytelling**, of stories told by women with those told by men, and of coming-of-age rituals in this culture with rituals in that culture. A more complicated sense of difference asks how such entities are seen or constituted as different in the first place. Instead of taking the compared entities as natural or pregiven, this latter sense of difference asks how they came to be understood as something in and of their differences. This view of difference troubles the commonsense coherence and homogeneity implied in terms such as *the folk*, *tradition*, *ethnic culture*, or *a people*.

Consider the generative differences used to distinguish gender and sexuality. Feminist and queer theories reposition the normative constraints of "being a woman" or "being a man" by conceptualizing them as performative. Gender and sexuality, following the work of Butler (as discussed above), are socially reflexive and

self-constituting practices for *doing* and not just something to be done. Positioning the identity and expression of gender and sexuality as performative avoids both a universalist essential-ism (one is either a woman or a man, masculine or feminine, gay or straight), on the one hand, and a volun-terist individualism, on the other (one can consciously choose to be whatever one wants to be). The historical realities of gender and sexual identities are continually performed in the embodied gestures, behaviors, habits, and institutions of daily life. In the field of communication, Kroløkke and Sørensen (2006) develop this view of gender and sexuality as performative.

Other authors have repositioned race and ethnicity as performative formations, as captured in the expressions “performing blackness” (Johnson, 2003) and “performing whiteness” (Warren, 2003). Petra Kuppers (2003) uses per-formativity to refigure the binary opposition of disabled and able-bodied identities. For writers such as José Esteban Muñoz (1999), such formations of identity are always already hybrid or “identities-in-difference.” By using this phrase, Muñoz argues that the subject is not created or posited in a linear process of identification that would present or re-present a uniform and consistent persona or self. He complicates identity formation by attending to the processes of disidentification, in which divergent, fragmentary, and contradictory practices work on, with, and against identification. Identities-in-difference are unstable, transitory, and discontinuous formations that function strategically; that is, they may deploy existing discourses of power and knowledge at one level and, at the same time, work to resist, oppose, and destabilize these same discourses at other levels.

Contemporary Issues and Future Directions

The postmodern movement of performance and **storytelling** outside the detached realm of aesthetic expression— as demonstrated by their varied applications and comparative dimensions—raises a series of issues that will shape the future direction of students, scholars, activists, audiences, and artists. Some of the first responses to this movement, not surprisingly, were reactions against an expansive understanding of what could be considered the appropriate subjects and texts of performance and **storytelling**. Attendees at the National Festival of **Storytelling** complained that their favorite storytellers were not performing the much loved folktales and classic cultural stories; instead, they were telling stories drawn from personal experience and daily life. The new performance studies scholarship, published in journals such as *Text and Performance Quarterly*, was criticized for taking up varied phenomena such as flight-attendant announcements, fake identification, office folklore, anorexia nervosa, and gay pornography instead of studies of great literature, great performers, and great performances.

The objections of critics to the new scholarship in performance and **storytelling** can be seen in part as a reactionary response to the domestic social movements of the time, a resistance to diversity and identity politics, an opposition to changes in the global flow of peoples and capital, and a rejection of postmodern art and aesthetics. But such criticism also advances, and somewhat obscures, an important question regarding the nature of performance and **storytelling**. If performance and **storytelling** are no longer to be defined in modernist terms as the making of art and the art of making (poiesis), then what are the boundaries that define it as a communication practice (praxis)? In performance studies, Jon McKenzie (2006) tracks how performance has “gone global” and can be found not only in cultural forms but also in technological, organizational, governmental, economic, and environmental forms of power and knowledge. In narrative studies, Michael Bamberg (2007b) describes the shift from research on “big stories” and master narratives to an increasing emphasis on narrative practices and the “small stories” of what people do *in particular* when they talk and tell stories, on the situated and contextual nature of **storytelling**. But is everything performance and **storytelling**? Is performance and **storytelling** everything?

The boundary issues provoked by the new scholarship on performance and **storytelling** are recognized by scholars in a variety of ways. For example, the editors of a new journal posed the problem this way in their introduction to the inaugural issue:

Storytelling, *Self, Society sets itself this task, among others: to steer between the dangerous shoals of fetishizing this particular medium (to the exclusion of the fertile channels that connect it with virtually any other) and of surrendering to the metonymic swoon in which the name **storytelling** can be bestowed on whatever one finds sufficiently uplifting.* (Sobol, Gentile, & Sunwolf, 2004, p. 3)

This formulation evokes the dangerous shores trope that Wallace Bacon articulated more than four decades earlier on the need to navigate performance (in the guise of oral interpretation) between the shores of theatrical and literary study. Contemporary scholarship in performance and **storytelling** suggests that the future direction of theory and research is not to be found in opposition of different forms of study, exclusion of art from life or life from art, or the choice between poiesis and praxis but in charting their differential combinations.

Two contemporary issues in performance and **storytelling** research illustrate the difficulty of charting these differential combinations in ways that do not collapse into oppositional and exclusionary thinking. The first issue is the problem of representation and mimesis (e.g., see Diamond, 1997), or what might be described as the conjunction and combinatory logic of performance and performativity. Performativity names the repetition and citation of genres and conventions that, because they are materialized in performances, disappear in the act of doing them. Performance, to use phenomenological terms, has a horizon of retention and protention, where what is done trails off and fades away even as anticipations of what may happen begin to emerge in the act of doing what will soon be done. To continue performing requires that communication research encompass both the performative repetitions and citations that make it possible and the transitory ephemerality of performance that opens it up to new horizons.

The second issue is the embodied ambiguity of the imaginary and the real. For example, in **storytelling** research, the analysis of **storytelling** practices—usually talked about as practices of showing and telling—constitutes and positions subjects with varying degrees of agency. At a minimum, these subject positions include the narrator in the story and the narrator of the story, the audience addressed by the narrator in the story and the audience addressed by the narrator of the story. Of course, any narrative can position the narrator as a character in the story and as a narrated subject by that character. Or, to move in the direction of the **storytelling** event, the narrator can be positioned as an audience to the audience addressed by the narrator, and so on ad infinitum. Furthermore, these various subject positions, both actual and imaginary, are now extended in computer and new media technologies, through sampling and remixing. The challenge for communication researchers is to account for the motility of embodied subjects that articulate or “mash up” the real and the imaginary in the changing terrain of **storytelling**.

Conclusion

Performance and **storytelling** are key processes that can be understood theoretically as a reflexive and reversible combination of making and doing communication. They can be studied through the human science methodologies of semiology, ethnography, historiography, and phenomenology. Performance and **storytelling** appear in applications that range across aesthetic, political, cultural, pedagogic, and therapeutic contexts. These applications highlight differences in contexts, messages, codes, and contact and differences within and among participants. These comparative differences lead scholars to question the boundaries that define performance and **storytelling** as communication processes. Rehearsing these arguments— putting performance and **storytelling** on stage, in other words—is a way to *make* what scholars *do*, their poiesis and praxis, explicit and open to critique and revision.

—Eric E. Peterson

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